

# RETHINKING THE GDR OPPOSITION: REFORM, RESISTANCE AND REVOLUTION IN THE OTHER GERMANY

by

ALEXANDER D. BROWN

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Department of Modern Languages  
School of Languages, Cultures, Art  
History and Music  
University of Birmingham  
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## Abstract

The following thesis looks at the subject of communist-oriented opposition in the GDR. More specifically, it considers how this phenomenon has been reconstructed in the state-mandated memory landscape of the Federal Republic of Germany since unification in 1990. It does so by presenting three case studies of particular representative value. The first looks at the former member of the Politbüro Paul Merker and how his entanglement in questions surrounding antifascism and antisemitism in the 1950s has become a significant trope in narratives of national (de-)legitimation since 1990. The second delves into the phenomenon of the *dissident* through the aperture of prominent singer-songwriter, Wolf Biermann, who was famously exiled in 1976. Often viewed as a proponent of ‘true’ communism who confronted the SED with uncomfortable truths, this study interrogates several aspects of the Biermann legend, thematising the role which ‘true’ or dissident communism plays in representations of the GDR. The final case study looks at the canonised opposition of the 1980s from peace groups to women’s rights organisations and how memory of the same tends to omit the contemporary left wing views of these groups in order to canonise them as part of a striving for liberal democracy and national unification.

The dissertation concludes that communist-oriented opposition presents a rich seam with which the FRG’s public guardians of memory are able to communicate narratives significant to the FRG’s own national legitimisation and identity. It argues that awareness of the ideological conditioning of representations of the past and the significance of this for contemporary political debates should be taken into account more than is frequently the case. Furthermore, it argues for contextualisation of the socialist past in order to avoid the potential pitfalls of simplistic anti-communist perceptions of state socialism within our present discourse.

IN MEMORIAM

Adam Oyston

*“It only had meaning as part of a whole, of which he was at  
all times conscious”*

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# Rethinking the GDR Opposition: Reform, Resistance and Revolution in the Other Germany

## Introduction and Theory

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was the *other* German state between 1949-1989. Its advocates claimed it to be the better Germany and to be in the process of building an ever-improving socialism on German soil. For its fiercest critics, however, it was little more than a Soviet satrapy, a Stalinist totalitarian statelet. Between these two polar interpretations lies a field of remembering rich in contestation with continuing political significance for the modern post-unification Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

This thesis investigates memory of communist and socialist oppositional currents, which I have termed ‘communist-oriented opposition’, within the GDR as portrayed in the cultural policy and memory landscape of the FRG since 1989. The aims of this project are to re-examine the concept of *opposition* in the GDR by looking at it from the particular and neglected vantage point of the communist-oriented opposition. It does so by analysing how this opposition has been reconstructed in state-mandated representations since the fall of the Wall. It considers the impact of these discourses on the ongoing construction of collective memory of the former socialist state and what they can tell us about the contemporary ideological frameworks operating in the FRG.

In order to do so, this introduction first begins with a review of literature pertaining to the complex of opposition and communism before turning to a discussion of memory and ideology in order to flesh out the theoretical framework for this thesis. Finally, the sources and structure of the thesis are introduced.

## Communist-oriented Opposition in the GDR: A Literature Review

In pursuit of this thesis regarding communist-oriented opposition in the GDR, it is apparent that several key theoretical areas must first be discussed. Perhaps most prominently, the question as to whether it is even possible to speak of a communist-oriented opposition under historical state socialism. How has previous scholarly work interacted with such a concept? This review of the literature seeks to present and analyse some of the extant theoretical and historiographical approaches to GDR opposition drawing out some of the core issues significant for a thesis on the communist-oriented opposition. Although, as will become clear, such a designation is often contentious.

Firstly, while opposition is a frequently used term within GDR studies, it often resists clear definition due largely to the fact that the epithet *opposition* is endogenously subjective; one person's opposition is another's collaboration. However, certain definitions and accounts of opposition within the GDR have been more influential than others. An important early contribution is found in Kowalczyk, who uses 'Widerstand' as an umbrella term, which he divides into four sub-categories '1. gesellschaftliche Verweigerung, 2. sozialer Protest, 3. politische Dissidenz und 4. Massenprotest'.<sup>1</sup> Kowalczyk's schema primarily associates opposition with fundamental political dissidence which is further sub-divided into two additional subcategories relating to political-ideological and socio-cultural aspects. Kowalczyk's definition, therefore, emphasises the ideological aspect of opposition and does not formally allow for an opposition that shared communist ideals but differed in their view of the direction in which these ideals should lead.

Ehrhart Neubert's seminal history of the GDR opposition presents a more generalised approach based on his view of the systemic opportunities available for opponents of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, 'Von der Freiheit, Ich zu sagen. Widerständiges Verhalten in der DDR', in *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung*, ed. by Ulrike Poppe and others (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1995), pp. 85–115 (p. 97).

GDR.<sup>2</sup> Neubert presents ‘Gegnerschaft’ as a general term for all behaviour, attitudes and actions that involved opposition in the broadest sense of the word.<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon is located within a dynamic of ‘Anpassung’ and ‘Verweigerung’, which are posited as the two positional poles possible within the GDR. Within this dynamic, ‘Gegnerschaft’ is divided into three broad camps. ‘Opposition’ is deemed to be the activities of opponents who, on the basis of the obligatory norms extant within the GDR, sought to compel the authorities to adhere to those norms or to limit the power of the authorities.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, anything that complied with the legal system, or at least did not overtly antagonise the legal system, is included within this definition. On the other hand, ‘Widerstand’ is conceptualised as the extra-legal resistance to the ruling Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED). In order to be classified as ‘Widerstand’, activities should have aimed at the weakening or ultimate defeat of the SED and its public discrediting.<sup>5</sup> Neubert recognises that the difference between the two is not always entirely obvious in practice, but that ‘Widerstand’ was generally more extensive and determined in its confrontation of the SED. Neubert adds a third category of ‘Widerspruch’, which is considered to be the most widespread form of political ‘Gegnerschaft’ and is described as those who were not particularly interested in pursuing ideological or political alternatives, did not build their own structures and were content to be half-open in their criticism.<sup>6</sup>

Neubert’s definitions appear superficially to be a useful starting point for a heuristic model; however, his exegesis is somewhat more problematic as he conceptualises opposition from a particularly engagé position. He argues that the GDR’s political system was handicapped by a secularisation of politics undertaken by the SED that rejected the religious,

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<sup>2</sup> Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

or rather Protestant, roots of ‘modernes Denken’, which Neubert considers necessary to conceive of a genuine oppositional attitude within the GDR.<sup>7</sup> This bastion of ‘modernes Denken’ is seen as being present in the Protestant churches of the GDR who became the counter-weight to the SED and formed the antecedent of all opposition and resistance. This teleological and western-centric view somewhat paradoxically identifies the western liberal tradition with religion and places limits on describing any activities that reject liberalism as opposition. It does not allow for the many socialists and communists who attempted to help shape socialism in the GDR through oppositional activities. Furthermore, it is clear that Neubert considers the final category of ‘Widerspruch’ to be less worthy than the other two and explicitly links this with the communist-oriented opposition within the SED.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, Neubert’s concern with privileging the religious and western-centric liberal opposition, as well as his clearly politicised marginalisation of other oppositional currents, limits the viability of his conceptual model. However, the terminology excised from Neubert’s narrative is a useful schema with which to categorise oppositional activities and will be used throughout this thesis.

Karl Wilhelm Fricke essentially agrees with Neubert’s typology in that ‘Opposition’ sought to develop relatively openly and legally, whereas ‘Widerstand’ renounced any possibility of doing so.<sup>9</sup> The important aspect of Fricke’s concept is his incorporation of both into Martin Broszat’s description of ‘Resistenz’, a term Broszat originally used in his work on resistance to fascism. In doing so, Fricke directly links the opponents of the GDR with those of fascist Germany.<sup>10</sup> The equation of the opponents of fascism and those of socialism is problematic for many reasons which cannot be elucidated here; however, the primary

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Wilhelm Fricke, ‘Dimensionen von Oppositionen und Widerstand in der DDR’, in *Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR*, ed. by Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp. 21–44 (p. 24).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

failing is that such models again do not take into account the communist-oriented opposition, particularly their fundamentally anti-fascist and socialist beliefs. The attempt to link the GDR and fascism through the lens of opposition has a clear political objective of de-legitimising the GDR. My own thesis will work with a more nuanced concept of opposition that moves away from the particularly politicised models of Kowalczyk, Neubert and Fricke.

Within historiography, the concept of opposition from within the communist milieu or even from within the SED is often accused of being in some way illegitimate, inauthentic or counterintuitive.<sup>11</sup> The question as to whether critical dissidents among the intelligentsia were genuinely *opposition* is often conducted within the unspoken framework of a binary contest between capitalist democracy and the associated discourses of individualism, self-determination and freedom as opposed to socialist dictatorship with its emphasis on the collective and social totality. Within this binary, opposition is often implicitly conceived as actions and discourse aimed at, or perceived as objectively achieving, the undermining of the latter. This logical premise not only excludes heterodox interpretations of democracy per se and the philosophical discourse of individual and society within the GDR and wider Marxist tradition, but is also strikingly limiting in the scope it allows for investigations into the historical opposition within the structures of the GDR.

The question as to whether there was inner-party or even external consultation, debate and disagreement involved in the society or governance of the GDR is answered by the absence of such terminology and conceptualisations in much historiography. However, by casting the net a little wider, it becomes apparent that the topic is bubbling under the surface of several discourses in various guises.

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<sup>11</sup> See: David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) p. 2; Birgit Dahlke, 'Underground literature? The unofficial culture of the GDR and its development after the Wende', in *Rereading East Germany: The Literature and Film of the GDR*, ed. by Karen Leeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) pp. 160–179 (p. 160).

For example, Peter Grieder's 1999 study<sup>12</sup> of the leadership during the Ulbricht era largely considers – without announcing it – the question of whether there was an opposition *within* the communist SED itself. His discussion focuses on several figures of early internal opposition (pp.9-16) including the episode surrounding Paul Merker (analysed in this study), without emphasising the term opposition explicitly.<sup>13</sup> His analysis reduces the fascinatingly rich case of Merker to being a sort of left-communist devotee of Rosa Luxemburg<sup>14</sup> who argued for a different direction to the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> These early communist oppositionals are dismissed by Grieder as serious examples of opposition per se as demonstrated by assertions such as that the 'Stalinist morality of party discipline' was more important than 'socialism with a democratic face'.<sup>16</sup> Grieder fails to investigate the detail of Merker or others' own understanding of their actions or to consider earnestly the motivations and context of the situation. I would suggest this is due to Grieder's own preconceptions which are revealed in his account of the Marxist-Leninist self-understanding of party discipline and unity, which is coloured by a contemptuous irony. He compares it to the Catholic Church: 'The "party of the new type" was to Communists what the medieval church was to Catholics – the source of all truth and redemption. To engage in "factionalism" was to violate the first commandment of Stalinist politics that the "party was always right".'<sup>17</sup> It appears Grieder has not left the terrain of the anti-communist binary. Indeed, the comparison of the SED with the

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946-1973 Conflict and Crisis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25–36.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> The concept of a third way or non-Soviet path to socialism would be a recurring theme in oppositional discourse throughout the existence of the GDR and it is important to recognise that, despite often being treated in isolation, these strands of discourse were part of a tradition which stretches back to the very dawn of the GDR (and indeed beyond).

<sup>16</sup> Grieder, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24. Although commonly cited as a pejorative and caustic meme to characterise the SED's inner workings, serious commentators must surely ask themselves whether party anthems should really be considered as empirical evidence of a party's character let alone concrete practice. After all the British Labour Party can hardly be said to believe in militancy or illegal agitation as implied in the lyrics 'Come dungeons dark and gallows grim' (The Red Flag) and few would claim that the British Liberal Democrats are nostalgic for the British Empire – 'By Freedom gained, by Truth maintained, Thine Empire shall be strong' (Land of Hope and Glory).

'medieval' Catholic Church is an exemplary instance of *othering*, whereby the GDR is presented as an archaic, obscurantist relic.

Little attempt is made by Grieder to explain or even acknowledge the communist understanding of democracy and opposition and still less with the very real context of the Cold War which necessarily informed this understanding. Instead, the communist conception is communicated derisively: "Objectively", such people were "counter-revolutionaries" who were giving succour to the class enemy. Demoted, ostracised and persecuted, they were required to recant in a public ritual known as "self-criticism". The ultimate sanction was excommunication, even execution.<sup>18</sup> This excerpt, which purports to explain the background of 'SED high politics', is a drastic simplification. It betrays a remarkably open sense of bias by presenting a laconic and undifferentiated view of communist democracy without providing any evidence. Furthermore, the implication that all internal oppositionals were demoted, ostracised and persecuted is demonstrably untrue, as is actually clear from Grieder's own subsequent accounts of various internal opposition figures. Equally, the assertion that execution was a potential outcome for the internal opposition is not supported by any evidence and it certainly did not occur with any of the figures Grieder discusses.

However, some commentators have seen Grieder as not going far enough in uncovering the Stalinist nature of inner-party oppositional figures such as Paul Merker:

Moreover, as Grieder points out, all of Ulbricht's opponents were Stalinists to the core. They had all engaged in nasty denunciatory politics in the past; none had expressed serious misgivings about Stalinization before being purged; and, once purged, they all acceded to the demands of party discipline and engaged in deprecatory self-criticism. Given the past politics and contemporary behavior of these

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<sup>18</sup> Grieder, p. 24.

committed Communists, it is highly unlikely that any of them intended to radically reform East Germany.<sup>19</sup>

Epstein goes even further than Grieder in dismissing the very concept of a communist-oriented opposition. The schematic manner in which she dismisses the opponents of Ulbricht as Stalinists lacks nuance as cases such as Merker cannot be reduced, as I will show in chapter 1, to such a staccato summary judgement. Equally, the emotive language indicates a clear commitment to a western liberal historical understanding. Finally, such a view does not take into account the specific context of pre- and post-1956 discourse surrounding *Stalinism*. As Eric Hobsbawm points out, Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, which denounced the personality and government of Joseph Stalin, changed the discursive situation completely, in both West and East:

There are two 'ten days that shook the world' in the history of the revolutionary movement of the last century: the days of the October Revolution and the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (14-25 February 1956). Both divide it suddenly and irrevocably into a 'before' and 'after'... To put it in the simplest terms, the October Revolution created a world communist movement, the Twentieth Congress destroyed it.<sup>20</sup>

In itself, this discursive shift is worthy of further scholarly investigation and debate, firstly with reference to accumulated layers of assumptions on the subject within predominant western discourse and how this affects our view of and approach to historicising communists. Secondly, to what extent it contemporaneously affected the communist-oriented opposition in their motivation, self-understanding and policy suggestions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Catherine Epstein, 'Review', *Central European History*, 34.2 (2001), 301–303 (302).

<sup>20</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times* (London: Abacus, 2002), p. 214.

<sup>21</sup> Recent scholarship has questioned some of the historiographical basis of what many refer to as Stalinism. While Grover Furr takes a fairly clear engagé position, his monograph nevertheless provides some convincing evidence that helps to contextualise what Khrushchev was seeking to achieve with his speech. Losurdo investigates the wider *black legend* of Stalin and how it evolved over time, presenting a nuanced discussion of both historical basis as well as cultural reception of the narrative. Kotkin's recent biographies cast a dispassionate light on Stalin's life and manage to cut through many Cold War



Another intriguing example of oppositional figures touched on by Grieder is that of chief editor of *Neues Deutschland* Rudolf Herrnstadt and head of the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, Wilhelm Zaisser. The two were involved in an anti-Ulbricht faction within the Central Committee and according to Grieder held Ulbricht to account until they were expelled in the fallout of their failed attempt to remove Ulbricht from his position as General Secretary following the demonstrations and strikes of June 1953.<sup>22</sup> Scholarship on the subject of the Herrnstadt-Zaisser affair and the inner-party opposition of the early GDR in general (although this is rarely the terminology used) is divided. Van Dijk (2003, p.150) accepts the received wisdom that Machiavellian Stalinism, and in particular party purges, had left Ulbricht with nothing but the ‘fainthearted officials’ Herrnstadt, Zaisser and Schirdewan, who were ‘no match for him’.<sup>23</sup> It is somewhat difficult to imagine Wilhelm Zaisser, the first head of the MfS, who was also a veteran of the First World War, Red Ruhr Army campaign and Commander of the International Brigades in Spain, as being fainthearted. However, such unconsidered simplifications seem to be fairly common within scholarship on the subject. Some commentators dismiss Herrnstadt and Zaisser as little more than pawns in the Soviet power struggle following Stalin’s death.<sup>24</sup> Andreas Malycha speaks of the ‘Führungsstil’ and ‘Führungsstruktur’ of the party only being called into question ‘im engeren Kreis’.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he states that this limited opposition first appeared as a response to the blatant ‘Herrschaftskrise’ beginning in June 1953. The implication is that internal opponents were opportunistic and had broadly approved of the *Stalinisierung* to which Malycha’s investigation is dedicated. The effect of such a portrayal is to delegitimise the communist-

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myths. See: Grover Furr, *Chruschtsows Lügen* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2014); Domenico Losurdo, *Stalin Geschichte und Kritik einer schwarzen Legende* (Cologne: PapyRossa, 2013); Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, 1878–1928* (London: Allen Lane, 2014); Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1928–1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Grieder, pp. 53–90.

<sup>23</sup> Ruud Van Dijk, (2003) ‘Walter Ulbricht Eine deutsche Biografie’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 5.2 (2003) 147–150.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Thompson, *The Crisis of the German Left: The PDS, Stalinism and the Global Economy* (New York: Oxford, 2005), pp. 31, 53; Armin Mitter, and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten. Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1993), pp. 59–60.

<sup>25</sup> Andreas Malycha, *Die SED Geschichte ihrer Stalinisierung 1946–1953* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2000), p. 400.

oriented opposition *qua* opposition. In any case, it would appear to be an over-simplification. There are plenty of indications that Rudolf Herrnstadt, the subject of and source cited for much of Malycha's discussion, had often been at the forefront of party debates and had been a public opponent of Ulbricht's leadership long before June 1953.

For instance, in Helmut Müller-Enbergs more detailed treatment of Herrnstadt's career, he takes a directly conflicting view to Malycha's portrayal. Herrnstadt is seen primarily as a victim and man of principle who stood up for his ideals throughout his party career.<sup>26</sup> A particularly illuminating example of how divergent approaches to Herrnstadt can be, is found in interpretations of his articles published in *Neues Deutschland* and *Einheit* on the subject of 'Sozialdemokratismus'. For Malycha, these are evidence of Herrnstadt's subjection to SED orthodoxy and he is portrayed as complicit in the 'Gleichschaltung' of the membership, with all the connotations of this very political term.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, Müller-Enbergs believes that Herrnstadt set a very different accent to the SED discourse on *Sozialdemokratismus*. Herrnstadt's position is seen as a rallying cry against the bureaucracy within the GDR and constituted an 'unübersehbare Angriff auf wesentliche konstitutive Elemente des Herrschaftsverständnisses der SED'.<sup>28</sup> This discrepancy may only really be explained through reference to the authors' own approaches and political value systems. Müller-Enbergs' 1991 monograph was begun before the Autumn of 1989 and displays a thorough and comparatively multi-faceted methodology which tends towards sympathy, albeit alongside an apparent and consistent critique of the SED. In contrast, Malycha's very subject material in 2000 – the Stalinisation of the SED – indicates a more closed framework from the outset, involving the pre-determined conception that the SED was indeed Stalinised. However, he does not adequately define what this Stalinism is or attempt to explain its

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<sup>26</sup> Helmut Müller-Enbergs, *Der Fall Rudolf Herrnstadt* (Berlin: LinksDruck, 1991), pp. 342–344.

<sup>27</sup> Malycha, p. 405.

<sup>28</sup> Müller-Enbergs, pp. 130–132.

historical context(s); the reader is left to wonder how the complex social formation of the Stalin-era USSR compares with the post-war GDR. Instead, the reader is seemingly expected to understand the negative shorthand that accompanies the term ‘Stalinism’ in western discourse. The question of how far *Aufarbeitungspolitik* can be seen as an influencing factor in these two very different narratives is pertinent. The difference in the communicative situation surrounding the *Wende* and the increasingly professionalised and state-financed period beginning in the late 1990s may well help to understand such divergent narratives. In any case, the example of the Herrnstadt-Zaisser affair demonstrates how much this period of the communist-oriented opposition in general warrants further investigation, which takes into account the discursive situations and implicit value systems of previous scholarship and memory work.

The same can broadly be said of the dissident phenomenon as exemplified in narratives relating to figures such as: Wolfgang Harich, Robert Havemann and Rudolf Bahro and, of primary concern for this thesis, Wolf Biermann. These seemingly disconnected figures often dominate any discussions of left-wing opposition within the GDR and justifiably so as all four were involved in prominent leftist critique of the SED, all four attempted to use western channels to circumvent the state’s controls on publishing and sought to utilise inner-party and state channels as well.<sup>29</sup>

However, there is some consternation over how far these dissidents can really be seen as opposition and exactly what their achievements were, if any. Fricke certainly seeks to incorporate dissidents into his pantheon of opposition; however, under his definition, opposition is merely the overlapping of fundamental resistance into open and legal forms.

Fricke is aware of what he terms the ‘innerkommunistische Opposition’, although he tends to

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<sup>29</sup> Alexander Amberger, *Bahro–Harich–Havemann Marxistische Systemkritik und politische Utopie in der DDR* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014); Alex Brown, ‘The Red Resistance? Communist Opposition in the Early GDR’ (Unpublished MRES Thesis: University of Birmingham, 2015); Ines Weber, *Sozialismus in der DDR Alternative Gesellschaftskonzepte von Robert Havemann und Rudolf Bahro* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2015).

utilise these individuals to emphasise the repressive nature of socialism even against supposed fellow communists.<sup>30</sup> His treatment of communist-oriented opposition suffers therefore from a predetermined framing which incorporates Marxists, Communists and Socialists into this rather blurred continuum alongside Christian resisters, violent saboteurs and liberal anti-communists. The only unifying strand being a supposedly natural rejection of the existing ‘Herrschafts- und Gesellschaftsstrukturen’.<sup>31</sup>

David Bathrick’s influential account does not consider Harich to be an example of genuine opposition. He is described as a ‘party acolyte’ and listed among the likes of Kurt Hager and Hermann Kant as being ‘on the other side of the moral ledger’ to individuals such as Stefan Heym and Wolf Biermann who are acknowledged as being *truly* oppositional.<sup>32</sup> Bathrick’s treatment of Harich is somewhat superficial as it primarily focuses on his involvement in the Nietzsche debate, and more briefly in the Lukács debate, of the 1980s.<sup>33</sup> In this context, Harich’s Marxist critique of Nietzsche is dismissed as emanating from ‘East Germany’s most ardent advocate for a revival of cultural Stalinism’. Further *ad hominem* attacks include describing Harich as a ‘Stalinist mastodon in the closet’.<sup>34</sup>

If Bathrick was completely unaware of Harich’s past as an agitator for a more open and plural Marxism which sought to promote classical German philosophy and literature and to move away from Stalin-era norms,<sup>35</sup> his description of Harich could perhaps be understood

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<sup>30</sup> Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Opposition und Widerstand in der DDR: ein politischer Report* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1984) p. 209.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205. Rainer Eckert echoes Fricke’s views, emphasising that resistance and opposition are phenomenologically linked in ‘the second German dictatorship’. Rainer Eckert, ‘Opposition und Repression in der DDR vom Mauerbau bis zur Biermann-Ausbürgerung (1961–1976)’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), 355–390 (pp. 355–357).

<sup>32</sup> Bathrick, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche was the subject of a debate surrounding cultural heritage which reached its climax in the 1980s and a series of articles in *Sinn und Form* which primarily called for a reappraisal of Nietzsche as a literary icon and inclusion of him into the tapestry of GDR cultural recognition. Harich, like many Marxists and non-Marxists, saw Nietzsche’s philosophy as an elitist, mystifying subjectivism which had helped to prepare the ground for German and Italian fascism. See: Wolfgang Harich, *Nietzsche und seine Brüder. Eine Streitschrift in sieben Dialogen* (Schwedt/Oder: Kiro, 1994); Nicholas Martin, ‘Nietzsche in the GDR: History of a Taboo’, in *Nietzsche and the German Tradition* ed. by Nicholas Martin (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003) pp. 263–286.

<sup>34</sup> Bathrick, pp. 193, 196.

<sup>35</sup> Brown, ‘The Red Resistance? Communist Opposition in the Early GDR’; Mike Dennis, *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic 1945-1990* (London: Longman, 2000), p. 82.

if not agreed with. However, he does make reference to Harich's philosophical and political projects and subsequent imprisonment for eight years, albeit superficially – the only source cited for Harich's oppositional activity is an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* from 1957.<sup>36</sup> Arguably, Bathrick's own antipathy towards Harich's opinion of Nietzsche leads him to discount him as an example of opposition, with barely a cursory engagement with Harich's actual oppositional activity or writings. Furthermore, the source of this hostile interpretation could perhaps be said to emanate from Harich's ultimate loyalty to socialism and the GDR,<sup>37</sup> as opposed to Bahro and particularly Biermann's prominent renunciation of both.

This omission leads Bathrick to conclude that Rudolf Bahro is the first example of an inner-party opposition proper.<sup>38</sup> It is not immediately apparent why the fact that Havemann comes from the 'scientific-academic' community should mean his opposition is not properly internal; indeed, Havemann was a longstanding member of the SED, an elected member of the Volkskammer and involved in several official organisations over the years. Equally, quite why Schirdewan, Herrstadt, Zaisser, Ackermann et al. are not to be considered as opposition is not overtly discussed. However, it would seem that the reason is again an inability on the part of Bathrick to remove his discourse from the implicit anti-communist binary. This is despite the fact that Bathrick prefaces his work with a seemingly nuanced discussion of the difficulty of writing about dissidence or opposition due to the politicised nature of the Cold War and its accompanying value systems, describing it as: 'a process by which dissidents were celebrated, moral superiority was certified, historical narratives were organised and challenged, and binary systems of value were accepted and utilised'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Bathrick, pp. 60, 82–83.

<sup>37</sup> Harich famously headed an alternative Enquete Commission in the early 1990s which sought to redress the imbalance of the Bundestag's own enquiries and to defend the record of state socialism. See: Siegfried Prokop, ed, *Ein Streiter für Deutschland* (Berlin: edition ost, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> Bathrick, p. 57.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

However, in the course of his own work, Bathrick seems to ignore his own warning. This is demonstrated in his telling summation of the ‘voices within’, which seems to fall into an – admittedly more sophisticated – version of the anti-communist premise:

The ‘paradox’ of Bahro, Biermann, and Havemann contains in nuce the paradox at the root of the inner opposition. What becomes clear in the story of the voices from within is the extent to which their success as opposition is the inverse side of their failure to establish such an opposition by revitalizing Marxism. Neither Havemann nor Bahro nor certainly Biermann will be remembered in the long run for his theoretical contributions; rather, the significance of each one’s achievement rests in his symbolic ‘testimony,’ as an individual, to another way of knowing and doing. What has been clear since Bahro’s leaving and Havemann’s death is the extent to which books like *Die Alternative* and *Dialektik ohne Dogma* remained one-time events rather than the beginnings of something new; the extent to which the discourse of Marxism had become moribund in the GDR as the basis for alternative thought. In this same vein, it was Biermann the poet, not Biermann the Marxist theoretician, who truly challenged the existing discourse. It was for that reason that the cultural sector continued to provide a crucial source for a language with which both to articulate and negate the status quo.<sup>40</sup>

The anti-communist paradigm is first expressed in Bathrick’s tacit acceptance of the premise that *opposition* necessitates a fundamentally anti-SED engagement (whether in the name of a revitalised Marxism or not). The inner-communist opposition failed, according to Bathrick, due to their inability to break with the SED and the ‘moribund’ discourse of GDR Marxism consistently enough. This would seem an unfair generalisation as, in this text at least, Bathrick does not allow the philosophical discourse(s) of Marxism in the GDR to speak and

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<sup>40</sup> Bathrick, p. 83.

certainly does not engage with contemporary GDR Marxists other than the dissidents themselves. The reader is left to fill in the blanks with the well-established trope of *orthodox* Marxism-Leninism. Furthermore, Bathrick's own suspicion of western instrumentalisation of eastern dissidents is no longer evident in this conclusion. He states plainly that the value of these figures lies in their prominence as discursive events, which essentially means *western* discursive events as it was in the West that these discourses were primarily composed and promulgated. While in the West these figures were largely instrumentalised for Cold War purposes and the minutiae of their theoretical contributions were of secondary importance, it is rather western-centric to dismiss the importance that an eastern audience may have invested in their actual ideas which of course were addressed to their reality.

Bathrick's dismissal of the theoretical value of these thinkers' work is furthermore problematic as it ignores (or does not anticipate) other interpretations which notably do take this theoretical content seriously. For example, Ralph Miliband's contemporary theoretical interaction with Bahro's alternative<sup>41</sup> or more recent scholarship which has turned to Harich, Havemann and Bahro to investigate the 'utopian' philosophy of their alternative societal conceptions.<sup>42</sup> This latter phenomenon may be explained by the more general (modest) revival of heterodox philosophy and political discourse since the prolonged effects of the 2008 recession and subsequent breathing space for questioning neoliberal hegemony. Inversely, the discursive situation in which Bathrick was writing may well have influenced his pessimistic take. In any case, it would appear that there is a case to be made for re-evaluating the reception of these figures from the communist-oriented opposition, taking into account discursive shifts and to critically question some of the more predominant scholarly narratives which have largely ignored them on their own terms.

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<sup>41</sup> Ralph Miliband, 'A Commentary on Rudolf Bahro's Alternative', *The Socialist Register*, 16 (1979), 274–284.

<sup>42</sup> Amberger, *Bahro–Harich–Havemann Marxistische Systemkritik und politische Utopie in der DDR*; Weber, *Sozialismus in der DDR Alternative Gesellschaftskonzepte von Robert Havemann und Rudolf Bahro*.

Following the *Wende* the concept of opposition in the GDR has generally carried with it connotations of the late 1980s *Bürgerrechtler* and the demonstrations of autumn 1989.

Admittedly, the concept of communist-oriented opposition – whether within the SED or not – is seldom at the forefront of such images, if included at all. However, Christof Geisel’s study of the oppositional groups in the 1980s argues, despite the claims of many opposition figures since 1989, that socialism was very much an influence and indeed the aim of many of these groupings including *Neues Forum* and *Demokratie jetzt*.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, he highlights that a great many of the celebrated opposition did not consider themselves to be in opposition *per se*.<sup>44</sup> Elements of co-operation with the socialist structures of the GDR can certainly be read into Ulrike Poppe’s calls for alliances with the mid-levels of the SED.<sup>45</sup>

The reformers within the SED of this period are a somewhat under-acknowledged and contentious aspect of opposition in the GDR. Thomas Klein points to the fact that it is ‘alles andere als selbstverständlich, in der Debatte um die Vielfalt widerständigen Verhaltens in der DDR auch die Frage nach einer “Opposition in der SED” aufzugreifen’.<sup>46</sup> The case of Rolf Reißig illustrates how difficult this can be. Reißig was a member of the SED and academic at the *Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED*. During the 1980s he was involved in the SED-SPD dialogue which led to the publication of ‘Der Streit der Ideologien und die gemeinsame Sicherheit’ in 1987 which was greeted with hope and acclaim by many in both East and West. No less a commentator than Poppe confirms that the dialogue paper was well-received and spread like a ‘Biermann-Text’ in typewritten copies among oppositional circles.<sup>47</sup> However, a passage on the subject of Rolf Reißig from Kowalczuk

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<sup>43</sup> Christof Geisel, *Auf der Suche nach einem dritten Weg: Das politische Selbstverständnis der DDR-Opposition in den 80er Jahren* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2005), pp. 68–72.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Ulrike Poppe, ‘Neue Wege?’, in *Freiheit und Öffentlichkeit: Politischer Samisdat in der DDR 1985–1989*, ed. by Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk (Berlin: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 2002), pp. 170–174 (p. 172).

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Klein, ‘Reform von oben? Opposition in der DDR’, in *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung: Formen des Widerstands und der Opposition in der DDR*, ed. by Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1995), pp. 125–141 (p. 125)

<sup>47</sup> Poppe, ‘Neue Wege?’, p. 171.



highlights just how controversial the subject of inner-SED opposition can be in post-1990 discourse:

Die SED-Führungsriege bis hin zu den SED-Akademien und Parteihochschulen war nicht in 'konservative' und 'reformfreudige Kräfte' gespalten, wie zuweilen behauptet und unterstellt wird. Es mag Meinungsverschiedenheiten gegeben haben, aber keine Lager. Zum Reformier kann ein Mensch nicht im Nachgang erklärt werden, Reformier müssen in ihrer Zeit als solche kenntlich sein. Das war innerhalb der DDR in der zweiten Hälfte der achtziger Jahre niemand aus dem SED-Apparat.<sup>48</sup>

Kowalczuk denies all SED politicians and even academics the title of reformer, let alone opposition. The concept that one must be seen openly as a 'reformer' in one's own time would arguably discredit many of the underground oppositional figures celebrated in post-Wende accounts but certainly unknown outside of small circles beforehand. In any case, Kowalczuk's most recent position appears to directly contradict his earlier commentary: 'Die DDR war sowohl durch Anpassung wie Widerstand gekennzeichnet. Dabei konnte eine Person sowohl Exekutor wie Widerständler sein'.<sup>49</sup> The question as to why Kowalczuk so categorically changed his position is open to interpretation. Perhaps the closer proximity in the mid-1990s to the complex lived experience of the GDR allowed for a more lenient judgement, or perhaps the increasing emphasis on opposition and resistance emanating from state-mandated institutions<sup>50</sup> helped to influence the discursive parameters?<sup>51</sup> Part of the aim of this thesis is to investigate precisely what the state-mandated memory narratives are with

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<sup>48</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich C. H. Beck, 2015), p. 109.

<sup>49</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, 'Von der Freiheit, Ich zu sagen. Widerständiges Verhalten in der DDR', in Poppe and others (eds), *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung Formen des Widerstands und der Opposition in der DDR*, pp. 85–115 (p. 91).

<sup>50</sup> See for instance: Deutscher Bundestag, *Gesetz über die Errichtung einer Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (1998) <<http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/headline-1081.html>> [accessed 16 November 2018]; Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur (2011) *Förderschwerpunkt 2012-2013 Opposition und Widerstand in SBZ und DDR* (2011) <<http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/pdf-2011/opposition.pdf>> [accessed 13 December 2018].

<sup>51</sup> Kowalczuk is himself employed by several state-mandated institutions.

regard to the communist-oriented opposition and under what ideological circumstances they operate.

This review has touched on some of the theoretical problems facing anyone who wishes to study the concept of opposition within the GDR. It has highlighted that there is a need to question some of the a priori assumptions evident within existing historiography. It would appear that there is scope for a more targeted treatment of communist-oriented opposition in the GDR, one that seeks to overcome the prejudicial anti-communist binary detailed above. Furthermore, the ideological underpinnings which lead to such approaches appear worthy of exploration. The question therefore remains: what is ideology?

### Memory and/or Ideology Critique?: A Theoretical Framework

Memory studies has been in the ascent since the 1980s, achieving boom proportions in the 1990s<sup>52</sup> and becoming firmly established in the academies and cultural landscapes during the 2000s.<sup>53</sup> This discussion aims to review this vibrant field, introducing and critically analysing some of its core concepts and theoretical foundations. The first section deals with the earliest systematic exposition of *collective memory* by Maurice Halbwachs, before the second section introduces the Nestors of *cultural memory* theory in Jan and Aleida Assmann, whose work has been seminal in Germany, and the influential work of Astrid Erll. Particular focus is paid throughout to the role or lack thereof which Marxist ideology theory plays within mainstream memory discourse and what the potential consequences of this may be.

Maurice Halbwachs was a French academic with an intriguingly varied theoretical background. His theoretical studies began under the thoroughly individualist philosopher

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<sup>52</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung* (Weimar/Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2011), vii.

Henri Bergson, of whom Halbwachs wrote ‘I am not sure that his influence was not ineffaceable’.<sup>54</sup> Halbwachs then worked on the papers of the German idealist rationalist Leibniz<sup>55</sup> producing a monograph *Leibniz*,<sup>56</sup> in which he tentatively breaks with Bergson by affirming Leibniz’s criticism of intuition. The great encyclopaedist would also influence his conception of (initially individual) memory and forgetting. Halbwachs’ interpretation of Leibniz holds that we never completely forget; instead, our thoughts and impressions leave traces in us as both vague impressions and conscious memories. Although these may become dulled over time, partial remembering takes place under the influence of external (i.e. social) stimuli such as interacting with others.<sup>57</sup> An initial recognition of the relational interaction between social and personal remembering can be discerned in this conceptualisation and a rejection of Bergson’s own highly individualist concept of memory, which holds that *spirit* synthesises mind and matter in the two processes of ‘pure perception’ and ‘pure remembering’.<sup>58</sup>

The turn from Bergson was further exemplified by Halbwachs’ collaboration with the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, whose emphasis on the collective was to greatly influence Halbwachs’ work on memory. His first mature conception of collective memory appeared in *The Social Frameworks of Memory*.<sup>59</sup> This work introduces Halbwachs’ seminal contribution to memory studies by establishing the link between social groups and collective memory. According to Halbwachs, collective memory is always socially framed as social groups determine what is considered memorable and *how* it is to be remembered: ‘The

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<sup>54</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Psychology of Social Class* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958), ix.

<sup>55</sup> A seemingly endless exercise of sifting through the hundreds of thousands of papers and fragments that the *Universalgelehrter* left behind. Halbwachs’ work would form part of a process that would begin to come to fruition in the GDR with the publication of the *Sämtliche Schriften*, an undertaking that has remarkably still not been completed.

<sup>56</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Leibniz* (Paris: Librairie Mellottée, 1930).

<sup>57</sup> Denis Wall, ‘Maurice Halbwachs’, in *Encyclopedia of Modern French Thought*, ed. by Christopher John Murray (New York/London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), pp. 285–287 (p. 285).

<sup>58</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1911), pp. 326-333.

<sup>59</sup> See: Maurice Halbwachs, ‘The Social Frameworks of Memory’, in *On Collective Memory*, ed. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 37–192.

individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory'.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Halbwachs clarifies the (re)constructive nature of our view of the past, emphasising the 'feeling of reality' that is the point of departure for all memory, but highlights the objective environment and societal basis whence this feeling comes: 'time, space and the order of physical and social events as they are established and recognised by members of our group are imposed on us'.<sup>61</sup>

Halbwachs is often situated within Durkheimian sociology<sup>62</sup> and the influence of the French sociologist is indeed clear in Halbwachs' turn to empirical and statistical studies of collectives. However, another important period in his intellectual development is often understated. During his time in Berlin in 1911, Halbwachs – already a member of the reformist Socialist Party of Jean Jaurés – was influenced by the reformist Marxism of Eduard Bernstein.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, following the publication of an article describing the brutal tactics of the Berlin police at a socialist demonstration in the French journal *Humanité*, Halbwachs was expelled from Germany. The future leader of the November Revolution (alongside Rosa Luxemburg) Karl Liebknecht would write an incandescent defence of Halbwachs for *Humanité*.<sup>64</sup> The significance of this engagement with Marxist theory and experience of life as a socialist in Wilhelmine Germany is attested by Halbwachs in a memorandum composed shortly before his death.<sup>65</sup> The influence of Marxist categories and concepts can already be seen in Halbwachs' earlier work on the living conditions of the working class<sup>66</sup> and more clearly in *The Psychology of Social Class*.<sup>67</sup> In retrospect the French sociologist and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.172.

<sup>62</sup> Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> Lewis A. Coser, 'Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877-1945', in Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 1–34 (p. 4).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Psychology of Social Class* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958).

Halbwachs' colleague, Georges Friedman, would note that his life's work 'link[s] up with Marxist sociology in some of its dominant themes'.<sup>68</sup>

However, it is arguably his work on the social frameworks of memory that bears the strongest hallmarks of Marxism. Olick acknowledges Halbwachs' work as a 'Durkheimian take on what Marx had discussed in terms of class consciousness'.<sup>69</sup> This insight can be taken even further as there is a clear family resemblance between Halbwachs' concept of 'societal ideas' and frameworks based upon social groupings and the theory of ideology. Marxist thought has always been fundamentally interested in the past and how it shapes the present and vice versa:

Die Menschen machen ihre eigene Geschichte, aber sie machen sie nicht aus freien Stücken, nicht unter selbstgewählten, sondern unter unmittelbar vorgefundenen, gegebenen und überlieferten Umständen. Die Tradition aller toten Geschlechter lastet wie ein Alp auf dem Gehirne der Lebenden.<sup>70</sup>

Halbwachsian *collective memory* and Marxist *ideology* are both clearly attempts at a 'sociology of knowledge'<sup>71</sup> that is unavoidably concerned with how the past and the present can be *known* or understood. The points of agreement can be seen in their emphasis on the unconscious influence and taking on of ideas according to membership of social groups and environment.<sup>72</sup> While Halbwachs goes into more specialised differentiation, this is not by any means incompatible with Marxist theory; indeed, his discussion of the familial, religious and class spaces is strikingly reminiscent of French Marxist Louis Althusser's categorisation of

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<sup>68</sup> Georges Friedman, 'Introduction', in Maurice Halbwachs, *The Psychology of Social Class* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 1–20 (p. 17).

<sup>69</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey K. Olick et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 139–140 (p. 139).

<sup>70</sup> Karl Marx, 'Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte', *Marx Engels Werke*, viii (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956–1968), p. 115.

<sup>71</sup> Lewis A. Coser, 'Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877-1945', p. 22.

<sup>72</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Karl Marx, 'Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie', *Marx Engels Werke*, 39 vols, (Berlin: Dietz, 1956–1968), xiii (1968).

ideological state apparatuses (ISAs).<sup>73</sup> Similarity can also be read into Halbwachs' continuous reconstruction of memory and identity in accordance with the given material and social environment and the Marxist conception of the reproduction of the social structure.<sup>74</sup> This is not to say that there are no other important influences on Halbwachs' thought, as we have already seen, Bergson, Leibniz and Durkheim all helped shape Halbwachs intellectually and one could also add Freud<sup>75</sup> to this list. However, in view of the tendency to downplay Marxist thought in memory discourse, this more detailed picture of the figure often seen as the starting point of collective memory studies is significant. Halbwachs is someone who we can perhaps tentatively describe as Marxian if not a fully-fledged Marxist.

Since the popularisation of the term memory in the 1980s there have been two especially significant heirs to Halbwachs – Jan and Aleida Assmann. Few approaches are as influential in the field of memory studies as that of Assmanian cultural memory. I will now sketch some of its concepts and undertake an interrogatory analysis of the philosophical foundations of cultural memory theory in order to draw out their political connotations. The Egyptologist Jan Assmann, described as 'both the major legatee of the Halbwachsian tradition and its most potent critical reconstructor'<sup>76</sup> introduces the concept of 'mnemohistory'. This is to be seen not as the opposite or other of history per se but as a subsection of the same. The key characteristics of his theory are that it leaves aside synchronic aspects of the past and focuses only on the aspects which are the 'product of memory' in later portrayals.<sup>77</sup> In other words, contrary to 'positive history', the purpose 'is

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<sup>73</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 85–126 (p. 209).

<sup>74</sup> Karl Marx, 'Das Kapital Erster Band', in *Marx Engels Werke*, 39 vols, (Berlin: Dietz, 1956–1968), xxiii (1962), p. 591; Karl Marx, 'Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie', p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Halbwachs' combination of social psychology and social framework could be seen as one of the first attempts to synthesise Marx and Freud as later commentators such as Marcuse and Althusser – by way of Lacan – would. Herbert Marcuse, *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp); Louis Althusser, 'Freud and Lacan', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 133–150.

<sup>76</sup> Olick et al., eds, *The Collective Memory Reader*, p. 209.

<sup>77</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism', in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. by Olick et al., pp. 209–212 (p.209).

not to ascertain the possible truth of traditions [...] but to study these traditions as phenomena of collective memory'.<sup>78</sup> Collective memory is further subdivided into two categories.

Firstly, into communicative memory, which is identified as living memory communicated in everyday life through interaction, lasting usually for a period of 80-100 years. This aspect of memory is associated (by Assmann) with Halbwachs' conception of collective memory and considered broadly constitutive of the field of oral history.<sup>79</sup>

The second and the primary focus of Assmanian collective memory is cultural memory:

Unter dem Begriff kulturelles Gedächtnis fassen wir den jeder Gesellschaft und jeder Epoche eigentümlichen Bestand an Wiedergebrauchs-Texten, -Bildern und -Riten zusammen, in deren 'Pflege' sie ihr Selbstbild stabilisiert und vermittelt, ein kollektiv geteiltes Wissen vorzugsweise (aber nicht ausschließlich) über die Vergangenheit, auf das eine Gruppe ihr Bewußtsein von Einheit und Eigenart stützt.<sup>80</sup>

It is clear that Assmann seeks to highlight the diachronic aspect of memory, which some have interpreted as being under-represented in Halbwachs' model.

Building on the Assmanian model of cultural memory, Astrid Erll proposes a 'kultursemiotisches Modell' which seeks to answer the criticism that collective memory is problematic as it merely adds a collective qualifier to individual (psychological) phenomena.<sup>81</sup> This answer is inspired by Olick's differentiation between collected (social and

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>79</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', in *The Collective Memory Reader* ed. by Olick et al., pp. 212–215 (p. 212). Indeed, Assmann readily admits that he borrows the term communicative memory from Oral Historian Lutz Niethammer (p.213). See Lutz Niethammer, *Lebenserfahrung und kollektives Gedächtnis. Die Praxis der Oral History* (Bodenheim: Athenaeum, 1980).

<sup>80</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität', in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, ed. by Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 9–19 (p.15).

<sup>81</sup> Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 109. I feel a close interrogation of the cultural memory theoretical approach is justified as Erll's work is considered to be an influential 'groundbreaking [...] comprehensive account of the origins, developments and current state of memory studies' and is cited as such by other notable memory theorists. See: Ann Rigney, 'The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing', in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 345–356 (p.346).

culturally determined individual memory) and collective memory ‘im engeren Sinne’ (the symbols, media, social institutions and practices of societal interaction with remembering).<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, Erll seeks to emphasise the processual<sup>83</sup> and plural nature of

‘Erinnerungskulturen’ which are made up of three dimensions:

1. Material dimension: Media and other cultural artefacts;
2. Mental dimension: cultural-memory schemata and codes such as value hierarchies and cultural stereotypes;
3. Social dimension: Social institutions and practices such as archives, universities and memorial rituals.<sup>84</sup>

As a heuristic schema, this appears to be a productive and well-conceived model which helps in understanding the complex processes of societal remembering. Furthermore, it is broadly in agreement with most theoretical models operating within the European context. However, there is often more to a model than its stripped back components. In the following section, I seek to explore and interrogate the theoretical foundations and assumptions of Erll’s model to highlight potential blind spots.

The first point of interest lies in Erll’s portrayal of Halbwachs as an early progenitor of memory studies whose concepts are essentially stepping stones or precursors to the advances of social psychology, oral history and Assmannian cultural memory.<sup>85</sup> A revealing passage is contained in Erll’s summary of Aby Warburg and Halbwachs’ ‘grundlegende’ differences, as opposed to Halbwachs’ ‘theorielastig’ concepts:

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<sup>82</sup>Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 111

<sup>83</sup>The processual aspect is similarly emphasised by Olick and Rigney. See Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘Figurations of Memory: A Process-Relational Methodology, Illustrated on the German Case’, in *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York/London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 85–120; Rigney, pp. 345–356.

<sup>84</sup>Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 117

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 16–20.



Warburg geht induktiv, vom Material hervor, ganz gemäß seinem berühmten Diktum:

“Der liebe Gott steckt im Detail.” Dabei rückt er die **materiale Dimension der Kultur** in den Vordergrund.<sup>86</sup> [emphasis in original]

In contrast to Warburg’s emphasis on the material dimension, Halbwachs is presented as focusing on the social aspect of culture. Erll posits that in Halbwachs’ view this is about the ‘aktive, bewusste, konstruktive und Bedürfnissen der Gegenwart entsprechende Aneignung einer identitätsbezogenen Vergangenheit durch soziale Gruppen’. While not entirely inaccurate, this appears to be an unfair reading of his work when one considers passages devoted to material influences,<sup>87</sup> which display a keen knowledge of and interest in (primarily unconscious) psychological processes of identity and memory building and the dialectical influence of individual subject and surroundings.

This apparent oversight may be explained by analysing Erll’s concept of *material*. It is evident that by material Erll means media or objects. However, these media and objects are expressions of *Objektivierung*<sup>88</sup> or ‘Vergegenständlichung, Äußerungsformen’<sup>89</sup> of subjective or *ideal* content. In this sense, Erll is advancing an epistemologically idealist philosophical position and it would seem slightly out of place to criticise Halbwachs for ignoring the *material* dimension of culture.

I would suggest that this ungenerous reading emanates from Erll’s own philosophical position, which has consequences for her conceptualisation of memory. This can be seen in her open criticism of what she perceives to be Halbwachs’ naïve objectivism:

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>87</sup> For example: ‘What is at issue here is no longer mere dates or facts. Of course, even contemporary history too often boils down to a series of overly abstract conceptions. But I can fill in these conceptions, substituting images and impressions for these ideas, when I look over the paintings, portraits, and engravings of the time or think about the books that appeared, the plays presented, the style of the period, the jokes and humor in vogue.’ Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, p. 56.

<sup>88</sup> The concept of *Objektivierung* is closely associated with Schopenhauer’s idealism, Dilthey’s historicism and Berger and Luckmann’s constructivism. See: Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. (Zürich: Diogenes, 1977), pp. 301–302; Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), p. 177; Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1987), p. 20.

<sup>89</sup> Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 23.

die Tätigkeit der Historiker/innen [vermag] keineswegs dem naiven Objektivitätsideal gerecht zu werden, das noch Halbwachs seiner polemischen Gegenüberstellung von unbeteiligter Geschichte und wertendem Gedächtnis zugrunde legte. Historiker sind an ihren historischen Standort und ihre persönliche Perspektive gebunden. Sie wählen aus, gewichten, überformen das historische Geschehen mit rhetorischen Mitteln, überführen es in eine narrative Struktur und deuten es damit zugleich (vgl. White 1973).<sup>90</sup>

The juxtaposition of history and collective memory in Halbwachs' work is not as clear cut as Erll states. Halbwachs' differentiation between history and memory does not naively claim that historians have an Archimedean point, instead he advances, at most, the idea that professional source analysis and narrative can help to demarcate and shape debates about the past.<sup>91</sup> Jan Assmann describes much the same phenomenon using different language,<sup>92</sup> as does Erll herself to some extent.<sup>93</sup>

More revealing, however, is the implicit and explicit connotations of Erll's portrayal of Hayden White's theories as a paradigm shift. Indeed, White's *Metahistory*<sup>94</sup> is generally considered to be an important event which helped inaugurate the 'linguistic turn' and revolutionise approaches to history.<sup>95</sup> However, is White to be considered the instigator of a (teleological) progression in the philosophy of history? At the centre of this, as Erll alludes, is narrative or the concept that all history-writing is more or less *constructed* in the form of a

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>91</sup> Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, pp. 51–52.

<sup>92</sup> 'Memory cannot be validated as a historical source without being checked against 'objective' evidence. This is as true of collective memory as individual memory' and 'the task of historical positivism consists in separating the historical from the mythical elements in memory and distinguishing the elements which retain the past from those which shape the present. See: J. Assmann, 'Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism', p. 210.

<sup>93</sup> 'Archive und Universitäten sind ebenfalls kein Gedächtnis, sondern können als *Institutionen* des kollektiven Gedächtnisses dienen, die zu bewahrende Informationen erschließen, verwalten und vermitteln.' Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 113.

<sup>94</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> See, for instance: Alun Munslow, *The Future of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

story.<sup>96</sup> However, this acknowledgment of construction is not synonymous with philosophical relativism. White's position is somewhat more complicated. Firstly, he is highly critical of many of the 'eschatological structuralists'<sup>97</sup> and 'absurdist critics'<sup>98</sup> most associated with poststructuralism and their theoretical approach of the 'Flesh made Word':

For them, the whole of human life is to be treated as a 'text,' the meaning of which is nothing but what it *is*. To interpret this text is their aim. But here interpretation does not lead to the discovery of the relationship between the words in the text and the universe of things conceived to stand outside the text and to which the words of the text refer.<sup>99</sup>

Here, White shows that he has not given up entirely on the world of the referent as an ontological category. Furthermore, in his preface to the latest edition of *Metahistory*, White – seeking to distance himself from both critical and laudatory interpretations – contends that he has never been concerned with 'how one ought to research and write history' but instead to show that historians do history 'by means of research *and* writing' or to put it another way that 'the process of composition begins at least as early as the moment of a choice of subject'.<sup>100</sup> As Paul Herman notes it is not entirely clear or even useful to conceive of White's work in terms of the objectivism/relativism juxtaposition.<sup>101</sup> In light of this, I would suggest that Erll's undifferentiated reading or rather use of White to dismiss Halbwachs' alleged naive objectivism is somewhat misplaced. Furthermore, it highlights the centrality of the *flesh made word* to her own theory of memory.

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<sup>96</sup> White's own schema differentiates between general narrative which is characteristic of most writing and *narrativisation*, where the events of the past are portrayed as if seemingly speaking for themselves. Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 7.1 (1980), 5–27 (pp. 8–10).

<sup>97</sup> Hayden White, 'Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground', in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 230–260 (p. 259).

<sup>98</sup> Referring to Lacan, Levi-Strauss, and Foucault and Lacan, Barthes and Derrida respectively. See Hayden White, 'The Absurdist Moment in Contemporary Literary Theory', in *Tropics of Discourse Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 261–282 (p. 262).

<sup>99</sup> White, 'Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground', p. 259.

<sup>100</sup> White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th-Century Europe*, pp. xxvii–xxviii.

<sup>101</sup> Paul Herman, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 98.

This is evident in her uncritical acceptance of postmodernism/poststructuralism:<sup>102</sup>

Geistes- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Dimension: Der Gedächtnisdiskurs hat sich auch in der Folge der postmodernen Geschichtsphilosophie und des Poststrukturalismus etabliert. Die Einsicht in die wirklichkeitskonstituierende Kraft von Repräsentation und in die Geformtheit und Narrativität der Geschichtsschreibung, die Rede vom ‘Ende der Geschichte’ (Francis Fukuyama) oder doch zumindest vom ‘Ende der Großen Erzählungen’ (Jean-Francois Lyotard) haben Vorstellungen von Geschichte als monolithischem ‘Kollektivsingular’ (Reinhart Koselleck), als objektiv Gegebenem oder als Prozess der teleologischen Progression unterhöhlt. Die kulturwissenschaftliche Gedächtnisforschung vereint das Interesse an Geschichte mit den Einsichten der postmodernen Theoriebildung, indem sie fragt, wie soziale Gruppen Vergangenheiten durch Signifikationsprozesse immer wieder aufs Neue erzeugen.<sup>103</sup>

The portrayal of poststructuralism as a turn leading to *the* insight into relative and constructed aspects of knowledge is too simplistic. From the Pre-Socratics<sup>104</sup> to Kant<sup>105</sup> and Hegel<sup>106</sup> these epistemological questions that inform any discussion about the past and knowledge thereof have been the source of rigorous and nuanced debate. Should this emphasis on the novelty and efficacy of poststructuralist *Geschichtsphilosophie* in memory studies be

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<sup>102</sup> In the sense that it is presented as a given fact with no exposition, indeed, somewhat ironically it is presented as (teleological) progress. One need not share Erll’s view of poststructuralism to see that all theories are influenced by the societal and personal contexts of the theoretician and that this is as applicable to poststructuralism as any other school of thought. There is hardly space to delve into the ideological and historical roots of postmodernism here. However, Paglia presents some (polemical) ideas about the origins of French poststructuralism as influenced by the unconscious coming to terms with the issues of Vichy France and collaboration. Lukács offers insight into the *Werdegang* of some intellectual precursors, notably Nietzsche, Dilthey and Simmel. Jameson’s collection of essays looks at the field(s) of postmodernism from a critical perspective. See Camille Paglia, ‘Junk Bonds and Corporate Raiders: Academe in the Hour of the Wolf’, in *Sex, Art and American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), pp. 170–248; Camille Paglia, ‘What I hate about Foucault’, *Salon*, 2 December 1998; Georg Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin/Weimar: Aufbau, 1987); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1992).

<sup>103</sup> Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 4.

<sup>104</sup> Wilhelm Capelle, *Die Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958), pp. 327–333.

<sup>105</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam, 1979), pp. 200–207.

<sup>106</sup> Georg Wilhelm Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, 3 vols, (Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam, 1971), iii (1971), pp. 491, 515.

considered an example of institutional forgetting?<sup>107</sup> Or is this exemplary of what Kant identifies as the lack of a fixed object within the ‘endlosen Streitigkeiten’ that distinguish the philosophical process or ‘Kampfplatz’ of preconceived systems (or anti-systems)? Whichever way one answers these questions, there are certain discernible consequences of this philosophical outlook. Firstly, there is an obverse to Erll’s presentation of poststructuralism as progress, as described somewhat polemically by Žizek:

with the ‘postmodern’ turn, philosophizing becomes ‘experimental’, no longer providing unconditional answers, but playing with different ‘models’, combining different approaches which take their own failure into account in advance – all we can properly formulate is the question, the enigma, while answers are simply failed attempts to fill in the gap of this enigma.<sup>108</sup>

Indeed, this theoretical difficulty if not impossibility of concrete definition and analysis is seemingly minimised by Erll and celebrated as being evidence of the inherent interdisciplinarity of memory studies.<sup>109</sup> While interdisciplinarity is absolutely an important aspect of modern academia which helps to further our understanding of complex phenomena, this affirmation is more complicated. While pluralism and interdisciplinarity are presented as essential characteristics of memory studies,<sup>110</sup> any form of realist ontology or dialectical materialism are explicitly excluded in such texts:

Bei aller Heterogenität der Begriffsbestimmungen lassen sich zwei zentrale Merkmale des Erinnerns anführen, über die weitgehend Einigkeit herrscht: sein Gegenwartsbezug und konstruktiver Charakter. Erinnerungen sind keine objektiven

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<sup>107</sup> This is not meant to imply that individual theoreticians are ignorant of previous philosophical debates but is meant to highlight that many are de-emphasised in favour of sometimes derivative conceptions which are arguably less nuanced. For an example of this phenomenon see: Astrid Erll ‘Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction’ *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 1–18 (p. 7).

<sup>108</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism: Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London/New York: Verso, 2011), p. 27.

<sup>109</sup> Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, pp. 1, 41, 112–113.

<sup>110</sup> Kammen in Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 3.

Abbilder vergangener Wahrnehmungen, geschweige denn einer vergangenen Realität. Es sind subjektive, hochgradig selektive und von der Abrufsituation abhängige Rekonstruktionen. Erinnern ist eine sich in der Gegenwart vollziehende Operation des Zusammenstellens (re-member) verfügbarer Daten. Vergangenheitsversionen ändern sich mit jedem Abruf, gemäß den veränderten Gegenwarten.<sup>111</sup>

Is this emphasis on constructivism and plurality not in and of itself a part of the postmodern turn that is inspired by and constituent of relativistic subject-oriented philosophy? In other words, is it not somewhat disingenuous to claim openness in the form of interdisciplinarity but simultaneously exclude any realist or dialectical materialist epistemology and ontology, however nuanced?<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, what are the political consequences of attenuating the theoretical foundations of our ability to speak in a *concrete* register and ultimately to justify criticism or the unmasking<sup>113</sup> of special interests in the memory landscape?

I would suggest these consequences are visible in Erll's conception of *hegemony*:

Trotz der grundsätzlichen Annahme synchroner Pluralität muss jedoch davon ausgegangen werden, dass zur Erinnerung im Modus des kulturellen Gedächtnisses eine Tendenz gehört, die so produzierte Vergangenheitsversion als allein gültige darstellt. Kulturelles Gedächtnis zielt auf Hegemonie ab, denn durch Erinnerung im Rahmen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses werden zentrale Fragen von für die Gesellschaft vitalem Interesse und mit weitreichenden politischen Folgen verhandelt.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, p. 7.

<sup>112</sup> For instance, Marxist *Abbildtheorie* or *Widerspiegelungstheorie* is conversant with the constructive character of perception but also posits an objective aspect to this dialectical process. E.g. 'Das Bewußtsein des Menschen widerspiegelt nicht nur die objektive Welt, sondern schafft sie auch.' Vladimir Ilich Lenin, 'Philosophische Hefte', *Werke*, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1959–1964), xxxviii (1964), p. 203.

<sup>113</sup> See: Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>114</sup> Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*, pp. 133–134.

ErlI undermines the potency of her brief discussion of hegemony by foregrounding *synchronous plurality*, by which is meant that an individual has a part in several collective memories. This is undoubtedly true; however, the existence of several spaces (Halbwachs) does not mean that these are not all conditioned to some extent by a *Hegemon* (however one wishes to conceptualise this) nor does she provide any concept of how specific ideas achieve dominance or what the potential reasons for this are. ErlI is clearly aware that cultural memories affect the political legitimisation processes of a society (at the macro level) or a group (at the micro level); however, due to her inclination towards postmodern theory's emphasis on individual subjects and their involvement in cultural memory production or contestation, the concepts of dominance, power and cleavages such as class are, whether inadvertently or not, de-emphasised. Equally, the notion that cultural memory – in this instance broadly interchangeable with the concept of ideology – could be understood 'als interessengeleitete Verzerrung' is explicitly dismissed.<sup>115</sup> While it may seem something of an abstraction, I believe that this downplaying of special interests in the cultural memory sphere weakens our understanding of how certain institutions can unduly shape societal perceptions. The revelations of the 2016 Hillsborough inquest in the UK serve as a sobering reminder of just how much influence a few well-placed individuals and a compliant media can have and equally how arduous a task it is to contest the narratives of elite institutions, even in a self-identified liberal democracy.<sup>116</sup>

In order to continue this discussion of the place of hegemony and ideology in collective memory, it is necessary to introduce the Assmanian criticism thereof, which is clearly an important foundation of ErlI's own view.

Aleida Assmann posits that:

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>116</sup> See: Phil Scraton, Hillsborough – The Truth (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2016); [n.a.] 'Hillsborough campaigner Prof Phil Scraton turns down OBE', *The Guardian*, 29 December 2016.

the term ideology is derogatory. It denounces a mental frame as false, fake, manipulated, constructed, insincere and harmful, thereby presupposing an absolute truth that is as clear as it is indisputable. The use of the term ideology is grounded on the rock of a self-assured truth. This rock has been eroded since the 1990s under the influence of multiculturalist and constructivist thinking.<sup>117</sup>

Such interpretations have become commonplace within academia, from Foucault's famous tripartite critique<sup>118</sup> to social constructivists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann<sup>119</sup> and more contemporary critics.<sup>120</sup> However, precisely which ideology theorists are meant to have presented ideology as false, manipulated and in opposition to absolute truth is more difficult to work out. Indeed, this preconception seems to be a largely Western phenomenon, as in Eastern Marxist discourse there is agreement that ideology is to be understood as the structure or framework(s) of any society's 'gesellschaftliches Bewußtsein' including socialism.<sup>121</sup> In reality, the main proponents of ideology as false or flawed consciousness were conservative and liberal Cold War-era theorists.<sup>122</sup>

Despite this, the direct object of Assmann's critique (and in a strikingly similar fashion, Barbara Misztal's) is 'Marxist ideology critique', specifically Eric Hobsbawm and

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<sup>117</sup> Aleida Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory', *Social Research*, 75.1 (2008), 49–71 (p.53).

<sup>118</sup> 'The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to use for three reasons. The first is that, whether one wants it to be or not, it is always in virtual opposition to something like the truth. [...] The second inconvenience is that it refers, necessarily I believe, to something like a subject. Thirdly, ideology is in a secondary position in relation to something which must function as the infrastructure or economic or material determinant for it'. See: Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 108–133 (p. 118).

<sup>119</sup> "'Ideologie'" (Ideen, die als Waffen für gesellschaftliche Interessen wirken) und den des 'falschen Bewußtseins' (Denken, das dem gesellschaftlichen Sein des Denkenden 'entfremdet' ist). and 'Der spätere Marxismus tendierte dazu, 'Basis' kurzerhand gleichzusetzen mit Wirtschaftsstruktur, deren 'Überbau' dann lediglich ihr Reflex wäre (so beispielsweise bei Lenin). Heute steht wohl fest, daß dieser einseitig ökonomische Determinismus eine Fehlinterpretation ist.' Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>120</sup> Derek Layder, *Understanding Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1994), p.104; Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method', *The American Historical Review*, 102.5 (1997), 1386–1403 (p. 1395).

<sup>121</sup> Georg Klaus and Manfred Buhr, *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1971), pp. 423–425. See also: Harald Schliwa, 'Der marxistische Begriff der Ideologie und das Wesen und die Funktionen der sozialistischen Ideologie', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 16.9 (1968), 1037–1066; Erich Hahn, 'Ideologiekritik heute', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 16.12 (1968), 1494–1503; Hans-Christoph Rauh, 'Auseinandersetzungen um das Ideologieproblem', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 16.9 (1968), 1123–1139.

<sup>122</sup> Ernst Topitsch, *Sozialphilosophie zwischen Ideologie und Wissenschaft* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1964); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Ideology and Power in Soviet Politics* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976); Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: Volume Two: Hegel and Marx* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995).



Terence Ranger's concept of invented tradition.<sup>123</sup> It is alleged that the concept of invented or constructed falls into the false consciousness trap of ideology and necessitates the obverse category of 'true' or 'authentic'.<sup>124</sup> This interpretation is premised on two misreadings: first, as we have seen above, that the Marxist conception of ideology is a form of flawed consciousness; and, second, that ideology theory is ignorant of the processual constructive nature of collective memory formation. However, this is only possible if one ignores the philosophical foundation of Marxist ideology theory which is *dialectical* materialism. Following in the footsteps of Hegel, the processual philosopher par excellence, Marxism acknowledges not only that societal phenomena are processual but that the very being or ontology of existence is processual in nature.<sup>125</sup> Sartre summarises this very concisely, stating that Marxism:

addresses itself to experience in order to discover there concrete syntheses. It can conceive of these syntheses only within a moving, dialectical totalisation, which is nothing else but history or – from the strictly cultural point of view adopted here – 'philosophy-becoming-the world'.<sup>126</sup>

Equally, in terms of *Geschichtsphilosophie*, Fredric Jameson points to 'the one absolute and we may even say "transhistorical" imperative of all dialectical thought' – 'Always historicise!'.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, it is rather difficult to recognise the allegedly myopic Marxist

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<sup>123</sup> Aleida Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory', pp. 66-69; Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), pp. 60–61. Indeed a further memory theorist can be added to this list. Pierre Nora, the French nationalist of *Lieux de memoire* fame famously refused to translate and publish Hobsbawm and Ranger's book. Perhaps it is not merely coincidence that Nora, the French nationalist and Assmann, defender of European values, end up censoring and censoring Hobsbawm for his allegedly outdated Marxist approach.

<sup>124</sup> A. Assmann, 'Transformations between History and Memory', p. 66; Misztal, p. 61. See also: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a different interpretation of Hobsbawm and Ranger's thesis which questions some of Assmann and Misztal's premises see Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Press, 1993), and Olick's comments, Jeffrey K. Olick, in Olick et al., *The Collective Memory Reader*, pp. 250, 271.

<sup>125</sup> See: Friedrich Engels, 'Anti-Dühring', *Marx Engels Werke*, 39 vols, (Berlin: Dietz, 1956–1968), xx (1968), pp. 111–130; Friedrich Engels, 'Dialektik der Natur', *Marx Engels Werke*, 39 vols, (Berlin: Dietz, 1956–1968) xx (1968), pp. 328–336, 348 ; Georg Lukács, *Prolegomena: Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1986); Hans-Heinz Holz, *Weltentwurf und Reflexion: Versuch einer Grundlegung der Dialektik* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2005).

<sup>126</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 32.

<sup>127</sup> See Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. ix.

tradition that thinks itself ‘free of the taint of ideology’ while exploding the flawed consciousness of others as Aleida Assmann describes.<sup>128</sup> Even Lenin’s famous and trenchant formulation<sup>129</sup> acknowledges that we ‘can only escape from one ideology into another’.<sup>130</sup> Aleida Assmann’s fundamental criticism of Marxist ideology critique appears to take umbrage with its claims to be able to recognise the power relations and powerful agents evident in our capitalist society and to suggest that we can attempt to ‘unmask’ their influence on or within the memetic ideosphere of culture. A key component of her criticism is her perception of Marxists believing they do so from a neutral standpoint; however, as we have seen above, this is not the case and Marxist theory of ideology does not claim an absolute truth or perfect vision of a static model. Furthermore, concerns with power and its influence within symbolic meaning making is not limited to Marxists; semiotician Umberto Eco – who is well aware of the complexity of the constructive process that is knowledge – was under no illusions regarding what we can say about power in class society:

Not long ago, if you wanted to seize political power in a country you had merely to control the army and the police... Today a country belongs to the person who controls communications.<sup>131</sup>

What then is the origin of this seeming antipathy towards Marxist ideology theory? I would suggest that it derives from Assmann, Misztal and Erll’s implicit and explicit use of an (ultimately) subjectivist epistemology, which necessitates an emphasis on individuals’ roles in the collective memory process and consequentially precludes conceptualization of a

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<sup>128</sup> A. Assmann, ‘Transformations between History and Memory’, p. 68.

<sup>129</sup> ‘[...] bürgerliche oder sozialistische Ideologie. Ein Mittelding gibt es hier nicht (denn eine ‘dritte’ Ideologie hat die Menschheit nicht geschaffen, wie es überhaupt... niemals eine außerhalb der Klassen oder über den Klassen stehende Ideologie geben kann). Darum bedeutet jede Herabminderung der sozialistischen Ideologie, jedes Abschwenken von ihr zugleich eine Stärkung der bürgerlichen Ideologie’. Vladimir Ilich Lenin, ‘Was tun?’, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1959–1964), v (1959), p. 396.

<sup>130</sup> Flood in Aleida Assmann, ‘Transformations between History and Memory’, p. 69.

<sup>131</sup> Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt and Brace, 1990), p. 43.

dominant hegemonic strand.<sup>132</sup> This of course is not to say that the aforementioned are unaware of the hegemonic dimension of collective memory or of the ‘critical spirit’ that seeks to challenge it.<sup>133</sup> However, the theory of how this criticism is to take place reveals the limits within the premises of cultural memory imposed by its tendency towards relativism and emphasis on the participatory nature of memory production, as seen, for example, in this description:

Institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, governments, the church, or a firm do not “have” a memory – they “make” one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments. Together with such a memory, these groups and institutions “construct” an identity. Such a memory is based on selection and exclusion, neatly separating useful from not useful, and relevant from irrelevant memories. Hence a collective memory is necessarily a mediated memory. It is backed up by material media, symbols, and practices which have to be grafted into the hearts and minds of individuals.<sup>134</sup>

Given this emphasis on the participation of groups themselves to create *their* identity and *their* memory, which is then further relativized by a seemingly isolated institutional mediation, how does one begin to dissect and criticise this process in light of power relations? Who decides what is ‘useful’ and ‘relevant’ and more importantly why? Both Misztal and Assmann – again with striking similarity – see their solution in Foucault’s concept of counter-memory.<sup>135</sup> However, it is actually quite difficult to reconcile Foucault’s conception of resistance to power or counter-memory with Assmann’s ultimate appeal to moralism:

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<sup>132</sup> I am not suggesting that these theorists are absolute subjectivists, all show awareness of the complexity of epistemological processes to some extent; however, I would suggest they all take up a certain position which, like all others, has consequences.

<sup>133</sup> Aleida Assmann, ‘Transformations between History and Memory’, p. 69.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>135</sup> See Misztal, pp. 64–65; Aleida Assmann, ‘Transformations between History and Memory’, p. 70.

it is up to the memory discourse to develop its own stance of critical vigilance and to develop criteria for probing the quality of memory constructions, distinguishing more “malign” from more “benign” memories – that is, memories that perpetuate resentment, hatred, and violence from those that have a therapeutic or ethical value.<sup>136</sup>

In contrast to this moralistic approach (which again raises a lot of questions as to who decides what is benign and malignant), Foucault famously emphasises an anti-dualistic and anti-moralist approach:

What often embarrasses me today [...] is that all this work done in the past fifteen years or so [...] functions for some only as a sign of belonging: to be on the ‘good side’, on the side of madness, children, delinquency, sex. [...] One must pass to the other side – the good side – but by trying to turn off these mechanisms which cause the appearance of two separate sides. This is where the real work begins.<sup>137</sup>

Foucault’s relativism is evidently more consequent than Assmann’s. Indeed, some commentators have seen Foucault, despite his famous slogan of ‘where there is power there is resistance’, as emphasising the dominant role that power plays in the process of memory construction, leading to the pessimistic conclusion that we are unable to actually liberate ourselves from oppressive power.<sup>138</sup> In any case, both Misztal and Assmann speak elliptically of highlighting forgotten episodes or voices and shameful moments without any discussion of how to determine whether something is shameful or indeed forgotten. More importantly to what purpose would we highlight such episodes, other than the vague (and in themselves indicative of a potentially problematic liberal political view)<sup>139</sup> notions of promoting

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<sup>136</sup> Aleida Assmann, ‘Transformations between History and Memory’, p. 54.

<sup>137</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* (New York/London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 110–124 (p. 120).

<sup>138</sup> Patrick Baert, *Social Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), p. 131.

<sup>139</sup> Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2009).

democracy and inclusion.<sup>140</sup> It would appear that the concept of counter-memory – which was never formulated in any great detail by Foucault himself – is arguably not a sufficient replacement for the methodology of ideology critique as it does not provide us with tools with which we can confidently (and therefore persuasively) approach criticism.

As has been discussed above, the original justification put forward by memory theorists (among others)<sup>141</sup> to reject ideology and Marxist inspired ideology critique seems to have been based on a false premise (no pun intended!). This is particularly poignant because, as I have suggested above, the progenitor of modern collective memory theory, Halbwachs, shows more kinship to Marxist theory than is commonly acknowledged. Furthermore, I have attempted to show that the tendency towards a relativistic epistemology characteristic of cultural memory discourse imposes limits on or undermines the efficacy of what can be said with regards to power. However, this is not to imply that there is an obvious or ready-made alternative other than to suggest that a re-examination of how the art of unmasking or consequential criticism could once again be incorporated into the analysis of collective memory would seem justified. The question is how to do so given the suspicion of anything resembling objectivity or claims to truth evident in much of the memory studies field? The importance of not giving up on the realm of objective analysis is present in the stark message of Walter Benjamin's Seventh Thesis on History, concerning the relationship between power and culture:

Wer immer bis zu diesem Tage den Sieg davontrug, der marschiert mit in dem Triumphzug, der die heute Herrschenden über die dahinführt, die heute am Boden liegen. Die Beute wird, wie das immer so üblich war, im Triumphzug mitgeführt.

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<sup>140</sup> Aleida Assmann, 'Response to Peter Novick', *GHI Bulletin*, 40 (2007), 33–38 (p.35). See also: Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006); Aleida Assmann, 'From Collective Violence to a Common Future: Four Models for Dealing with a Traumatic Past', in *Cultural History and Literary Imagination 18*, ed. by Martin Modlinger and Peter Sonntag (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 8–23.

<sup>141</sup> See: Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1997); David Howarth, *Discourse* (Buckingham: The Open University Press, 2000).

Man bezeichnet sie als die Kulturgüter. Sie werden im historischen Materialisten mit einem distanzierten Betrachter zu rechnen haben. Denn was er an Kulturgütern überblickt, das ist ihm samt und sonders von einer Abkunft, die er nicht ohne Grauen bedenken kann. Es dankt sein Dasein nicht nur der Mühe der großen Genien, die es geschaffen haben, sondern auch der namenlosen Fron ihrer Zeitgenossen. Es ist niemals ein Dokument der Kultur, ohne zugleich ein solches der Barbarei zu sein. Und wie es selbst nicht frei ist von Barbarei, so ist es auch der Prozeß der Überlieferung nicht, in der es von dem einen an den andern gefallen ist. Der historische Materialist rückt daher nach Maßgabe des Möglichen von ihr ab. Er betrachtet es als seine Aufgabe, die Geschichte gegen den Strich zu bürsten.<sup>142</sup>

The image of the distanced observer questioning power may seem gauche or even unacceptable to some, as an absolute it is almost certainly an unattainable fantasy. However, given the very real effects of barbarism in our world, the question remains as to whether we can afford to give up on such fantasies? An examination of precisely what is meant by objectivity within different discourses reveals that the term is not so simple to define or reject. The claims of objectivity in western positivist discourse is summarised ably by Karl Popper: 'Die Objektivität der wissenschaftlichen Sätze liegt darin, daß sie intersubjektiv nachprüfbar sein müssen'.<sup>143</sup> This 'unbiased' objectivity is contrasted sharply with subjective judgements of a personal inclination and is said to only be possible where 'Vorgänge (Experimente) auf Grund von Gesetzmäßigkeiten sich wiederholen, bzw. reproduziert werden können'.<sup>144</sup> While this may be a suitable approach for small scale physical experiments in the controlled environment of a laboratory, the social environs we inhabit are far too complex and most importantly in a state of fluidity for such a theory of objectivity to be universally

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<sup>142</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), p. 73.

<sup>143</sup> Karl Popper, *Logik der Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), p. 18.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

applicable. Given the predominance of this ‘scientific’ discourse in the Anglosphere (and beyond), it is not difficult to see why many theorists react with distrust to attempts to *objectively* analyse the past as it implies a sense of neutrality which is unachievable. However, in the theoretical approach of Marxism the concept of objectivity takes on a more nuanced meaning. Inspired by the terminology of classical German philosophy, objectivity is used to denote the degree to which cognition (Erkenntnis) adequately reflects (Widerspiegelung) objective reality.<sup>145</sup> Objective or material reality denotes the world of materiality external to an individual’s consciousness. The question of how a human subject gains knowledge of this world is answered by Marxists in the form of dialectical materialism. This theory describes the process in which the objective (material) interacts with the subjective (ideal) in order to create a reflection of the external world within our consciousness. This does not suggest that the individual undertaking this process possesses a perfectly clear view of the object; on the contrary, each of us has our own prisms through which the world is viewed which shape our reflection (or indeed refraction). However, as a *materialist* dialectic, Marxists posit that the materiality of the objective world poses certain limits on our perceptions thereof. For example, it is difficult to promote steel as being transparent or wood as being magnetic. For Marxists, one of the most important of these limits is the principle of *Parteilichkeit in Wissenschaft*.<sup>146</sup> This concept holds that the position one inhabits and function one performs in society will inevitably influence one’s perceptive field. For instance, the exploitative structures of feudalism were more likely to be perceived as natural and right by those who benefited due to their membership of a privileged class than those of a non-privileged class.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Klaus and Buhr, p. 802.

<sup>146</sup> Ernst Bloch, ‘Parteilichkeit in Wissenschaft und Welt’, in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), pp. 330–344.

<sup>147</sup> Of course this is a very schematic description which omits for reason of clarity and brevity the complex ideological processes and conceptualisations that permeated and stabilised feudal society for centuries by portraying it as inevitable and even desirable among all the different classes.

However, *Parteilichkeit* is not just to be understood in the fairly banal perspectival manner above, but also as an intrinsic aspect of knowledge creation and dissemination. Cognitive dissonance is a term with much currency in academic circles at the moment and can largely be explained in terms of the different conditioning one receives based on the *party* or position in which one is born and matures. Lenin showcases the relevance of *Parteilichkeit* in Marxist theories of objectivity in opposition to *neutral* objectivism:

Der Objektivist spricht von der Notwendigkeit des gegebenen historischen Prozesses; der Materialist trifft genaue Feststellungen über die gegebene sozialökonomische Formation und die von ihr antagonistischen Verhältnisse. Wenn der Objektivist die Notwendigkeit einer gegebenen Reihe von Tatsachen nachweist, so läuft er stets Gefahr, auf Standpunkt eines Apologeten dieser Tatsachen zu geraten; der Materialist enthüllt die Klassengegensätze und legt damit seinen Standpunkt fest.<sup>148</sup>

In other words, the concept of objectivity in Marxist epistemology is actually in opposition to the more common usage of the term as a mode of thinking which engenders neutrality or an Archimedean point. Instead, Marxists try to look at how a given event functions within the socio-economic whole and allow their partisanship to become visible in the process.

Interestingly, this touches on a rarely recognised commonality between objectivist positivism and subjectivist relativism. Positivism limits our ability to understand the complexity of the world by avoiding contextualisation and narrowing focus onto microcosms of verifiable logic;<sup>149</sup> whereas, relativism limits our ability to understand the complexity by retreating before it into an ontological pluralism which negates attempts to analyse the world systematically. In this sense, both usually antagonistic worldviews have a similar effect in their rejection of any theory that seeks to understand the totality (in the Hegelian sense) of

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<sup>148</sup> Vladimir Ilich Lenin, 'Der ökonomische Inhalt der Volkstümlerrichtung', *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1959–1964), i (1963), p. 414.

<sup>149</sup> See for example Hume's so-called law concerning the impossibility of distilling an *ought* statement from an *is* statement: David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 335.



society in terms of historical knowledge. Marxism seeks to walk the difficult path between the two by acknowledging the relative (partial) nature of knowledge and constructive character of dialectical materialism, without lapsing into a register of terminology which views the world in itself as systemically unknowable – which logically undermines viable justification for critique – and proposing concrete radical alternatives to the world as we find it.

For Benjamin, the Marxist duality of historical and dialectical materialism was the answer to analysing our view of the past in the present. Benjamin did not conform, however, to any simplistic stereotypes of ‘orthodox’ Marxism. He, like many of his high-modern contemporaries, was profoundly aware of the same problems that are core to later postmodern theory and it is arguably this field of thought that could provide more engaging solutions to the aforementioned blind spots of postmodernist inspired memory theory. Intriguingly, this has been reflected to a certain degree in some recent contributions to memory studies. For instance, Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz speak of the postmodern ‘notion that what most characterises the times in which we live is a social amnesia, in which we, as modern subjects, are cut off from the pasts that have created us’.<sup>150</sup> This conceptualisation of the past as being ‘nowhere’ is contrasted with the ‘unprecedented politicisation of memory’ and a call to ‘move from the high level of generality on which the premises of the decline of memory is based to lower, more concrete levels of analysis, closer to the historical “real”’.<sup>151</sup> Following, Radstone and Schwarz’s logic, memory is indelibly caught up in a political process of power and legitimisation and requires, therefore, that we discuss it in a concrete register, which is to say *objectively* in the Marxist sense of the word. This raises the question as to whether the very conceptualisation of memory as detached from any real past is not itself a deeply

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<sup>150</sup> Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

political consequence of the ideological framework and ever fluid dialectical processes we inhabit.<sup>152</sup>

In any case, the overt emphasis on the political potential of collective remembering as an alternative to postmodern-influenced models indicates that the authors are aware of the attenuation of our ability to criticise and develop alternatives within models that theoretically de-emphasise the concrete in favour of subject-oriented relativism. This, therefore marks a welcome shift towards the theoretical approach of ideology critique, albeit without using such terminology.

An illuminating example of this shift is contained in Esther Leslie's discussion of Benjamin's approach to memory and optical technology. In 2003, Benjamin's approach of painstaking winnowing through the rubble of his and Germany's past to find the cause of contemporary misery was framed with the unanswered question as to whether such attempts are worth it given the mounting piles of data and 'Baudrillard-inflected postmodern perspective' according to which memory is 'only simulation without origin, virtuality without actuality, signifier dirempt from signified'.<sup>153</sup> However, in 2010 the tone is far less doubtful and in no uncertain terms the past (following Benjamin) is declared as a site of contestation, in which our interpretations have the potential to transform the future. Furthermore, the concept of collective agency in awakening to truth and liberation along class, even proletarian, lines is spoken of openly.<sup>154</sup> This shift in language from a relatively meek questioning of the usefulness of postmodern approaches to outright positive affirmation of

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<sup>152</sup>The following all detect a marked shift into relativism among the educated elites (*Bildungsbürgertum*) of western Europe beginning in the late 1800s linked to a change in the bourgeois class from the period of liberal ascendancy to the imperial and post-war eras in which the universalist enlightenment rhetoric seemed hollow against the backdrop of empire and accompanying domestic and international conflict. Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*; Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*; Thomas Mann, *Nietzsches Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2005).

<sup>153</sup> Esther Leslie, 'Absent-minded Professors: etch-a-sketching academic forgetting', in *Regimes of Memory*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), pp. 172–185 (p. 184).

<sup>154</sup> Esther Leslie, 'Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin: memory from Weimar to Hitler', in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 123–135 (pp. 134–135).

Marxist philosophy in Benjaminian hue would, arguably, not have been likely without the economic crash of 2008 and inasmuch serves as an ongoing reminder of how the socio-economic foundations of our world affects our consciousness and discourse.

The discussion above has outlined the theoretical criticisms levelled against ideology critique from within the academic discipline of memory studies and sought to answer them, particularly the accusations of positivism and ignorance of the allegedly constructivist nature of reality. During the course of this thesis I will emphasise the political aspects of memory by proposing an unapologetic re-communication of memory studies with the concerns and language of ideology critique. Helmut Peitsch and Joanne Sayner have highlighted the obscuration of the state's role within cultural memory models, particularly the Assmanian, within a German context.<sup>155</sup> This is one of the primary reasons I have chosen to focus on state-mandated representations which are tasked with influencing public remembering. The proximity to state power, discourses of the governmental elite and existential reliance upon their largesse mean that state-mandated memory work presents a particularly rich opportunity to explore the ideological frameworks and politics of remembering the past in the FRG.

### State-Mandated Memory

An example of the difference in emphasis between ideology critique and cultural memory can be seen in Andrew Beattie's definition of 'state-mandated memory',<sup>156</sup> which is described as 'where state organs subsidise or otherwise endorse the activities of third parties'. Beattie

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<sup>155</sup> See: Helmut Peitsch and Joanne Sayner, 'Tendentiousness and Topicality: Buchenwald and Antifascism as Sites of GDR memory', *German Politics and Society*, 33.1 (2015), 100–118.

<sup>156</sup> Andrew H. Beattie, 'The Politics of Remembering the GDR: Official and State-mandated Memory since 1990', in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany*, ed. by David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 23–34 (pp. 24–25).

posits a difference between official memory – emanating directly from the state such as the Enquete Commissions – and state-mandated memory, maintaining that the state mandates have been more inclusive, pluralist and representative than has often been perceived.<sup>157</sup> This conclusion seems to suggest that this plurality is somehow desirable and indicative of an open, democratic memory culture per se. However, when viewed from the perspective of ideology critique, this willingness to compromise and incorporate plurality is an essential factor in actually achieving and maintaining ideological hegemony for the dominant anti-communist, de-legitimising narratives promoted within the general memorial landscape.<sup>158</sup> It follows therefore that state-mandated memory, that is semi-official, is just as significant for the processes of establishing historical narratives on a societal level if not more so. I will therefore be working with a definition of state-mandated which incorporates both official and semi-official representations. This includes all instances of historiographical and memorial work funded, authorised or otherwise mandated by the state and its related institutions. Although opposition in general has been a frequent aspect of narratives surrounding the GDR since German unification in 1990, insufficient scholarly or public attention has been paid to the communist-orientation of a great part of this opposition. The parameters for state-mandated discourse are clearly indicated in government documents. The *Fortschreibung der Gedenkstättenkonzeption* of 2008, for example – an updated version of the federal memorial concept – locates opposition within the context of *resistance*.<sup>159</sup> The Enquete Commissions *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur* (1992–1994) and *Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozess der deutschen Einheit* (1995–1998) speak of a

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>158</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Books* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2005), p. 161; Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (New York: Monthly Review, 2001), pp. 124–125.

<sup>159</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Unterrichtung durch den Beauftragten der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien Fortschreibung der Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes Verantwortung wahrnehmen, Aufarbeitung verstärken, Gedenken vertiefen* (2008).

<<https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/72488/414660/5c88e4e4ecb3ac4bf259c90d5cc54f05/2008-06-18-fortschreibung-gedenkstaettenkonzeption-barrierefrei-data.pdf?download=1>> [accessed 26 November 2018].

popular rejection of socialism.<sup>160</sup> The founding purpose of the state-mandated *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* is ‘die Erinnerung an das geschehene Unrecht und die Opfer wachzuhalten sowie den antitotalitären Konsens in der Gesellschaft, die Demokratie und die innere Einheit Deutschlands zu fördern und zu festigen’.<sup>161</sup> This politically-charged institution specified the pairing of opposition and resistance as a funding priority as recently as 2012-2013,<sup>162</sup> sponsoring hundreds of events, exhibitions and publications that promoted related narratives. An important aspect of this research is to highlight such attempts to politicise remembrance of the GDR with concepts such as a popular rejection of socialism and to discuss the important role such narratives play in shaping contemporary cultural and political perspectives.

## Sources

The research aims to deconstruct official representation of the GDR opposition by examining state-mandated publications and exhibitions and critically evaluating them in light of contemporary primary sources and specific contexts. This will include close textual analysis of primary sources alongside archival research and analysis of past and present museal exhibitions as well as publications emanating from a variety of state-mandated and funded institutions.

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<sup>160</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Bericht der Enquete-Kommission ‘Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland’* (1994) <<http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/12/078/1207820.pdf>>; Deutscher Bundestag, *Schlußbericht der Enquete-Kommission ‘Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit’* (1998) <<http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/13/110/1311000.pdf>> The *Enquete Commissions* are special parliamentary enquiries convened, in these instances, to define the GDR and deal with its legacy.

<sup>161</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Gesetz über die Errichtung einer Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (1998) <<http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/headline-1081.html>> [accessed 16 December 2018].

<sup>162</sup> Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, *Förderschwerpunkt 2012-2013 Opposition und Widerstand in SBZ und DDR* (2011) <<http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/pdf-2011/opposition.pdf>> [accessed 15 November 2018].

The archives consulted include:

- The *Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde*. I utilise the protocols of SED and GDR government meetings, official correspondence and reports pertaining to the named figures, groupings and events and their interactions with the SED and government of the GDR which are contained in the SAPMO collection.
- The Archive of the *Behörde des Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR* (BStU) holds the files of the former Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS). Extensive holdings pertaining to Paul Merker, Wolf Biermann and a range of 1980s oppositionals as well as other relevant resources have been consulted as part of this research.

The state-mandated organisations and institutions of memory subjected to analysis include:

- The *Deutscher Bundestag*'s two Enquete Commissions: 'Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland' (1994) and 'Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit' (1998a). These parliamentary commissions of enquiry were set up to analyse the GDR dictatorship and to come to terms (*Aufarbeitung*) with its legacy. Many commentators have interpreted the commissions as pursuing a political agenda, such as countering an alleged revisionism on the part of the SED successor party, the PDS, and aiming towards a de-legitimisation of the GDR.<sup>163</sup>
- The *Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen*: Since 2000, the former Stasi remand prison in Berlin has been a publicly funded memorial, tasked with documenting and remembering the Stasi as well as stimulating an 'Auseinandersetzung mit den Formen und Folgen politischer Verfolgung und Unterdrückung in der kommunistischen

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<sup>163</sup> Beattie, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries into East Germany*, p. 11; Carola S. Rudnick, *Die andere Hälfte der Erinnerung: Die DDR in der deutschen Geschichtspolitik nach 1989* (Bielefeld: transcript verlag, 2011), p.56; Sara Jones, *The Media of Testimony: Remembering the East German Stasi in the Berlin Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 10.

Diktatur'.<sup>164</sup> Up until the year 2000 the site was the subject of disputes regarding funding and differing concepts, primarily from victim groups, of how best to remember those affected by the MfS.<sup>165</sup> However, under the tenure of Hubertus Knabe who took over as director in 2000, and was dismissed following allegations of a culture of misogyny within the memorial's leadership in 2018, the memorial concept has been largely aligned with the concerns of anti-communist and victims' representation groups, presenting a highly politicised and undifferentiated view of the GDR.<sup>166</sup>

- *Die Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* was created by the *Deutscher Bundestag* in 1998 on the recommendation of the second Enquete Commission in order to establish an institution mandated to promote and support public memory of the GDR. In many respects, it can be seen as the primary legally mandated interpreter of GDR for public consumption. It considers its mission to be 'die umfassende Aufarbeitung der Ursachen, Geschichte und Folgen der Diktatur in SBZ und DDR zu befördern, den Prozess der Deutschen Einheit zu begleiten und an der Aufarbeitung von Diktaturen im internationalen Maßstab mitzuwirken'.<sup>167</sup> It does so by funding and promoting the work of third parties, including exhibitions, events and publications as well as organising all of the above under its own banner as well. The work of the Bundesstiftung can certainly be interpreted as de-legitimising the GDR and has sharpened focus on opposition and resistance since its inception.<sup>168</sup>
- The *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (BpB) is a state body which promotes public political education; it was first established in 1952 as the *Bundeszentrale für*

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<sup>164</sup> Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen. *Gesetz über die Errichtung der Stiftung 'Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen'* (2000) <<https://www.stiftung-hsh.de/assets/Uploads/2018-08-02-Stiftungsgesetz.pdf>> [15 November 2018].

<sup>165</sup> Rudnick, pp. 327–329

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 330–331.

<sup>167</sup> Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, *Die Stiftung: Erinnerung als Auftrag*. (2015) <<http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/die-stiftung-1074.html>> [accessed 15 November 2018].

<sup>168</sup> Rudnick, p. 81

*Heimatdienst* at the height of the Cold War. Alongside traditional print publications, the BpB maintains dossiers of online resources relating to certain subjects considered important for the political education<sup>169</sup> of the German population. Its contemporary stated mission is ‘die Entwicklung eines sich auf Demokratie, Toleranz und Pluralismus gründenden politischen Bewusstseins zu fördern’.<sup>170</sup> However, according to some accounts the BpB promotes anti-communism.<sup>171</sup>

- The *Amadeu Antonio Stiftung* (AAS) is a technically non-governmental organisation although it began life between 1998 to 2002 under the auspices of the state-funded *Forschungsgruppe Modellprojekte e.V.*<sup>172</sup> The AAS understands its mission as being to support ‘Engagement für Zivilgesellschaft und demokratische Kultur’ with a specific reference to combating right wing extremism, particularly in the territory of the former GDR: ‘Die Amadeu Antonio Stiftung reagiert auf eine rechtsextreme Alltagskultur, die sich vor allem in den neuen Bundesländern verankert hat.’<sup>173</sup> Although it is an independent *Stiftung*, the AAS has received funding to produce materials, notably on the subject of antisemitism and the GDR, from the federal level of government as well as from state-mandated institutions such as the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Interestingly, they insist on the translation of their title/remit as being involved in ‘civic education’.

<sup>170</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Leitbild der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (2003) <<http://www.bpb.de/die-bpb/51248/leitbild-der-bpb>> [accessed 14 December 2018].

<sup>171</sup> Erhard Meuler, ‘Mit Massenwirkung’ Antikommunismus als Erziehungsziel: Aus der Geschichte der Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, *Die junge Welt*, 27 May 2013; Gudrun Hentges, *Staat und politische Bildung: Von der ‘Zentrale für Heimatdienst’ zur ‘Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung’* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013).

<sup>172</sup> Demokratie Zentrum Baden Württemberg, *Modellprojekte* (2018) <<https://demokratiezentrum-bw.de/demokratiezentrum/modellprojekte/>> [accessed 16 December 2018]. ‘Das Demokratiezentrum Baden-Württemberg wird gefördert durch das Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend im Rahmen des Bundesprogramms ‘Demokratie leben!’ und durch das Ministerium für Soziales und Integration aus Mitteln des Landes Baden-Württemberg.’

<sup>173</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, *Was wir tun* (2018) <<https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wir-ueber-uns/was-wir-tun/>> [accessed 16 December 2018].

<sup>174</sup> For example: Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, ‘Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben!’ *Antisemitismus in der DDR* (2010) <<https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/die-stiftung-aktiv/themen/gegen-as/was-tut-die-stiftung/as-ddr/>> [accessed 16 December 2018]. The AAS received some 49,990 EURO for this in 2010 and a further 22,200 for an English wandering exhibition version. See: Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung, *Tätigkeitsbericht Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur 2010 Anhang* (2010) <[https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/pdf-2011/Taetigkeitsbericht\\_2010\\_Anhang.pdf](https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/pdf-2011/Taetigkeitsbericht_2010_Anhang.pdf)> [accessed 16 December 2018] p.125; Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung, *Tätigkeitsbericht Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur 2011 Anhang* (2012) <[https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/2012-pdf-publikationen/TB\\_2011\\_Anhang.pdf](https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/2012-pdf-publikationen/TB_2011_Anhang.pdf)> [accessed 16 December 2018] p. 166.



## Structure of thesis

The main body of the thesis is structured into three empirical case studies which interrogate the state-mandated representations of the individual subject matters since 1990. Memorial representations emanating from within or otherwise supported by official institutions are read closely and compared with primary and secondary sources in order to draw out points of conflict and to analyse the interpretive approaches given precedence in memory mandated by the state. The results of this analysis are then examined to draw out potential conclusions regarding the ideological framework evident therein. The subjects of each of the three studies have been carefully selected due to their representative quality of what appear to be significant aspects of the ideology of remembering the GDR.

The first case study focuses on the former Politbüro member Paul Merker who takes up a key position in memory of inner-SED opposition in the GDR and frequently appears in narratives concerning the early GDR. Merker's role in memory is particularly rich for a discussion of ideology as, thanks to his position in the debate about the restitution of Jewish victims of the Holocaust among other things, his case touches on the rubrics of antisemitism/anti-Zionism and antifascism which go to the heart of German national legitimation and *Sinnstiftung*. This presents the opportunity for a wide-ranging discussion of the nexus of opposition, *Aufarbeitung* of the German past and how it ties into contemporary discourses of power and legitimation in the FRG.

The second case study looks at the *Liedermacher* and most famous GDR dissident Wolf Biermann. The story of Biermann's time in the GDR up to his exile in 1976 as well as his contributions to political debate and memory discourse surrounding the GDR after and up

to the present day offer a staggeringly rich seam of materials. No other figure better typifies the archetype of the left-wing oppositional thinker and intellectual often subsumed under the heading of ‘dissident’. The trope of ‘true’ communist dissidents has been an integral part of state-mandated representations of opposition in the GDR and is interrogated here by way of Biermann’s example in order to draw out the multi-faceted role ascribed to this brand of dissident communism within representations of the GDR and the political and ideological implications of this exceptional and overt inclusion of communism within portrayals of the GDR’s opposition.

The third case study looks at ‘the’ now canonised GDR opposition of the 1980s. In particular the well-established cultural trope of the ‘peaceful revolution’ and its antecedents in the peace, environmental, women’s movement and other oppositional groups of the late 1980s. While these groups are often portrayed as the agents of state socialism’s demise, such discourse lacks nuance and does not do justice to the complex positions taken by these intellectuals towards the GDR and excludes their often inveterate criticism of capitalism, liberal democracy and the Federal Republic, the state which now seeks to canonise them. The chapter closely analyses portrayals of canonical groupings and events in order to draw out the contradictions between how they have been portrayed post-unification and how they acted prior to this, including accounts from actors themselves. A particularly intriguing aspect of this is the role of internal SED reformers within the late stage of the GDR; their interfaces with various oppositional groupings and events presents a distinct challenge to approaches which highlight a binary of totalitarian GDR dictatorship and the oppositional actors of the ‘peaceful revolution’.

The discussion of perhaps lesser known communist oppositional currents, such as the inner party reformists and deconstruction of memorial representations of the canonical

opposition is a timely antidote to the orthodox accounts promoted in state-mandated discourse that tend to disproportionately foreground the anti-communist and nationalist sentiment in portrayals of the opposition. This thesis aims, in contrast, to highlight heterodox interpretations of the GDR and the various oppositions by critically contrasting the representation of these currents in academic and state-mandated portrayals with primary sources, the most up-to-date theoretical models and in-depth contextualisation. The need to challenge accepted wisdom appears to be of seminal importance given a memory landscape which as recently as 2014 over 59% of eastern Germans described as not representing the GDR as it was.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Infratest dimap, *Deutsche Teilung und Friedliche Revolution Eine Studie im Auftrag der Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (2014) <<https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/2014-pdf/2014-10-02-umfragebundesstiftungaufarbeitung-2-graf.pdf>> [accessed 15 December 2018].



# Paul Merker – ‘ein Moment kommunistischer Ungleichzeitigkeit’?

## Introduction

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the aim of this first thematic chapter is to look at how early communist-oriented opposition in the GDR is memorialised through the prism of Paul Merker and the related events of the early 1950s. Why Merker? As seen in the previous chapter there are many communist figures who could be said to have acted in an oppositional manner during the early period of the GDR: the SED politician Anton Ackermann who proposed a ‘German path to socialism’ and advocated a more liberal vision of parliamentary democracy during the initial *Aufbau* period;<sup>1</sup> the philosopher and publisher Wolfgang Harich who also proposed a ‘German path to socialism’ in the mid-1950s;<sup>2</sup> and Rudolf Herrnstadt and Wilhelm Zaisser who actually managed to hold a vote to unseat Ulbricht in the Politbüro, but eventually lost out themselves.<sup>3</sup> However, one name stands out from the rest – Paul Merker.

In October 1994, American historian Jeffrey Herf claimed to have uncovered ‘eines der beschämendsten Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte’ in the archives of the former MfS. Referring to the expulsion and subsequent arrest and trial of Paul Merker, a member of the Politbüro, in the early 1950s. Herf’s grounds for sensation lay in his claim that Merker was the only senior politician to oppose the SED’s ‘tradition’ of ignoring antisemitism and the ‘Jewish catastrophe’ and for standing up for the Jewish victims of fascism. Furthermore, Herf

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<sup>1</sup> Grieder, *The East German Leadership 1946-1973*.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, pp. 34–62.

<sup>3</sup> Müller-Enbergs, *Der Fall Rudolf Herrnstadt Tauwetter Politik vor dem 17. Juni*.

suggests that this oppositional politics, or ‘Martyrdom’ as he terms it, is the reason why Merker was in fact prosecuted by the GDR.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein in 2010, Kai Posmik declared:

Paul Merker ist kein stromlinienförmiger Mitläufer. Kritische Worte sind für den in Radebeul geboren Kommunisten kein Tabu, trotz seiner Mitgliedschaft im SED-Politbüro. Und vor allem setzt er sich für die Juden ein. Für einen Antifaschisten, der während der NS-Zeit in einem französischen Internierungslager gesessen hat, sollte das nach Auschwitz selbstverständlich sein. Beinah jedoch hätte er diesen Einsatz mit seinem Leben bezahlt.<sup>5</sup>

Annette Kahane, head of the state-mandated *Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*, spoke in 2008 of the systematic antisemitic politics in the GDR of which the Merker affair was highlighted as the most prominent example.<sup>6</sup> It would appear that since the 1990s a particular narrative portraying Merker as the victim of an antisemitically motivated purge due to his opposition in matters related to ‘the Jewish question’<sup>7</sup> has become established within German discourse.

If the tenor of such portrayals is indeed accurate, it would mean that the self-proclaimed anti-fascist German state had officially persecuted a fellow communist on the grounds of philosemitism and would therefore open up the communist SED to allegations of antisemitism. An investigation into what I shall refer to as the ‘Merker affair’ therefore presents a particularly rich opportunity to delve into the complicated nexus of anti-fascism, antisemitism, opposition and the roles they currently play in the politics of memory in the Federal Republic.

The chapter is divided into thematic sections which seek to outline the contours of the Merker affair and trace the genealogy of dominant historiographical narratives in order to

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<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Herf, ‘Der Geheimprozeß’, *Die Zeit*, Dossier 41, 7 October 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Kai Posmik, ‘Die Verfolgung geht weiter’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 21 August 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Nora Goldenbogen and Annette Kahane, ‘War die DDR ein antisemitischer Staat?’, *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 13 November 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Herf, ‘East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of Paul Merker’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29. 4 (1994), 627–661.

interrogate and contextualise the key *topoi* and contrast with some more heterodox interpretations of the primary sources. An integral aspect is the thematisation of representations of Merker in state-mandated memorial practice which offers unique insight into the dynamics of contemporary discourse on the subject.

Unlike some of the more prominent dissidents of the GDR, Merker remains an enigmatic figure. Despite the well-established wisdom that the devil is in the detail, discourse surrounding the eponymous affair is often sparing with regard to the actual person and events. The chapter therefore seeks to introduce as much detail as possible and to contextualise the Merker affair and its key components as constructed in historiography and state-mandated memory. It first looks at Merker in the period up to his arrest, before taking an excursion into the inextricably linked Noel Field affair. It then discusses Merker's arrest, trial and subsequent release through various thematic apertures. These can be roughly divided into two primary and frequently interrelated prisms: the often contended show trial thesis and the theme of antisemitism. In doing so, the different interpretative models and approaches are drawn out, interrogated and contrasted with my own reading of primary sources from the SAPMO and BStU archival collections. The chapter concludes with a dissection of questions surrounding memory, ideology and national legitimisation in the FRG raised by this case study.

### Merker Before the Fall

In many respects, Paul Merker had a fairly ordinary proletarian communist biography. Born in 1894 to a working-class family in Oberlößnitz and by profession a waiter, he came to the trade union movement before serving in the infantry for the duration of the First World War. He joined the KPD in December 1920 after a brief stint in the USPD and following a number

of minor trade union and KPD roles he was elected to the Central Committee of the KPD and subsequently its Politbüro, serving from 1927 to 1930.<sup>8</sup> However, it was during this period that he began to show signs of being on the far left of the party which culminated in his authoring of an article describing rank and file SPD members as ‘kleine Zörgiebels’.<sup>9</sup> This divisive and sectarian language stood in stark contrast to the KPD’s policy at the time of an *Einheitsfront von Unten* which sought to co-operate with ordinary SPD members and led to an official reprimand and the removal of Merker from his position as secretary for union affairs in April 1930. This ultra left positioning would be a common reference point for Merker’s propensity towards opposition throughout the investigation following his arrest.<sup>10</sup> While we would hardly consider such a thing as criminal today, for Marxist Leninists at the time the lack of adherence to democratic centralism during such a critical period of revolutionary struggle was seen as a grave error and as reflecting badly on Merker’s character; it was raised by friend and foe alike during interviews conducted by the MfS.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this and following initial underground illegal activity in fascist Germany, Merker was called to Moscow in 1935, participated in the VII. Congress of the Communist International and was re-elected to the Central Committee and Politbüro in 1939.<sup>12</sup> He then emigrated to France, was interned in the Le Vernet and Les Milles camps between 1940-42 before eventually escaping to Mexico with the help of a French agent and Noel Field. This would be the first of several encounters with Field, which would become an albatross around Merker’s neck as is discussed in more detail below. Once in Mexico he became the leader of

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<sup>8</sup> Hermann Weber, ‘Merker, Paul’, *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, ed. by Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 26 vols (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1971–2016), xvii (1994), pp. 156–157.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Zörgiebel was the SPD police chief of Berlin who bore responsibility in large part for the ‘Blutmai’ of 1929 in which 32 mainly KPD supporters were killed. See Thomas Kurz, ‘Blutmai’. *Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten im Brennpunkt der Berliner Ereignisse von 1929* (Berlin: J.H.W. Dietz Nachfl., 1988).

<sup>10</sup> For instance in a report to the Central Committee: Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/ 40670, vol 3, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU Nr. 192/56 vol 1 and MfS AU Nr. 192/56 vol 2. Not to mention that such ultra-left sentiment is often seen as one of the factors which enabled the fascists to come to power. See, Heinrich August Winkler, *Der Schein der Normalität: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1924–1930* (Berlin/Bonn: Verlag J.H.W Dietz Nachf., 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Weber, ‘Merker, Paul’, p. 156.



the KPD-led Latin American section of the Bewegung Freies Deutschland and was primarily employed in publishing exile literature, including the influential exile journal *Alemania Libre* (*Freies Deutschland*), which quite understandably given the large number of Jewish German refugees<sup>13</sup> thematised the suffering of European Jews under fascism and other topics such as Zionism.<sup>14</sup>

On his return to the Soviet Zone of Occupation in July 1946, he was elected to the *Partei Vorstand* of the newly formed SED and its highest organ the *Zentralsekretariat*. Merker was then duly elected to the first SED Politbüro in 1949 and became *Staatssekretär* in the *Ministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft*. In 1950, in the context of the Noel Field affair and Rajk trials in Hungary,<sup>15</sup> Merker and other associates of Field were publicly removed from all posts and expelled from the party in no uncertain terms as shown in the Central Committee's communique carried in *Neues Deutschland*:

Wegen Verbindung mit dem Agenten der amerikanischen Spionage Noel H. Field und umfangreicher Hilfe für den Klassenfeind werden Paul Merker, Leo Bauer, Bruno Goldhammer, Willy Kreikemeyer, Lex Ende und Maria Weiterer aus der Partei ausgeschlossen.<sup>16</sup>

However, Merker was not at this point accused of having committed any concrete crimes and the question of whether he had knowledge of Field's alleged espionage is left unclarified. This is attested by conflicting statements, such as that referring to Merker's role in a 'Netz bewußt oder unbewußter Verbindungsleute' allegedly established by Anglo-American intelligence services, and more accusatory rhetoric:

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<sup>13</sup> Among the many Jewish Germans involved in *Freies Deutschland* were Anna Seghers, Otto Katz who operated under the pseudonym of Andre Simone, Alexander Abusch, Erich Jungmann, Johann Schmidt, Rudolf Feistmann to name but a few.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Kießling, *Alemania Libre in Mexiko. Band 1: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des antifaschistischen Exils (1941-1946)* (Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1974).

<sup>15</sup> László Rajk was a senior Hungarian communist, in 1949 he and seven other defendants were implicated in the Noel Field affair, tried on charges of agency for imperial powers and executed.

<sup>16</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, 'Das ZK der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands zur Verbindung von Funktionären der SED mit amerikanischen Agenten', *Neues Deutschland*, 1 September 1950.

Es ist einfach nicht zu glauben, daß alle diejenigen, die mit Field in Verbindung standen, noch bis zum Jahre 1949 der Meinung waren, daß sie es mit einem amerikanischen Wohltäter der Menschen und Freund der Arbeiterklasse zu tun hatten.<sup>17</sup>

As can be seen from the above, the expulsion was framed primarily as a precautionary measure, and indeed tale, which should be understood within the context of the SED's ordained drive for vigilance (*Wachsamkeit*) during the transition to the *Partei des neuen Typus*.<sup>18</sup> The background of the burgeoning Cold War had created a situation of mutual suspicion with ongoing anti-communist campaigns in the West exemplified by US Senator Joseph McCarthy's House investigations into suspected communist sympathisers and more or less analogous investigations of pro-western sympathisers in the socialist states of Eastern Europe performed by Party Control Commissions.

#### Excursus: Noel Field

At this point it is prudent to discuss the figure of Noel Field in more detail. The genesis of the Merker affair like all the trials and related events of the period lies in the figure of Noel Field and the allegations that he had established a network of agents on behalf of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA. Field had started his career in the US State Department before heading to Geneva during the Second World War to head up the Unitarian Service Committee's aid operations while simultaneously working covertly for

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> The communique in fact ends with a six point plan on how this vigilance can be achieved and an admonishment for party members to practice self-criticism and honesty with the party at all times, giving the article a distinctly pedagogical if somewhat condescending feel.

the OSS under Allan Dulles.<sup>19</sup> However, during his time at the State Department he had become a convinced communist and had been recruited by the Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) to act as a double agent. One commentator sums up his time in Europe thus: 'Die kommunistischen Emigranten sahen Noel bald als den Mann an, der ihnen Zugang zu den Gabentischen des amerikanischen Weihnachtsmannes öffnete.'<sup>20</sup>

The question as to how a seemingly loyal communist who had supported many communist refugees during the dark times of the War could become the central figure overshadowing a series of Eastern European campaigns and trials is particularly interesting. Made even more so by the fact that this question is rarely engaged with within the pertinent literature. It is almost universally attested that Field was used as a patsy by Stalin in order to rid himself of rivals in allied communist parties.

George Hermann Hodos, an erstwhile defendant in the Rajk trials turned belletrist, presents a typical and influential example of this narrative which suggests Field took up an entirely fictional role in the 'Stalinist showtrials' of the early Eastern Bloc:

It was in Budapest that the legend of Noel Field was first created – the master spy from the United States, who, during the war, recruited communists in exile for the US espionage network and who ended up serving as liaison between the imperialists and Tito in order to undermine the east European communist parties. The fiction of Noel Field resulted in death and imprisonment for hundreds of communists in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. Additional thousands of people fell victim to the charge of being friends, acquaintances, or fellow workers with people who knew Field. The Field fiction provided the initial impetus for the

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<sup>19</sup> The USC was a religious charitable organisation whose purpose was to aid Unitarians and other needy refugees during the war. Like many such networks it was well suited to the purposes of intelligence gatherers, not least the American OSS.

<sup>20</sup> Flora Lewis in Wolfgang Kießling, *Partner im 'Narrenparadies' Der Freundeskreis um Noel Field und Paul Merker*, (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1994), p. 118. Kießling however disputes whether Field supported communists because he was working as an agent on behalf of the Soviets, suggesting it was merely out of sympathy.

Prague show trials and its ominous shadows spread over those in Warsaw and East Berlin. The name of Field was used when an attempt was made to put the noose around the neck of Gomulka and in preparing the gallows for the leading East German communists Paul Merker and Franz Dahlem.<sup>21</sup>

It is evident from Hodos' account that he firmly believes the Field affair was entirely manipulated. The question as to why is answered in the lacunar discourse – the culturally accepted trope of *Stalinism*. The logic of Machiavellian totalitarian need for control is seemingly accepted without need for further explanation or indeed any documentary evidence. In a two-volume edition dedicated to the *Fall Noel Field* – supported by the state-mandated *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* (BA) – Bernd Rainer-Barth and Werner Schweizer provide some elucidation as to why Stalin would be motivated to concoct a fake spy ring:

Stalin brauchte die Schauprozesse, um seine durch Titos Revolte unsicher gewordene Einflußzone in ein eingeschüchtertes, gefügiges Satellitenreich zu verwandeln. Der amerikanische Kommunist Noel Field bot ihm ein ideales Instrument dazu. Er paßte genau in die Rolle eines amerikanischen Spitzenspions, der als Gegenleistung für seine Hilfe während des Krieges ungarische, deutsche, tschechische, polnische kommunistische Emigranten, die in ihren Ländern jetzt hohe Partei- und Staatsämter ausübten, in seinem Agentennetz angeworben hätte. Er könnte ja tatsächlich ein Spion gewesen sein, und wenn nicht, so kann er zu einem unschätzbar nützlichen Erfolterter werden, den von ihm aus führen Fäden überall hin in Ostmitteleuropa.<sup>22</sup>

Here, as in other examples,<sup>23</sup> the narrative is consistently pre-conceived as an episode of Stalinist skullduggery without any need to provide concrete evidence as to why or especially

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<sup>21</sup> George H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948–1954* (New York: Praeger, 1988), p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Bernd Rainer-Barth and Werner Schweizer, *Der Fall Noel Field Schlüsselfigur der Schauprozesse in Osteuropa* (Berlin: Basisdruck, 2005). This work and the accompanying documentary film by Thomas Grimm was financed by the Brandenburger Landeszentrale für politische Bildung and Die Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung which means it can be described as state-mandated.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance: Karel Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), pp. 19–23; Kevin McDermott, *Communist Czechoslovakia 1945–1989 A Political and Social History* (London: Palgrave, 2015), p. 66; Jan Osers, 'Die Spezifika des Slansky-Prozesses in der CSR im Vergleich mit den übrigen

how Noel Field came to be the focal point, despite the fact that, as Maria Schmidt correctly identifies there has not yet been a ‘serious scholarly account’ of the Field affair.<sup>24</sup> Instead, accounts of exactly how Field came to be targeted tend to fudge the question. A good example of this is the aforementioned Rainer-Barth and Schweizer’s two volume collection of primary source documents relating to the Field case. Rainer-Barth advances the theory that Rákosi, the Hungarian General Secretary, was placed under pressure by Stalin to invent a ‘Titoist’ plot in order to create a show trial, he provides no definitive evidence from the Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, German or Russian archives for this. The singular source that could be construed as evidencing a conspiracy is a one-line telegram from Rákosi to the Czechoslovakian Minister President Klement Gottwald: ‘An Genossen Gottwald. Bitte, entsprechen Sie unserem Ersuchen und verhaften Sie Field, der soeben in Prag eingetroffen ist.’<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, Rainer-Barth concedes Gottwald had refused previous requests from Rakosi to arrest Field and was not convinced of his guilt.<sup>26</sup> While this is not conclusive in any direction, it could be interpreted as casting some doubt on claims of a concerted conspiracy within the upper echelons of international communism. Indeed, the oft-repeated claim that Field was tricked into returning to Czechoslovakia under a pretence, which is a major pillar of the *invented* show trial theory is also dismissed by Barth.<sup>27</sup> This means that the most extensive primary source edition concerning the Noel Field affair not only does *not* provide the definitive evidence one would expect for the show trial narrative, it actually undermines it in part.

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Schauprozessen in Osteuropa’, in *Kommunisten verfolgen Kommunisten*, ed. by Hermann Weber (Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1993), pp. 459–469.

<sup>24</sup> Maria Schmidt, ‘Noel Field—The American Communist at the Center of Stalin’s East European Purge: From the Hungarian Archives’, *American Communist History*, 3.2 (2004), 215–245.

<sup>25</sup> Rainer-Barth and Schweizer, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Despite this lack of primary source evidence, the dominant narrative in western discourse is that Field was a scapegoat from the beginning. However, a conflicting narrative exists. The testimony of one intimate survivor of the Field affair, Erica Glaser-Wallach. Field's adopted daughter who had also worked for the USC during the war was arrested on suspicion of espionage while searching for Noel following his arrest. In later life she would claim that Field was caught up in an American plot. According to Glaser-Wallach, a Polish agent named Swiatlo, who was indeed an American asset defecting in December 1953, spread the allegation that Field was secretly a double agent working for Allen Dulles, the OSS head of covert operations in Europe.<sup>28</sup> According to this account the motivation for Dulles was twofold, firstly to throw fuel on the fire of the spy hysteria gripping both east and west at this time, sowing discord and distrust in the socialist camp where many leading functionaries had ties to Field due to his USC work, including Merker, and secondly, to clear both his and his brother, John Foster Dulles', names. Field had been denounced as a Soviet spy in front of the House Unamerican Activities Committee in 1948 and both Dulles brothers had been implicated due to collaboration with Field against the German fascists.

Glaser's version of events is supported by Steven Stewart's account which in turn is based on interviews with Josef Swiatlo himself.<sup>29</sup> This is treated with silence within the majority of academic and state-mandated accounts. A notable exception is Wilfriede Otto's which under the heading 'Dulles oder Stalins Hand' seeks to demonstrate that the Dulles narrative is unlikely:

Ogleich Steven in seiner Publikation nachprüfbar Vorgänge nennt, bleiben wichtige Aussagen nur Vermutungen und ohne Beleg.<sup>30</sup> Manche Angaben sind direkt falsch. Wenig glaubhaft erscheint, daß der amerikanische Geheimdienst eine solche Aktion so detailliert mit einem ausländischen Agenten absprach. Sicher mischte der amerikanische Geheimdienst mit.

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<sup>28</sup> James Srodes, *Allen Dulles Master of Spies* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 1999), pp. 414–415.

<sup>29</sup> Stewart Steven, *Operation Splinter Factor* (New York: J. P. Lipincott, 1974).

<sup>30</sup> This description is every bit as applicable to Otto's own version of events.

Das Hochspielen von Noel Field als US-Agenten in der überhitzten Atmosphäre des Kalten Krieges förderte vermutlich die Aktivitäten des Stalinschen Sicherheitsdienstes. Es kann aber nicht als ursächlicher Ausgangspunkt für die Verbrechen gegen kommunistische Führungen bis Mitte der fünfziger Jahre angesehen werden. Weltrevolutionär verklärt fungierten hinter den Kulissen stalinistische Partei- und Herrschaftsinteressen, die regierende Eliten der Stalin-Komintern in den Ostblockstaaten selbständig und im Geiste des Imperators verfochten.<sup>31</sup>

Somewhat unconvincingly, Otto does not specify which aspects are in her view accurate and which not. The reader is left with the impression that one should simply take Otto's word for it. Equally, she does not consider Glaser-Wallach's testimony which supports Steven's account. Her own subsequent analysis relies almost exclusively on interpretation of SED documents which discuss various aspects of the Field and Merker investigations, however, none demonstrate 'Stalins Hand' at play.<sup>32</sup> Otto's singular source which could be construed as evidence stems from an interview she performed with Bruno Haid in the early 1990s, according to which Hermann Matern the head of the ZPKK<sup>33</sup> said 'Der General drückt in der Field-Sache auf mich'.<sup>34</sup> This entirely de-contextualised quote is interpreted by Otto as definitively demonstrating the Stalinist conspiracy thesis, although it is in no way incommensurate with Steven's proposed dialectic of American manipulation and Soviet hyper-vigilance.

My purpose here is not to claim historical truth for any particular version, but to highlight that the predominant narratives surrounding Field and others are often not as proven or uncontested as they seem in some literature. Furthermore, that the narratives often exhibit a stark anti-Stalinist bias which seems to require no primary source evidence. Even if one

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<sup>31</sup> Wilfriede Otto, 'Visionen zwischen Hoffnung und Täuschung', in *Visionen. Repression und Opposition in der SED 1949-1989*, ed. by Thomas Klein, Wilfriede Otto and Peter Grieder (Frankfurt Oder: Editionen, 1997), pp. 137-514 (p. 187).

<sup>32</sup> Otto, 'Visionen zwischen Hoffnung und Täuschung', p. 186.

<sup>33</sup> Zentrale Parteikontrollkommission. The ZPKK was established in 1948 with the purpose of encouraging party unity and the enactment of democratic centralism. Equally, it served as the communist corollary to the McCarthy House Unamerican Activities Committee investigating what it deemed as weak links, such as former oppositionals from the Weimar era or those who had emigrated to the West during the fascist era.

<sup>34</sup> Otto, 'Visionen zwischen Hoffnung und Täuschung', p. 194.

accepts that adherence to party discipline and lack of acceptance of rival factions were distorted to a stark degree during the Stalin era, with often costly results for many individuals, it does not follow that the burden of documentary evidence in specific cases can simply be set aside. It is these moments of received wisdom or preconceived schema which allow us insight into the ideological framework of any given period. This is particularly relevant to the Merker Affair as if one accepts the narrative that Noel Field was a patsy, then Merker becomes a patsy by association. Equally, if the Field affair is more complicated, perhaps the story of Merker is in need of another look.

### Merker: A German Rajk? The Show Trial Thesis

Returning to the Merker Affair, following his banishment from party life in early 1950, Merker proceeded to work in his previous professional field as the head of a HO *Gaststätte* in Brandenburg and would write to his old friend and President of the GDR Wilhelm Pieck to protest his innocence in the Field affair.<sup>35</sup> Pieck had actually sought to defend Merker during the ZK meeting which decided on the aforementioned *Erklärung* published in *Neues Deutschland*.<sup>36</sup> Much as in the case of Field, historians are fairly unanimous that the SED (or the MfS) intended to instigate a show trial with Merker as the main defendant in the manner of the Hungarian Rajk trial and that planning was well underway by 1950.<sup>37</sup> However, Merker would not be arrested until the winter of 1952 and when eventually put on trial in 1955, proceedings would take place behind closed doors and no statements would be made to

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<sup>35</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol 1. Letter to Wilhelm Pieck, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Berlin, Federal Archive, SAPMO, DY 30/40612, '2. Tagung des Zentralkomitees am 24. August 1950'.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Hermann Weber, 'Schauprozessvorbereitungen in der DDR' in *Terror Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936-1953*, ed. by Hermann Weber and Ulrich Mählert (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998), pp. 459-486 (p. 472); Jan Gerber, *Ein Prozeß in Prag* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2016), p. 66; Mario Keßler, *Die SED und die Juden – Zwischen Repression und Toleranz* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), p. 70.



the press. In short, it never actually came to a show trial of the Rajk variety or otherwise. Nevertheless, it is often held that preparations for such a trial existed. This next section seeks to outline and interrogate the show trial preparations paradigm with regards to Merker.

In 1963, Ulbricht would deny that there were plans for a show trial in the GDR, giving the following statement to the SED's VI Parteitag:

Man kann der Meinung sein: Die Folgen des Stalinischen Personenkultes haben sich in der DDR nicht so stark ausgewirkt, weil die sowjetischen Genossen, die damals als Vertreter der Besatzungsmacht hier waren, Leninisten waren. Außerdem begünstigte der Charakter unserer Partei als Einheitspartei [...] die Einhaltung der marxistisch-leninistischen Partei- und Staatsnormen. So konnten z.B. Agenten Berijas keinen Schaden bei uns anrichten, weil sie nicht in die DDR hereingelassen wurden, das war nicht sehr demokratisch gemacht, aber sie wurden nicht hereingelassen. Das genügt.<sup>38</sup>

In 2016, Jan Gerber could state – quite categorically – that Ulbricht's claim is entirely baseless.<sup>39</sup> He argues Merker was earmarked for just such a show trial and preparations had been underway from as early as 1950 and, he seeks to evidence this claim by citing Otto's analysis from 1991,<sup>40</sup> claiming she has 'proven'<sup>41</sup> the thesis, indicating the seminal influence her interpretation still enjoys in German academia. At this point, it is useful to trace the genesis of this interpretation.

It is noteworthy that the initial instance of this interpretation in pre-Wende West German historiography emanated from Carola Stern, who in a twist of historical irony was in fact an American spy during the period in question until she was betrayed and fled to the

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<sup>38</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, *Protokoll der Verhandlungen des VI. Parteitages der SED 15-21 Januar 1963* (Berlin: Dietz, 1963), p. 239.

<sup>39</sup> Gerber, p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> Wilfriede Otto, 'Zur Stalinistischen Politik der SED Anfang der fünfziger Jahre', in *Ich habe den Tod verdient. Schauprozesse und politische Verfolgung*, ed. by Wolfgang Maderthaler, Hans Schafranke and Berthold Unfried (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1991), pp. 129–137.

<sup>41</sup> 'Die ersten Pläne für ein großes Tribunal in der DDR wurden, wie Wilfriede Otto nachgewiesen hat, ... von sowjetischer Seite fallen gelassen.' Gerber, p. 65.

West in 1951.<sup>42</sup> Stern's account was published by the *Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft*, which has been described as the “‘Hausverlag’ des Gesamtdeutschen Ministeriums’ and was funded by the American CIA's cultural front *The Congress for Cultural Freedom*.<sup>43</sup> Despite its clearly engagé position, it has evidently had a seminal influence on narratives beyond the Cold War, including on the hugely influential ‘Nestor’ of GDR historiography, Hermann Weber.<sup>44</sup> However, whereas commentators during the Cold War were often condemned to speculation and intrigue, many believe that the opening of the GDR and Soviet archives has – or indeed still will – shed light on many of these questions. A mapping of the genealogy of the Merker show trial narrative in post-1990 discourse is therefore quite illuminating.

In September 1990, the aforementioned Otto penned an article for *Neues Deutschland* entitled ‘*Mielke wollte einen “Schulfall” inszenieren*’,<sup>45</sup> which posited that Merker may have been victim of a show trial orchestrated by the Soviets, but with the following caveat:

Derzeit läßt sich noch nicht die weitverbreitete Vermutung belegen, daß ähnlich wie in Ungarn, Bulgarien und der CSR auch in der DDR ein Schauprozeß geplant war, dessen Hauptfigur Franz Dahlem<sup>46</sup> sein sollte, und daß der Prozeß gegen Paul Merker hierfür als Vorspiel gedacht war.<sup>47</sup>

In the 1991 contribution cited by Gerber, the argument is that these trials were only halted by concerns on the part of the Soviets in the context of the Stalin Note and international diplomacy.<sup>48</sup> However, there is a distinct dearth of primary source material involved in this

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<sup>42</sup> See Carola Stern, *Porträt einer bolschewistischen Partei* (Cologne: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1957); Carola Stern, *Doppelleben – Autobiographie* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer und Witsch, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Hentges, p. 363. See also: Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> See Weber, ‘Schauprozeßvorbereitungen in der DDR’, p. 460.

<sup>45</sup> Wilfriede Otto, ‘Mielke wollte einen ‘Schulfall’ inszenieren’, *Neues Deutschland*, 22 September 1990.

<sup>46</sup> Franz Dahlem (1892-1981) was a member of the Politbüro until 1953 when he was expelled for connections to Noel Field and ‘pol. Blindheit gegenüber der Tätigkeit imp. Agenten u. wegen nichtparteimäßigen Verhaltens zu seinen Fehlern’. See: *Wer war wer in der DDR?*, ‘DAHLEM, FRANZ’ <<https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363%3B-1424.html?ID=517>> [accessed 2 January 2019]. Dahlem was not arrested or charged.

<sup>47</sup> Otto, ‘Mielke wollte einen ‘Schulfall’ inszenieren’.

<sup>48</sup> The Note called for a neutral unified Germany and would presumably, according to Otto and Gerber, have been less credible if the SED were seen to be securing their power. Otto, ‘Zur Stalinistischen Politik der SED Anfang der fünfziger Jahre’, p. 136.

hypothesis. Otto simply states that the specific case of Germany *in her view*<sup>49</sup> led the Soviets to reject a showtrial. The only ‘preparation’ Otto documents is the same statement cited in the newspaper article by Erich Mielke to the Politbüro that a ‘Schulfall’ may be necessary after the arrest of several agents of American imperialism three months before Merker’s name is even mentioned in connections with Field. Otto does not, as Gerber’s exegesis suggests, provide any documentary evidence of preparations and even states plainly that the Merker and Field problematic ‘erst vor wenigen Monaten recherchiert werden konnte’.<sup>50</sup>

On closer inspection, Otto’s early contributions reveal that the show trial narrative began as more of a suspicion than as the result of research. The question of discursive context at this time – during the tumultuous Wende period – is perhaps of relevance here. The late 1980s had been accompanied by a loosening of censorship in the GDR and by an eagerness of even previously loyal SED historians – such as Otto<sup>51</sup> who had been a longstanding researcher at the *Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus* – to delve into the past of socialism in a more frank and self-critical manner than ever before.<sup>52</sup> By 1989 at the latest, there was also a preoccupation with discovering the roots of the problems which brought about the end of state socialism, the main culprit identified at this time was *Stalinism*. Despite the so-called campaign of de-Stalinisation of the late 1950s up to the mid 1960s, it was commonly held that the alleged poison of Stalinism had never truly been eradicated and that this task now lay ahead. In addition to the impact of challenged and changing habitus<sup>53</sup> comes of course the question of self-preservation, which was also now firmly on the agenda. Within the next few

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Meines Erachtens’, *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 136.

<sup>51</sup> Another pioneer in studies concerning Paul Merker and Noel Field is Wolfgang Kießling who shares a similar biography to Otto.

<sup>52</sup> A good example of this is Wolfgang Kießling’s 1989 (pre-Wende) study of antifascist emigration to Mexico which openly admits the SED made mistakes in its handling of the Merker and Field affairs and was positively reviewed in *Neues Deutschland*. See: Wolfgang Kießling, *Brücken nach Mexiko* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1989) pp. 458–464.

<sup>53</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

years hundreds of academics would lose their jobs and many sought to distance themselves from the *ancien regime* by profiling themselves as chroniclers of previously taboo subjects.

This context should be borne in mind as many of these factors may well have translated into how the material on Merker is approached, particularly during the 1990s. In any case, the show trial narrative had been established as early as September 1990 before the archives were fully opened without providing convincing evidence of a show trial. It may have been plausible in the early stages of discovery following the opening of the archives to argue in this subjunctive manner, in the expectation that future research would provide the evidence; however, it is frankly misleading to suggest – as Gerber does as recently as 2016 – that such analysis is *proof* of a planned showtrial involving Merker.

Indeed, Hermann Weber writing in 1998 indicates that the evidence was not as forthcoming as many had hoped:

Nach der Öffnung der Archive von SED und MfS war zu hoffen, nun konkrete Unterlagen über diese Vorbereitungen zu finden. Doch auch heute, acht Jahre nach dem Zusammenbruch der SED-Diktatur und einige Jahre nach der teilweisen Öffnung der russischen Archive sind diese Planungen immer noch nur indirekt zu belegen. Aber die Rekonstruktion anhand der Akten ist nur die eine Seite. Unterlagen über die Einleitung eines Schauprozesses, z.B. Anweisungen für Anklageschriften, Personenlisten usw. fehlen, ob sie je (etwa in russischen Archiven) ans Tageslicht kommen, ist fraglich. Gerade auf diesem heiklen Gebiet ist manches wohl nicht schriftlich festgehalten oder gar vernichtet worden. Dennoch ist inzwischen kaum umstritten, daß ein deutscher “Rajk”- oder “Slansky”-Prozeß beabsichtigt war.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Weber, ‘Schauprozessvorbereitungen in der DDR’, p. 459.

Weber, however, goes on to argue that ‘blinde Aktengläubigkeit’ does not lead to the illumination of historical events. The historiographical process is of course more than the regurgitation of sources as if they were mere fish on a slab as E. H. Carr famously put it.<sup>55</sup> Interpretation thereof is paramount to constructing a historical narrative; however, Weber’s assertion is somewhat disingenuous as he is not merely affirming the banal truism that writing history is an inductive as well as creative process, but is essentially defending the state of affairs wherein a hypothesis had been reached prior to the opening of the files, the expected support for said hypothesis had not materialised but that the consensus of historians remains unchanged. One could argue that this approach is somewhat duplicitous given Weber’s own clearly contradictory attitude towards the files from 1991:

Die gegenwärtig zugänglichen – noch immer unvollständigen – Quellen beweisen jedoch inzwischen auch, daß Schritt für Schritt ein öffentliches Tribunal gegen führende Kommunisten (in diesem Sinne also ein stalinistischer Schauprozeß) vorbereitet wurde.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, Weber’s interpretation of certain sources in his 1998 exegesis is also somewhat problematic. Take for instance his claim that Rudolf Herrnstadt’s memoirs support the thesis that the conspiracy for a show trial involving Paul Merker and Gerhart Eisler<sup>57</sup> was being driven by the Soviets:

Rudolf Herrnstadt überlieferte, daß der damalige “Hohe Kommissar” der UdSSR in Ost-Berlin, Semjonow, im “Winter und Frühjahr 1952/53 in einer Psychose” war, weil die Vorbereitungen des deutschen Schauprozesses nicht genügend schnell vorankamen.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Pelican, 1976), p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> Hermann Weber, ‘Politische Säuberungen in der DDR’, in *‘Ich habe den Tod verdient’ Schauprozesse und politische Verfolgung*, ed. by Maderthaner, Schafranke and Unfried (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1991), pp. 113–128 (p. 123).

<sup>57</sup> Gerhart Eisler (1897–1968) brother of Hanns Eisler and Ruth Fischer. Senior KPD and SED functionary. Famously denounced in the McCarthyist House Unamerican Activities Committee proceedings before fleeing to the GDR.

<sup>58</sup> Weber, ‘Schauprozessvorbereitungen in der DDR’ p. 479.

In the passage from which Weber takes his interpretation, Herrnstadt's actual sentiment as regards such a Soviet-led conspiracy appears to be rather different:

Ich behaupte nicht, daß Sie Genosse Semjonow, mit der Absicht der Schädlingstätigkeit einen solchen Prozeß konstruieren wollten. Im Gegenteil, ich kann Ihnen bestätigen, daß Sie mindestens im Winter und Frühjahr 1952/53 in einer Psychose waren.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, Herrnstadt clearly states that he has no knowledge of show trial preparations during the period in question, which given he was a member of the Politbüro and editor of *Neues Deutschland* until July 1953 would not seem to support a show trial preparation thesis. Due to his position he would presumably have played a pivotal role in both planning and executing its dissemination. However, he also *suspects* that his own expulsion along with Wilhelm Zaisser may well have been 'ein auf halber Strecke liegengebliebener Prozeß in der Art des Rajk- oder Kostoffprozesses'.<sup>60</sup> In any case, this cannot be construed as testimony supportive of the Merker show trial narrative.

Another problematic aspect of Weber's exegesis with regards to Merker is the manner in which it relies on somewhat tenuous links, but does not shy away from very concrete conclusions. Take for instance his citation of Hodos' unsubstantiated claim, published in 1988, that Beria ordered the inclusion of Merker in show trial preparations. Equally, his construction of file material as proof of a planned show trial, despite the fact that it is at least open to interpretation and could even be considered directly contradictory to Weber's argument. One illustrative example is a protocol of a meeting of the Politbüro:

Aus den Rundfunk Mitteilungen [!] über den Prozeß gegen das imperialistische Verschwörerzentrum in der Tsechoslowakei geht hervor, daß Paul Merker, Eisler,

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<sup>59</sup> Rudolf Herrnstadt, *Das Herrnstadt Dokument* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1990) p. 273.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

Schrecker und andere Verbindungen hatten. Das Politbüro beauftragt die Organe der Staatssicherheit, unverzüglich die Untersuchungen darüber durchzuführen.<sup>61</sup>

This statement would, on face value, indicate that within the Politbüro itself there was no prior preparation for a Merker show trial and that investigations began in response to testimony given at the Slansky trial. Weber, however, interprets it differently, building it into his narrative as evidence of precisely such prior preparation and implying that the reference to receiving the news via radio coverage of the trial is therefore cynical deception. However, Weber does not provide any evidence of such prior preparation, specifically of any communication between the respective parties or security ministries which would support his thesis. Nor does he deal with the uncomfortable question as to why within the Politbüro itself such pretense would be necessary. By implication, Weber suggests a conspiracy of individuals over and above the highest organ within the SED. However, with no little contradiction he also explicitly seeks to implicate the Politbüro and various other organs such as the ZPKK within the alleged show trial preparations. A certain ambivalence between these two approaches is discernible.

It is perhaps telling that in making his case Weber does not cite any files from the BStU, which one might presume would contain some indication of a show trial conspiracy. Indeed, the BStU files on Paul Merker appear to agree with the tone of the Politbüro meeting, which is to say that they had undertaken no investigation or preparation for a show trial involving Merker. The decision to commission the MfS to investigate Merker was made by the Politbüro on 25 November 1952, nearly two years after his initial entanglement in the Field affair. The MfS Operativer Vorgang (OV) file on Merker indicates the warrant for his arrest was issued and executed five days later on 30 November.<sup>62</sup> The earliest documents the

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<sup>61</sup> Weber, 'Schauprozessvorbereitungen in der DDR', p. 477. Note that the exclamation mark is Weber's interjection. See Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/42219 'Protokoll Nr. 149/52.- Sitzung am 25. November 1952'.

<sup>62</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol 1, 'Verfügung'.

BStU holds on Merker are letters he sent to Pieck and Ulbricht in 1950 regarding the Field accusations. There is no record of surveillance by the MfS during this interlude. Indeed, there are even some indications that Merker had made certain steps out of the party's bad books, for instance, he had been allowed to marry his partner, Grete Menzel, who as an SED member at the time could not marry a suspected agent.<sup>63</sup> Equally, he had been allowed to leave his job as a HO manager (essentially a *Bewährung in der Produktion*)<sup>64</sup> and work as a writer and translator. While inconclusive, all of the above does add nuance to the preparations thesis.

Wolfgang Kießling paints a slightly different picture, claiming an elaborate operation by the MfS to arrest Merker on 30 November involving the delaying of trains and numerous agents.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, he argues that the MfS arresting officer's report deliberately omits many aspects of this. The impression given is that the MfS sought to cover up their own operation. However, this appears to be based on conversations between Merker and his cellmate Erwin, in which Merker also brags 'Von der konspirativen Tätigkeit kenne ich weitaus mehr als die Leute, die mich fangen wollen'. Although there is no record of this 'Großaktion',<sup>66</sup> even if Merker's account is entirely accurate it would not have been out of the ordinary for the MfS to plan such a convoluted arrest and does not evidence prior planning before 25 November.

Furthermore, the widely held belief that the Merker show trial was only delayed due to various externalities<sup>67</sup> is seemingly contradicted by the BStU holdings. During the investigation the Hauptabteilung IX in charge of Merker's case had regularly to request extra

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<sup>63</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56 vol 1, Letter to Ulbricht; Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56 vol 1, Letter to Pieck.

<sup>64</sup> Kießling claims this was at the behest of *Arbeiter* who complained in an official *Eingabe* that they should not be served beer by an enemy agent, however, he provides no citation for this and I could not locate one in the SAPMO files. Presumably, it emanates from Kießling's conversations with Merker himself.

<sup>65</sup> See Wolfgang Kießling, 'Paul Merker in den Fängen der Sicherheitsorgane Stalins und Ulbrichts', in *Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte* (Berlin: Helle Panke, 1995), p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Kießling, 'Paul Merker in den Fängen der Sicherheitsorgane Stalins und Ulbrichts', p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Gerber, p. 65; Kießling, 'Paul Merker in den Fängen der Sicherheitsorgane Stalins und Ulbrichts' p. 21; Weber, 'Schauprozessvorbereitungen in der DDR' p. 460, p.474; George H. Hodos, *Schauprozesse: Stalinistische Säuberungen in Osteuropa 1948-54* (Berlin: LinksDruck Verlag, 1990), p. 187.



time from the *Generalstaatsanwaltschaft*, according to GDR law this was a legal necessity when in *Untersuchungshaft*. They did so on no less than six occasions. Notably before the events of June 1953 – the series of strikes and demonstrations often referred to as the *Volksaufstand* – a request for an extension of four months was made due to the need for ‘noch umfangreiche Ermittlungen’.<sup>68</sup> At the end of this extension another request was made for six months, the reason given: ‘da im großen Umfang Ermittlungen außerhalb der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik durchgeführt werden müssen. Diese Ermittlungen sind deshalb so notwendig, da der Häftling MERKER seine Agententätigkeit leugnet und ihm jeder einzelne Fakt nachgewiesen werden muss.’<sup>69</sup> The oft repeated view that delays came about due to either the death of Stalin or the events of June 1953, or the subsequent death of Beria, appear in this light too simplistic. They do not take into account Merker’s own determination not to confess – a difficult thing under any interrogatory circumstances and certainly not easy in the clutches of the MfS in the early 1950s.

This representation of Merker as a German Rajk, victim of a planned show trial in the wake of Noel Field, finds mention in several state-mandated forums. The BStU is one of the first and clearly most important state-mandated guardians of memory with a mandate for ‘politische, historische und juristische Aufarbeitung’ of the vast archive of the MfS.<sup>70</sup> The BStU has placed a strong emphasis on public education about the structure, methods and operations of the former East German security service.<sup>71</sup> *BF informiert* is a key publication in this endeavour, distributed by the BStU’s Education and Research Department it is described

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<sup>68</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56 vol 1, Fristverlängerungantrag 26 May 1953.

<sup>69</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56 vol 1, Fristverlängerungantrag 25 September 1953.

<sup>70</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Gesetz über die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (StasiUnterlagen-Gesetz- StUG)* (1991) <<http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stug/StUG.pdf> > [accessed 29 November 2018].

<sup>71</sup> BStU, *Aufgaben und Struktur*

[http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/BundesbeauftragterUndBehoerde/AufgabenUndStruktur/\\_node.html](http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/BundesbeauftragterUndBehoerde/AufgabenUndStruktur/_node.html) > [accessed 29 November 2018].

as producing ‘wissenschaftliche Studien zu Einzelfragen, die sich sowohl an ein Fachpublikum als auch an eine interessierte Öffentlichkeit richten’.<sup>72</sup>

In *BF informiert 17*, Walter Süß delineates the relationship between the SED and MfS. He seeks to demonstrate that the MfS was somewhat paradoxically both subordinate to the SED but also a state within the state and characterises the 1950s in his discussion as follows: ‘In dieser Phase wurden auch die entscheidenden politischen Weichen hinsichtlich des Beitrags des MfS zur Sicherung der Diktatur gestellt.’<sup>73</sup>

In a section entitled ‘Im Dienste der Partei’ which seeks to demonstrate the ‘Anleitung des MfS durch die SED’ and ‘die Zuarbeit des MfS für die Partei’, the Merker affair – particularly the show trial thesis – is thematised as a ‘Grundmuster’ of a ‘politische Vorgabe der Parteiführung’. It is introduced, as is often the case, via the Field affair:

In einer ‘EntschlieÙung’ dieses Parteitages wurde die Verknüpfung von Abwehraufgaben der Staatssicherheit und innerer Repression durch die parteioffizielle Übernahme der stalinistischen Kampagne gegen eine vorgebliche Verschwörung unter Regie des Amerikaners Noel H. Field hergestellt. Die operative Phase dieses von Berija gesteuerten Manövers zur Gleichschaltung der osteuropäischen kommunistischen Parteien hatte in Ungarn bereits im Mai 1949 begonnen.<sup>74</sup>

In Süß’s analysis we find a problematic use of language, for instance the use of the pejorative term *Gleichschaltung* with its connotations of German fascism and totalitarian theory. Equally, the unsubstantiated presentation of the Field affair as being entirely concocted and the statement that Beria personally orchestrated the entire affair. This is particularly significant as – contrary to the stated aims of the BStU and of this particular publication –

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<sup>72</sup> BStU, *BF informiert* <[http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Wissen/Publikationen/Reihen/BF-informiert/bf-informiert\\_node.html](http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Wissen/Publikationen/Reihen/BF-informiert/bf-informiert_node.html)> [accessed 29 November 2018].

<sup>73</sup> Walter Süß, ‘Das Verhältnis von SED und Staatssicherheit. Eine Skizze seiner Entwicklung’, *BF informiert*, 17/1997 (Berlin: BStU, 1997), p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

this narrative is not based on revelations emanating from research into the BStU's archive, but in actual fact cites Hodos' engagé analysis of 1988. This is an illustrative example of canonical literature being treated uncritically.

Süß continues to rely on the received historiographical narratives, for instance that the ZK selected Merker for a show trial: 'Im folgenden Monat wurden auf einem Plenum des ZK erste praktische Schritte abgesegnet und die exemplarisch abzustrafenden Opfer (Paul Merker, Leo Bauer, Bruno Goldhammer u. a.) namentlich fixiert.'<sup>75</sup> In evidencing this narrative, Süß cites Weber's 1993 account, which interestingly states: 'Ob sie [Schauprozessvorbereitungen] in den Akten des MfS dokumentiert sind, bleibt offen.'<sup>76</sup> Certainly, Süß does not show that they are. It is somewhat problematic that Weber's preliminary and largely unsubstantiated discourse should be replicated within the space of the education and research department of the BStU, especially given the authority with which publications from this state-mandated institution might be perceived.

Another instance of the "Merker as Rajk" thesis occurs in *Deutschland Archiv* (DA), one of the flagship publications of the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*. Its author is Hermann Weber:

Als Besatzungsgebiet der UdSSR war die SBZ, und dann auch die DDR, ganz besonders in das stalinistische System der Repressionen eingespannt. Das richtete sich inzwischen selbst gegen führende Kommunisten in den eigenen Reihen. Von der SED wurde deshalb ein großer politischer Schauprozess vorbereitet, der dann doch nicht stattfinden konnte. Aber Abweichler wurden brutal bestraft, alle Säuberungen innerhalb der SED mit Verweis auf den "Agentenführer" Noel H. Field vorangetrieben. Mit dem Parteiausschluss und der späteren Verhaftung des SED-Politbüromitglieds Paul Merker und anderer im August 1950 begann eine Welle von

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> Weber, 'Schauprozess-Vorbereitungen in der DDR', p. 439.

Verfolgungen gegen sogenannte Titoisten und Trotzlisten, die selbst nach Stalins Tod 1953 nicht endete.<sup>77</sup>

The incorporation of the “German Rajk” thesis in the state-mandated *DA*<sup>78</sup> as recently as 2011 in essentially the same form as during the initial forays into the subject during the 1990s demonstrates that the Stalinist show trial topos is not contested within the landscape of German memory. The thesis is also lent a certain level of authority as it appears in a key publication disseminated for educational purposes by a state-mandated educational organisation. Educators and students alike might take the thesis as definitely proven, given this seeming authorisation. Ultimately, however, the thesis that Merker was earmarked for a show trial analogous to the Rajk trial as part of a Machiavellian Stalinist conspiracy remains to be proven beyond reasonable doubt. Initially achieving popularity as an underresearched hunch, with pedigree as Cold War era propaganda, this claim continues to rely on grand narratives that ignore the specificity of Merker’s individual case and tends to omit incongruous strands of evidence. The question as to what exactly happened during this period will, of course, unlikely ever be resolved fully; however, the question of which interpretations remain dominant in spite of research which casts doubt and challenges major pillars thereof is an equally interesting question. It will be discussed in more detail in the coming sections. It is, however, clear that this (unproven) planned show trial claim provides the foundation for historiography of the Merker affair, establishing a general narrative of a Machiavellian SED and a victimised Merker.

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<sup>77</sup> Hermann Weber, ‘Die SED und der Titoismus’ *Deutschland Archiv*, 4 (2011) <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/54018/sed-und-titoismus?p=all>> [accessed 29 November 2018].

<sup>78</sup> The political and polemical role of the *DA* in state-mandated GDR research is illustrated by its three ‘programmatische Untertitel’, the pre-1990 ‘Zeitschrift für Fragen der DDR und der Deutschlandpolitik’, the 1990 ‘Zeitschrift für deutsche Einheit’ and the post-1990 ‘Zeitschrift für das vereinigte Deutschland’.

## Merker: A German Slansky? The Antisemitism Thesis

Whether or not Merker was earmarked to play the role of a German Rajk in a planned show trial – that is as part of the initial Field affair – many have held that he was earmarked to be the primary defendant in a German *Slansky trial*. This section will delineate the Slansky trial and its relations to the Merker affair, exploring the dominant interpretations and the issues they raise, particularly accusations of antisemitism.

### Excursus: Rudolf Slansky

Rudolf Slansky was a major figure within the Communist party of Czechoslovakia (KPCĚ). A Muscovite exile, he had worked in the partisans' headquarters in Kiev before helping to lead the Slovakian partisan movement during the National Uprising in 1944.<sup>79</sup> Insofar, his biography was very far removed from that of *Westemigrant* Merker or the American Field and he was indeed seen as a staunch Moscow loyalist or even Stalinist.<sup>80</sup> Despite this, the General Secretary of the KPCĚ would become embroiled in the Czechoslovakian instalment of the Field affair and ultimately become its central figure. Merker would be named in testimony during the trial, which seems to have been the catalyst for his own arrest, and so the Slansky affair is indelibly linked to Merker's own. Equally, how the Slansky trial has been constructed in historiography, has had a formative effect on approaches to Merker.

Historiographers have tended to interpret the Slansky trial along much the same Cold War paradigm as the Rajk or Field affairs<sup>81</sup> that is as a fabrication emanating from Moscow and specifically Stalin, indeed, one commentator describes it as a classic reinvention of the

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<sup>79</sup> 'Slansky, Rudolf' *Munzinger Online/Personen - Internationales Biographisches Archiv*, <<http://www.munzinger.de/document/00000004305>> [accessed 29 November 2018]

<sup>80</sup> Keßler, p. 77.

<sup>81</sup> See Gerber, p. 62; Rudolf Ströbinger, *Der Mord am Generalsekretär: Stalins letzter Schauprozess* (Stuttgart: Burg: 1983); Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary*, p. 221.

Moscow trials of the 1930s in which only the location names have changed.<sup>82</sup> The main difference in terms of historiographical narrative lies in the fact that Slansky and nine of his thirteen co-defendants were of Jewish heritage. In contrast to the Rajk trial,<sup>83</sup> this is often interpreted as having antisemitic motivations, it has even been described as an updated version of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.<sup>84</sup> The argument exists in two forms; firstly, that much as the Field affair was to serve as a show trial to discipline Titoism or the ‘national path to socialism’, the Slansky affair was intended to discipline Zionism in the wake of Israel’s alliance with the West and specifically Czechoslovakia which had provided weapons and even troops during the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts between 1947-1948.<sup>85</sup> Secondly, that it was a cynical attempt to instrumentalise antisemitism, the reason being a mistrust on Stalin’s part towards Jews.<sup>86</sup> However, as with the Field affair, it appears to be somewhat more complex and there are some striking incongruities and omissions in these narratives.

Perhaps the most illustrative is the question of how Slansky came to be the central figure in the trial. In the beginning, Slansky does not appear to have played a victim’s role in the slightest. During the initial investigations in the wake of the Field affair he was in fact involved in sanctioning the arrest of some of the individuals who would later stand trial next to him, accused of participating in the ‘staatsfeindliche Verschwörerzentrum unter Führung Slanskys’.<sup>87</sup> According to the investigators’ testimony, Slansky was strictly off limits for the

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<sup>82</sup> Paul Lendvai, *Antisemitismus ohne Juden* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1972), p. 223.

<sup>83</sup> Although nearly all of the defendants in the Rajk trial were also Jewish very few commentators have seen their Jewish heritage as relevant, presumably as the majority of the Hungarian leadership was at this time Jewish, including Matyas Rakosi the Minister President often cast as the arch-Stalinist conspirator. A notable exception is Peter Brod, who claims that Rajk was sentenced as part of an alleged titoist-zionist conspiracy, although the Eastern Bloc was still officially pro-Israel at this time and Zionism played no discernible role in the Rajk trial or coverage thereof. See Peter Brod, *Die Antizionismus- und Israelpolitik der UdSSR* (Baden Baden: Nomos, 1980), p. 330.

<sup>84</sup> Louis Rapoport, *Hammer, Sichel, Davidstern Judenverfolgung in der Sowjetunion* (Berlin: Ch.Links, 1992), p.169.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* pp.157, 169; Eduard Goldstücker, *Prozesse* (Munich: Albrecht Knaus, 1989), p. 208; Keßler, pp. 85–86, Arno Lustiger, *Rotbuch Stalin und die Juden* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1998), p. 271; Angelika Timm, *Hammer Zirkel Davidstern. Das gestörte Verhältnis der DDR zu Zionismus und Staat Israel* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1998), p. 99.

<sup>86</sup> For instance: Arkady Vaksberg, *Stalin against the Jews* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 255. Vaksberg goes so far as to defend his premise against the argument that antisemitism was often linked with anticommunism with this spurious explanation, which assumes knowledge of Stalin’s internal reasoning and plans, again with no citation: ‘Stalin knew that a new wave of antisemitism would in the satellites also be a wave of anti-Sovietism. That did not worry him. Once he had settled the Jewish question, he would have quashed any manifestations of anti-Sovietism, explaining through his propaganda that the Jews had perverted the idea of Stalin’s socialist paradise instead of promoting it.’

<sup>87</sup> [n.a.], ‘Elf Todesurteile im Slansky-Prozeß’, *Neues Deutschland*, 28 November 1952.

first two years of the investigation and this only changed due to direct accusations made by Arthur London, a future co-defendant.<sup>88</sup>

Karel Kaplan, who was charged with investigating the Slansky trial during the reform-communist period prior to the events of 1968, is one of the most seminal interpreters of the Slansky trial having had access to file evidence even before 1990. Kaplan creates a narrative in which a conspiracy of various security personnel, both Soviet and Czechoslovakian, coupled with interventions by Stalin sought to implicate Slansky. However, the evidence Kaplan utilises is often somewhat tenuous and in some instances seemingly contradictory. Take for instance this letter from Stalin to Gottwald:

Comrade Cepicka has briefed us in detail and has reported about the activities of comrades Slansky and Geminder.

We still believe that statements of offenders, with no supporting facts, cannot serve as a basis for accusing leaders known for their great positive work. Our experiences in struggling against the enemy suggest that proven offenders often resort to slandering honest people, thereby trying to sow mutual mistrust among party leaders (this is how they struggle against the party). You are therefore correct to proceed cautiously, mistrusting the statements of experienced offenders concerning comrades Slansky and Geminder.

Considering what we have received from our Soviet personnel it is clear to us that comrade Slansky has committed a number of errors in promoting and posting leading personnel. He has shown himself to be shortsighted and too trusting. As a consequence, conspirators and enemies have freely and with impunity gone rampant and harmed the party and the people. Therefore, it seems to us that the post of the general secretary cannot be occupied by a man who understands people poorly and

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<sup>88</sup> Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary*, pp. 125–127.

who makes frequent mistakes in posting personnel. I therefore think it would be correct to relieve com. Slansky of the office of general secretary.<sup>89</sup>

At face value, this private letter between the two heads of state appears to cast doubt on the idea that Slansky was singled out by either of them or indeed that there was a conspiracy to conduct a show trial. On the contrary, Stalin clearly urges caution and mistrust with regards to the accusations levelled. Indeed, following this, Gottwald would again order the security apparatus to leave Slansky out of any investigations, regardless of apparent witness testimony. In addition, Slansky was awarded the Order of Socialism in July 1951 and his fiftieth birthday was accompanied by a celebration lasting several hours with readings from his collected works entitled 'The Great Fighter'.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, while Stalin's suggestion that Slansky be removed from his post was eventually followed several months later, Gottwald showed his continued trust in Slansky by making him Deputy Premier, which was discussed as a promotion in the international press.<sup>91</sup> This took place only a few months before his arrest. How did the situation change so drastically in such a short space of time?

Many commentators see a Stalinist conspiracy emanating from Stalin himself or from within the various security bodies which concocted evidence in order to get their man.<sup>92</sup> The reason given is that the Stalinist imagined enemy was shifting from Titoism to Zionism due to the rise of Israel. It is alleged, and was uncontested in western published accounts until the late 1990s, that a letter was manufactured by the Czechoslovakian and Soviet investigators which incriminated Slansky by warning him he was about to be uncovered and arrested, and also offered to help him escape to the West.<sup>93</sup> Kaplan manages to give two rather different accounts of how this happened, firstly in his 1990 version, a 'turned' anti-communist

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<sup>89</sup> Letter from Stalin to Gottwald in Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary*, p. 128.

<sup>90</sup> Igor Lukes, *Rudolf Slansky: His Trials and Trial* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Int. Center for Scholars, 2006), p.32

<sup>91</sup> [n.a.], 'Rudolf Slansky', *The New York Times*, 9 September 1951.

<sup>92</sup> Hodos, *Schauprozesse* p.126; Rapoport, pp.165, 168; Lustiger, p. 271. Both Rapoport and Lustiger claim Slansky was arrested on the personal orders of Stalin, neither provide citations.

<sup>93</sup> Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary*, p. 540.



Czechoslovakian agent, Rudolf Nevecefal, was compelled to bring the incriminating letter by Soviet handlers. No evidence for this is given.<sup>94</sup> In 1998, however, the story has changed somewhat, now all reference to Nevecefal and his turning has disappeared and the letter is described as being either a Soviet fake or a genuine letter from the Czechoslovakian ‘Emigration’ which sought merely to save Slansky from his communist tormenters.<sup>95</sup> Kaplan’s shifting narrative does not provide any citations other than to his own work from 1972 which also does not provide any citations.<sup>96</sup> Kaplan leaves no doubt in his later account that regardless of whether the letter, which formed the crux of his Stalinist conspiracy thesis, emanated from the Soviets or not, the thesis remains intact: ‘Es liegt jedoch auf der Hand, daß ohne diesen Brief ein anderer ‘Verhaftungsgrund’ gefunden worden wäre.’<sup>97</sup> Kaplan’s changing argumentation and lacking evidentiary basis coupled with the unwavering conclusion of a Stalinist conspiracy with anti-Zionist purpose is frankly unsatisfactory.

This is thrown further into relief by subsequent research. For instance, Igor Lukes’ 2006 account which utilises both the Czechoslovakian archives and interviews with key actors. Lukes leaves little doubt that the incriminating letter was certainly not a Soviet fake, nor a well-meaning attempt to rescue Slansky by some anonymous ‘Emigration’ but was instead a calculated provocation designed to either make Slansky appear guilty and accelerate his demise or to recruit him as an asset and propaganda coup for the West by the anti-communist Czechoslovakian spy organisation OPAKI.<sup>98</sup> Lukes describes how this organisation and its American allies, led by a CIA agent Spencer Taggart, sought to avenge the rolling up of their own networks in the previous years by targeting the very people who had been responsible such as Slansky. Indeed, when Taggart briefed the top brass of the CIA

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 139–140.

<sup>95</sup> Karel Kaplan and Frantisek Svatek, ‘Die politischen Säuberungen in der KPČ’, in *Terror Stalinistische Parteisäuberungen 1936-1953*, ed. by Weber and Mähler, pp. 487–562 (p. 541).

<sup>96</sup> See Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary*, p. 451.

<sup>97</sup> Kaplan and Svatek, ‘Die politischen Säuberungen in der KPČ’, p. 541.

<sup>98</sup> Lukes, p. 37, pp.39–40; Jan Gerber agrees with Lukes’ assessment, see Gerber, p. 64.

about the operation, Dulles is reported as saying ‘I wish we had someone who could have thought that one up. I would like to claim credit for it.’<sup>99</sup>

Gerber’s recent monograph points out that despite a growing body of work that casts doubt on the Stalinist antisemitic conspiracy thesis, the trials are still seen as a ‘Moskauer Fabrikat’ and most accounts have only tinkered with ‘Detailfragen’ since the *Epochenbruch* of 1989.<sup>100</sup> His innovative approach seeks to re-contextualise the Slansky affair, especially with regard to the specificity of post-War Czechoslovakian society. The main points can be summarised as follows; firstly, that the events of the Slansky trial are often analysed anachronistically through the prism of Prague 1968 and the Soviet-led intervention.<sup>101</sup> In other words, that the events of 1968 which affected many of the first chroniclers of the Slansky affair led to an over-emphasis on the Soviets. Secondly, that the specific ethnic moment in contemporary Czechoslovakia is rarely taken into account. The Jewish community was overwhelmingly German speaking and often perceived as being ‘German’; furthermore, there had been interethnic struggles both within the party and wider society during the interwar and post-War years, culminating in the expulsion of ethnic Germans but leaving behind thousands of German-speaking Jews. According to Gerber, this played an often overlooked role in the Slansky affair. Indeed, he goes as far as to say that the KPČ leadership were oblivious to the ‘Signalwirkung’ of a seemingly antisemitic trial due to the ethnic ‘Aufladung des tschechoslowakischen Spätstalinismus’.<sup>102</sup> This is particularly poignant, as the question of cognisance and intention are endogenous to issues surrounding guilt, ethics and ultimately political narratives of legitimisation, both historically in socialist Europe and today in the ongoing political memory of states such as the GDR. In other words, if contrary to the claims of many commentators, the Slansky trial’s internal dynamic was not specifically

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<sup>99</sup> Letter from Spencer L. Taggart to Ronald Parker, 15 April 1998 and Interview with Spencer Taggart in: Lukes, p. 62.

<sup>100</sup> Gerber, p. 64.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., pp. 60–61.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 20–21.

antisemitic, but rather characterised by a peculiar Czechoslovakian ethnic tension expressed in a sort of surrogate anti-German prejudice as Gerber implies, it has wide repercussions for how we see this period and how this period is utilised in narratives surrounding the Stalin era, the GDR and of course the Merker affair.

In any case, this excursus has demonstrated that, much as in the Field affair, the predominant narratives on the Slansky affair are actually more contested than one would think from a great deal of historiography. This is vital to understanding the Merker affair and its role in state-mandated memory as the Slansky affair often serves as a core pillar of accusations of concerted antisemitism within the socialist bloc which appear to pre-determine narratives which focus on Merker, casting him as the *German Slansky*. The next section will discuss the key aspects of ‘Merker as Slansky’, that is Merker as part of an anti-Zionist if not even antisemitic show trial conspiracy, paying particular reference to the narratives established in state-mandated memory of the GDR and their sources.

### ‘The German Slansky’ in State-mandated Memory

The significance of Merker to conceptions of GDR opposition within post-unification state-mandated memory is first seen in the 1994 Enquete Commission ‘Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland’. In a section dedicated to internal SED ‘Machtkampf und Opposition’, Merker is listed as a key figure for the revisionist opposition in the wake of de-Stalinisation: ‘Auch ein Austausch führender Kader, besonders

die Ablösung Ulbrichts durch Schirdewan<sup>103</sup> oder Paul Merker, durch Politiker also, die nicht als stalinistisch kompromittiert galten, gehörte zu ihren Zielsetzungen.<sup>104</sup>

While this is clearly in reference to the role Merker played in the Harich-Janka group in 1956 after being released from prison – he was briefly envisaged by Wolfgang Harich as a potential leadership candidate for his oppositional platform<sup>105</sup> – it nevertheless raises the question as to how the Merker affair was perceived in the 1950s and how it would be remembered in post-1990 representations of opposition. Equally, in the same report the subject of Jews and antisemitism in the GDR is described as undoubtedly belonging to the most significant ‘Desideraten der Forschung’.<sup>106</sup> As will be seen in the following discussion, Merker would rarely if ever be mentioned in relation to the revisionist opposition again and would instead frequently be associated with the aforementioned desideratum.

### An Antisemitic Investigation?

At the core of the German Slansky thesis is the idea that Merker fell victim to an antisemitic witch hunt or more neutrally formulated, that there was a pronounced antisemitism to the investigation against him. Naturally, the MfS is key to this and indeed one of the most significant contributions concerning Merker within the domains of state-mandated memory is a *Hintergrund Aktuell* article produced by the *Presse* section of the BStU.<sup>107</sup> Entitled ‘Vom

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<sup>103</sup> Karl Schirdewan is often seen as an outspoken critic of Ulbricht. He was expelled from the Politbüro in 1958 for alleged fractionalism. See Karl Schirdewan, *Aufstand gegen Ulbricht* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1994).

<sup>104</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Bericht der Enquete-Kommission ‘Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland’* <<http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/12/078/1207820.pdf>> p. 197.

<sup>105</sup> See Brown, *The Red Resistance? Communist Opposition in the Early GDR*.

<sup>106</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Bericht der Enquete-Kommission ‘Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland’* <<http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/12/078/1207820.pdf>> p. 54.

<sup>107</sup> While the article is not signed by an author, it ends with the following notice: ‘Ansprechpartner für die Themen Verfolgung von angeblichen ‘Parteiverrätern’ und strafrechtliche Repression in den 1950er Jahren beim BStU ist Roger Engelmann’. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Engelmann was involved in the production of this text in some capacity. BStU, *Vom Spitzenkader zum ‘imperialistischen Agenten’*, <[bstu.bund.de/DE/Presse/Themen/Hintergrund/20150325\\_paul\\_merker.html](http://bstu.bund.de/DE/Presse/Themen/Hintergrund/20150325_paul_merker.html)> [accessed 20 December 2018].

Spitzenkader zum ‘imperialistischen Agenten’ Paul Merkers tiefer Fall’ the article consists of a running narrative interspersed with links to selected BStU documents which are clearly intended to support the narrative claims. This in-depth treatment of the Merker affair by an important state-mandated institution provides an excellent opportunity to outline how Merker is portrayed in public memory work but also to delve into the revealing detail of the Merker affair and contrast with my own reading of the archival material. The following discussion seeks to subject both narrative and evidence to a thorough interrogation. The literary sources cited for the article’s reconstruction are given as Wolfgang Kießling, Jeffrey Herf and Barth/Schweizer.<sup>108</sup> This discussion will therefore also scrutinise the exegesis presented by these authors as it arises in relation to the article’s thematics.

Merker’s trial in 1955 is introduced as a ‘Verlegenheitslösung’, which served merely to justify the fact that he had been in investigative custody for 28 months. The idea being that despite the initial cause for suspicion – the Field affair – having been refuted, the MfS needed merely to save face. This is of course possible, but ignores the fact that the investigation into Merker had not relied solely on the Field affair. Indeed, Merker was only arrested after the Slansky trial some 15 months after he was expelled from the SED in the wake of the Field investigation. Intriguingly, in making this argument the author asserts that all of the accusations against Merker were ‘strafrechtlich substanzlos’, ‘entbehrten jedoch jeglicher Grundlage’. Equally, it is claimed that the judgement evidences the antisemitic nature of the investigation: ‘Auch der antisemitische Charakter der Vorgänge [...] zeigten sich noch in der Urteilsbegründung. Ihm wurde vorgeworfen, “die ausnahmslose Entschädigung aller aus Deutschland emigrierten Juden” gefordert und “zionistische Tendenzen” vertreten zu haben’.<sup>109</sup> An extract of the court’s judgement is linked unmistakably in a supporting capacity; however, the extract does not detail any of the *Beschuldigungen* to which the author

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<sup>108</sup> BStU, *Vom Spitzenkader zum ‘imperialistischen Agenten’*.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

refers. The extract only contains the legal charges and the opening of a section entitled *Gründe*, which begins with a contextualisation of imperialist encirclement of the socialist revolution since 1917. This section has reached the point of *Agententätigkeit* in the 1930s when it is abruptly cut off in the selected excerpt.

Why is this significant? Firstly, it creates the impression that the BStU holdings have demonstrated that the Merker affair was entirely fabricated, whereas this evidence does not appear to substantiate this. Secondly, if the entire judgement were to be included, it would reveal that the charges laid against Merker did not revolve around his alleged Zionism and position on Jewish compensation, at least not to the extent that is often suggested. More on this below. Indeed, the charge that the ‘Verschwörungskonstrukt hatte eine ausgeprägt antisemitische Tendenz’ is a central tenet of the BStU’s portrayal. The claims of antisemitism are not limited to the Merker or Slansky affair either, instead the entire ‘konstruierte Verschwörung’ around Field, including the Rajk trial, is described as being antisemitic. This goes further than many commentators as generally the alleged antisemitic tendency is first identified in 1952 with the Slansky trial.

The somewhat confused nature of the narrative is further exemplified in the odd claims that the *timing* of Merker’s arrest evidences the antisemitic tendency of the affair: ‘Der Zeitpunkt, drei Tage nach dem Urteil im Prager Schauprozess gegen den Generalsekretär der tsechoslowakischen KP Rudolf Slansky und andere, in dem die konstruierte Verschwörung um Noel Field ebenfalls herangezogen wurde, war nicht zufällig.’<sup>110</sup> The files of the Central Committee and the MfS clearly indicate that the testimony given during the Slansky trial was indeed the reason for Merker’s arrest and certainly not coincidental,<sup>111</sup> but also not evidence of a concerted conspiratorial concept as implied here. This interpretation does, however, indicate that the BStU follows the Merker as German Slansky thesis.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/42219 ‘Protokoll Nr. 149/52.- Sitzung am 25. November 1952’.

The author then seeks to evidence the above claims further by linking a copy of an interrogation transcript from six weeks after Merker's arrest, which seeks to document 'die antisemitische Tendenz der Beschuldigungen auch im Fall Merker'. The transcript consists of a short series of questions pertaining to Merker's knowledge of and relation to the 'Geschäftsträger des Staates Israels' and whether he had connections to the *Jüdische Gemeinde*. The reasoning for the line of questioning becomes apparent towards the end, when Merker is asked about his relationship with Julius Meyer; Meyer, the then head of the *Gemeinde* in Berlin, had left for West Berlin the day before, which in the paranoid mindset of the MfS' spy hunters seems to have led to suspicion that he was a western agent.<sup>112</sup> Interestingly, it is usually suggested that Meyer and the other heads of the *Gemeinde* emigrated to the West due to their experience of an antisemitic campaign. However, evidence suggests that the situation was somewhat more complicated. For instance, the context that there was a campaign emanating from the West at this time, referred to by German-Jewish author Stephan Hermlin as 'jenes Geschrei über den "Antisemitismus" in den Volksdemokratien' is omitted in most accounts.<sup>113</sup> This campaign included press conferences by both *Landesrabbiner* for West Berlin, Nathan Peter Levinson, and the head of the *Jüdische Gemeinde* in West Berlin, Heinz Galinski. Both were broadcast via RIAS and they called on all Jews to leave the GDR shortly before Meyer did so. However, Levinson admits in an interview in 1984 that Heinz Galinski himself considered this to be in the interests of the Americans and that Levinson forced him into this position:

Es gab großen Krach mit Galinski. Er war unzufrieden, daß ... nach dem Slansky-Prozeß ... angesichts des neuen Antisemitismus berief ich eine Pressekonferenz ein, um die Juden zum Verlassen der DDR aufzufordern. Galinski weigerte sich, an der Pressekonferenz teilzunehmen. Er versuchte mich daran zu verhindern, die

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<sup>112</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol 2, 'Vermerk' regarding Julius Meyer.

<sup>113</sup> Stephan Hermlin, 'Brot und Rosen', *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1953.

Pressekonferenz abzuhalten, weil er der Ansicht war, ich hätte amerikanische und nicht jüdische Interessen im Auge.<sup>114</sup>

While this is certainly not evidence that Meyer and others did not genuinely believe an antisemitic campaign was in the offing, it does provide a different perspective on the Cold War politicking taking place and how various contemporaneous Jewish actors could interpret events at the time. It is certainly worthy of contemplation that two very distinct individuals in Hermlin and Galinski both saw the Americans as instrumentalising accusations of antisemitism and fomenting tensions in their own interests.

This context might help explain why the MfS interrogator decided to question Merker on this particular day about his relations to the *Jüdische Gemeinde* and Meyer. His response that he had worked with Meyer on a draft law concerning the ‘Entschädigung’ of Jewish victims of fascism in 1946-1947, leads to the question of what position Merker took in the ‘jüdischen Angelegenheiten’. Merker responds that he supported the restitution of ‘Wohnungen, Einfamilienhäuser oder Läden, Werkstätten’. The interrogator does not seem fazed by this answer, asking merely ‘Forderten Sie die Rückgabe kapitalistischen Besitzes von Juden?’ Following Merker’s negation the questioning ends.<sup>115</sup>

The position of the BStU is that this line of questioning is inherently evidence of antisemitism and a show trial conception surrounding Jewish thematics.<sup>116</sup> While this interpretation is to a certain extent accurate in that Merker’s alleged position of supporting restitution of capitalist property in this matter was raised in both the ZK’s *Lehren* article<sup>117</sup> and in his ultimate trial, it lacks context and simplifies a complex issue. Firstly, in contrast to Herf’s portrayal: ‘Die Vernehmer fragten ihn wiederholt, ob er Mitglieder ‘jüdisch-zionistischer

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<sup>114</sup> See: Robin Ostow, ‘Das Erbe des Holocaust im antifaschistischen Deutschland’ in *Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur nach 1945*, ed. by Bergmann and Erb (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1990), pp. 332–344 (pp. 335–336).

<sup>115</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56 vol 2, pp. 52–53. Interview of Paul Merker.

<sup>116</sup> BStU, *Vom Spitzenkader zum ‘imperialistischen Agenten’*.

<sup>117</sup> See: Zentralkomitee der SED, ‘Lehren aus dem Prozeß gegen das Verschwörerzentrum Slansky’, *Neues Deutschland*, 4, January 1953.



Organisationen' gewesen sei'<sup>118</sup> this is one of only two interrogation transcripts in which any Jewish-related topics are thematised; to put that into context, Merker's interrogation files amount to several volumes with well over a thousand pages. Both interviews taken together account for just four of them.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, the line of questioning as to whether Merker was a member of a Jewish-Zionist organisation appears only once in over two years of transcripts. Herf's narrative construction<sup>120</sup> seems somewhat exaggerated on this basis. Herf nevertheless continues with his premise that the investigation was characterised by antisemitism. Regarding the questioning of others, Herf states: 'Um Beweise für die im Slansky-Schauprozeß angeblich enthüllte antikommunistische, jüdisch gelenkte Verschwörung zu entdecken, untersuchten die Vernehmer Merkers Kontakte mit Juden in der französischen und mexikanischen Emigration.'<sup>121</sup> However, a close reading of the specific transcripts cited (but not directly quoted) by Herf reveals that the MfS did not ask a single one of these witnesses a question regarding Merker's 'Kontakte mit Juden' during the emigration or frankly any question regarding Jews, Zionism or related terminology. Three of the interviews cited do not mention Jewish related topics at all.<sup>122</sup> The MfS' line of questioning cannot reasonably, on the basis of the evidence Herf provides, be characterised as pursuing 'the Jewish question'<sup>123</sup> in any meaningful way.

This is particularly surprising as Jeffrey Herf's seminal body of work on Merker, which is regularly cited in both academic and state-mandated media,<sup>124</sup> leaves the impression that

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<sup>118</sup> Jeffrey Herf, 'Antisemitismus in der SED. Geheime Dokumente zum Fall Paul Merker aus SED- und MfS-Archiven', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 42.4 (1994), 635–667 (p. 640).

<sup>119</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU Nr. 192/56 vol. 1–4.

<sup>120</sup> 'The Stasi transcripts show that Merker was repeatedly asked if he 'was a member of Jewish-Zionist organizations'.' See: Herf, 'East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of Paul Merker', p. 640.

<sup>121</sup> Herf, 'Antisemitismus in der SED. Geheime Dokumente zum Fall Paul Merker aus SED- und MfS-Archiven', p. 640.

<sup>122</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU Nr. 192/56 vol. 3, pp. 43–46: Ackermann's interviews deal exclusively with the question of Merker's attitude to the German-Soviet Non-aggression Treaty. No mention is made of emigration particularly and certainly not about Jewish emigration. Wilhelm Koenen (pp. 47–48) is asked exactly three questions 'Was ist Ihnen über die Rolle Paul Merkers vor 1933 bekannt?', 'Wie trat Merker als Mitglied des Auslandsekretariats der KPD in Prag auf?' 'Haben Sie Ihren Aussagen noch etwas hinzuzufügen?'. Koenen does not mention anything Jewish related in his answers. Henny Stibi's testimony (pp. 74–78) also contains nothing about Jews nor questions to that effect.

<sup>123</sup> Herf's terminology.

<sup>124</sup> Other than the BStU article see for instance: Alexander Muschik 'Die SED und die Juden 1985–1990: Eine außenpolitische Charmeoffensive der DDR', *Deutschland Archiv*, 4 (2012)

Jewish thematics formed the core of the investigation. The following statement is exemplary of this approach: ‘Repeatedly, witnesses transformed the World Jewish Congress, B’nai B’rith in Mexico, and the Antifascist Refugee Committee in New York into organizations of stereotypically wealthy Jews. All searched their memories to uncover a nonexistent international conspiracy. The alternative of recalling the truth about the past was much more dangerous.’<sup>125</sup> It is worthwhile looking at precisely who Herf is referring to and exactly what they actually said. The witnesses discussed here are Leo Katz, Alexander Abusch, Erich Jungmann, Henny Stibi and Johann Schmidt, whose testimony was utilised in Merker’s trial.<sup>126</sup> Herf characterises their role in the investigation as entirely constructed and even that: ‘The purge files are a depressive account of how a totalitarian regime destroyed human solidarity as individuals tried to save themselves.’ Leaving aside the clearly emotive language, Herf is claiming that the MfS coerced these individuals into bearing false witness, a claim which he does not support with evidence and which does not appear to hold up under scrutiny.

Henny Stibi, for instance, had made allegations against Merker emanating from their time in exile immediately after arriving back in Germany, demonstrating that she was not coerced by some MfS or SED organ as part of a show trial concept. Particularly damning were her claims that Merker had ostracised her and her husband in exile in favour of Andre Simone – also known as Otto Katz, defendant in the Slansky trial who accused Merker – the primary link between Merker and the Slansky trial, and then sought to block her and her husband from being able to return to the SBZ as he feared their testimony with regard to his behaviour in exile.

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<<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/132869/die-sed-und-die-juden-19851990?p=all>> [accessed 20 December 2018]; Martin Jander, ‘...die Herzen unserer Genossen sind scheinbar noch härter als Stein’, in *‘Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben!’ Antisemitismus in der DDR*, ed by. Amadeu Antonio Stiftung (Berlin: Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2010), pp. 44–52.

<sup>125</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 149.

<sup>126</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, p. 148.

Herf's account of Leo Katz' testimony is clearly designed to make it seem forced, focusing on a statement 'as everybody knows'.<sup>127</sup> The implication is clearly that Katz was regurgitating common knowledge or rather received wisdom under pressure. This is certainly one interpretation. However, Herf claims that Katz died shortly after returning from his interview by the MfS of a heart attack, suggesting a causal link. Yet Katz died over three months later at the age of 62, and he was not under arrest or suspicion at any point, indeed as a citizen of Austria living in Vienna he is unlikely to have feared arrest nor indeed was he under pressure to co-operate with the MfS' investigation. He appears to have done so out of conviction.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, it was Leo Katz who while in exile had accused Andre Simone (Otto Katz) of being a spy and Merker had defended him and allowed him to continue to be privy to conspiratorial work. This would be an important aspect of the accusations against Merker at his trial.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, Katz was never known to have supported Merker's positions on Zionism or Jewish restitution while in Mexico, he was in fact an avowed anti-Zionist.

Abusch had been initially investigated in 1950 during the burgeoning Noel Field affair, however, the *Parteiverfahren* had been dropped in 1951 after he made several presentations to the ZPKK.<sup>130</sup> He agreed to work as an informant for the MfS<sup>131</sup> and took up several prominent positions in the intervening period; indeed, at the time that he was interviewed by the MfS he was the deputy Minister for Culture. It is possible to interpret Abusch's co-operation with the MfS as motivated by self-interest, but it is somewhat exaggerated to say he was trying to save himself by incriminating Merker and contrary to Herf's portrayal there is no indication that he

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>128</sup> This would seem to be supported by Katz's clear animosity towards Merker in his descriptions of him and the testimony of others which indicates he was always an opponent of Merker's in Mexico.

<sup>129</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol. 3, pp. 138–152, 'Court Judgement against Merker'.

<sup>130</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/70987, vol 6, Untersuchungen der ZPKK über Verbindungen zu Noel H. Field (Leiter des Unitarian Service Committee), pp. 42–45, 47–51, 54.

<sup>131</sup> *Wer war wer in der DDR?*, 'ABUSCH, ALEXANDER' <<https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363%3B-1424.html?ID=4>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

did not act out of conviction, at least in part. There is also no evidence that he was coerced or led in his testimony and it agrees fundamentally with that of the others.

Erich Jungmann's case is slightly different. Herf states that he was fired from his job as a newspaper editor due to 'Zionist deviation.'<sup>132</sup> This formulation – which Herf borrows from a Cold War-era propaganda edition<sup>133</sup> – disguises a far more complex series of events. Jungmann had been removed from all party posts in December 1952 due to his connections with Merker.<sup>134</sup> In March he gave his first official testimony in questioning by the MfS which incriminated Merker. On 4 April 1953 Jungmann became a confidential informant for the MfS, his assignment was given as 'Emigration'.<sup>135</sup> It is evident from his handler's file that his continued public 'disgrace' was to act as a cover story to enable him to infiltrate other disgruntled members of the western emigration and report back.<sup>136</sup> Insofar, one could perhaps plausibly suggest that he could have been coerced in or rewarded for his testimony; however, this simplifies the conflicting loyalties Jungmann appears to have had. As a former close collaborator of Merker's in Mexico, he appears to have subsequently changed his mind. Furthermore, in one of the final meetings with his handler before being decommissioned as an informant – largely as in the wake of the 'veränderte politische Lage' following the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU investigations into emigrés was reined back – Jungmann is reported as saying the following:

Er brachte zum Ausdruck, daß er im Prozeß Merker gegen diesen ausgesagt hätte, er auch trotz der veränderten Situation sich bewußt ist, daß er alles was er ausgesagt hat, auch heute noch verantworten kann. Er wird aber das Gefühl nicht los, daß ihn viele

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<sup>132</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, p.148.

<sup>133</sup> Untersuchungsausschuss Freiheitlicher Juristen, *SBZ-Biographie* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Frageb, 1964). This organisation was a CIA funded and directed organisation before being integrated into the Bundesministerium für Gesamtdeutsche Fragen. See: George Bailey, Sergej A. Kondraschew David E. Murphy, *Die Unsichtbare Front* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1997), p159; Karl Wilhelm Fricke and Roger Engelmann, *Konzentrierte Schläge* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998).

<sup>134</sup> 'JUNGMANN, ERICH' <<https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363%3B-1424.html?ID=1609>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

<sup>135</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS 5082/56, 'Anwerbungsbericht' 3 April 1953 , p.15.

<sup>136</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that Jungmann did not incriminate any of the people he reported on. See: Berlin, BStU, MfS 5082/56, vol. 2, 'Buchholz Bericht', p. 43.

Genossen meiden und er der Annahme ist, daß Merker mit diesen Leuten gesprochen hat und vielleicht seine Aussage vor Gericht anders ausgelegt hat.<sup>137</sup>

Equally, as in the case of Abusch his answers agree broadly with that of the other witnesses and were not specifically prompted by the interrogator.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, Jungmann is eager to state that he agreed with Merker's actions and attitudes during emigration and clearly relativises certain aspects. For instance, in response to a question contained in a long list provided by the MfS for him to answer after becoming an informant 'In welcher Verbindung stand Merker mit den Juden in Deutschland?', Jungmann answers the following: 'Mir ist darüber nichts bekannt. Merker sprach nicht darüber und von anderer Seite ist mir auch nichts bekannt.'<sup>139</sup> If, as Herf states, Jungmann was coerced to bear false witness concerning Merker and Jewish thematics, he appears to have done a fairly poor job of it. In any case, Jungmann is the only one of the five trial witnesses who could arguably be said to fit Herf's (potential) coercion profile.

The final witness testimony Herf mentions in this regard is that of Johann Schmidt (also known as László Radványi), Anna Seghers' husband. Schmidt arrived back in Germany comparatively late from Mexico, in summer 1952. Interestingly, the manner in which Herf portrays his testimony leaves the reader under the impression that Schmidt was merely replicating the 'already public accusation' against Merker in order to protect himself. The accusation is that Merker had blind faith in the imperialist states of the USA, France and England and that he possessed close ties to 'Jewish industrialists and big retailers... Merker regarded these wealthy Jews not as capitalists, that is as class enemies, but only as victims of fascism, and he used them as sources of money'.<sup>140</sup> This is, however, quite misleading as Herf cites Schmidt's testimony from May 1954 given to the MfS and ignores the fact that

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<sup>137</sup> See: Berlin, BStU, MfS 5082/56 'Reuscher Brief', p. 45.

<sup>138</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol 4, 'Vernehmung des Zeugen Erich Jungmann', p. 208.

<sup>139</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS 5086/56, vol 2, p. 113. It should be noted that this question was not put to Jungmann in any of his interrogations by the MfS and does not constitute part of Herf's evidence of antisemitic investigation as discussed above.

<sup>140</sup> Johann Schmidt in Herf, *Divided Memory*, p. 149.

Schmidt made the same claims in his debriefing reports to the ZPKK (he had remained in Mexico up to this point) in August 1952, before the MfS had even been tasked with opening investigations into Merker.<sup>141</sup> In particular, the allegation of self-preservation seems wide of the mark in Schmidt's case as well. In August 1952 he was given a professorship in 'Probleme des gegenwärtigen Imperialismus an der Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Humboldt Universität' and before his interview by the MfS in 1954 he had been promoted to 'Leiter im Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Institut der DAW'. Equally, the fact that his wife, Anna Seghers, was one of the most prestigious authors of the GDR and carried great weight with the SED at this time cannot be ignored.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, Schmidt and Seghers' critique of Merker appears to go back to their time in Mexico when according to Schmidt, Merker established a 'terroristisches Willkürsystem' within the KPD exile group.<sup>143</sup> Seghers and Schmidt's son, Pierre Radványi, describes an interesting episode of this in his memoirs, indicating how the initial fall out between the aforementioned Stibis, Seghers, Schmidt and Merker came about.

According to Radványi's account, following the surrender of the German Wehrmacht under General Paulus at Stalingrad and the much vaunted collaboration of former senior officers with the *Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland*, the emigrés split into two camps over whether collaboration with former Wehrmacht generals was permissible. The Stibis, Seghers, Schmidt (and Bauhaus architect Hannes Meyer) thought it was. Merker and his circle disagreed. The argument escalated and Merker removed Georg Stibi from all functions and all contact with him was forbidden for party members. A bizarre episode then occurred; Seghers was visiting the Stibis only to hear a knock on the door and find a business card

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<sup>141</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO DY 30/70994, vol 12, 'Untersuchungen der ZPKK über Verbindungen zu Noel H. Field (Leiter des Unitarian Service Committee)', pp. 259–266.

<sup>142</sup> The fact that the SED was particularly respectful of Seghers can be seen in the extraordinary discussions called at various times to address controversial topics with her and other leading authors, notably following the arrest of Janka and Harich in 1956. Seghers also attended the trial of Walter Janka in support of the accused as she was convinced of his innocence. She did not do the same for Merker.

<sup>143</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56 vol 3, p. 379. 'Interview of Johann Schmidt'.

printed with ‘Paul Merker, ehemaliger Abgeordneter des Preußischen Landtages’ and a handwritten addition ‘Anna, ich habe dich ertappt, du verkehrst mit Stibi!’<sup>144</sup> Shortly after, Merker threatened both Seghers and Radványi with expulsion from the party and forced Seghers from her political functions.<sup>145</sup>

Herf’s somewhat skewed portrayal of coerced witnesses stripped of ‘human solidarity’ is certainly called into question by this intriguing background. Particularly relevant is that he neglects to mention that Abusch, Jungmann, Katz, Stibi and Schmidt were all Jewish themselves, something which is quite revealing as Herf emphasises the Jewish identity of protagonists in other areas of his interpretation.<sup>146</sup> It is a particularly important nuance that the Jewish thematic, contrary to Herf’s premise, was introduced almost entirely by Jews who had been in Mexico with Merker themselves, predating even the Field affair in the case of Stibi and in Schmidt’s case before the Slansky trial and the subsequent investigation by the MfS. It indicates that the postulation of an MfS targeted witch hunt against Jewish communists through the vessel of Merker is frankly a distortion as it appears to have been Jewish communists who incriminated the non-Jewish Merker. The work of Herf is foundational in terms of post-1990 interpretation of the Merker affair and is generally accepted uncritically within state-mandated, and indeed academic, discourse. It is therefore worth remembering that one of Herf’s integral premises – an investigation motivated by antisemitism on the part of the MfS – is not evidenced sufficiently and appears misleading in its exposition.

Some commentators view the reported use of an antisemitic slur as evidence in chief of an antisemitic investigation, for example from the BStU’s article: ‘von seinen Vernehmern

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<sup>144</sup> Pierre Radványi, *Jenseits des Stroms: Erinnerungen an meine Mutter Anna Seghers* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2006), pp. 95–96.

<sup>145</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56 vol 3, p. 379. ‘Interview of Johann Schmidt’.

<sup>146</sup> e.g. Herf, *Divided Memory*, p. 162.

war Merker als “Judenknecht” beschimpft worden’.<sup>147</sup> Merker’s reporting of antisemitic insults during interrogation was first highlighted by Wolfgang Kießling in 1993, but appears to have been popularised by Herf.<sup>148</sup> These reports are recorded in Merker’s conversations with his cellmate, who was an MfS informant named Erwin Bruhn. Bruhn would write these down from memory every few days or so under the pretence that he had been taken out for questioning. The passage in question is as follows:

Heute wurde mir vorgeworfen ich sei ein Judenknecht weil ich 1942 einen illegalen Artikel gegen den Antisemitismus geschrieben und verbreitet habe. In diesem Artikel verlangte ich die Wiedergutmachung für alle Schäden die den Juden verursacht wurden. Ich habe es für alle Juden verlangt, dabei aber nicht für Rothschild u. die Kapitalisten gemeint. Ausserdem war es 1943 und es gab noch keine DDR das man heute sagt ich bin für die Wiedergutmachung von Schäden an Kapitalisten. Ich bin ausserdem auch verantwortlich das der Faschismus in Deutschland zur Macht kam, so sagte mein Vernehmer wörtlich zu mir. Heute wußte ich aus diese Hassbeleidigungen keine Antwort. Man will mich dadurch scheinbar zu Unbesonnenheiten reizen. Ich falle aber darauf nicht rein.<sup>149</sup>

This slur is clearly unacceptable and conjures an image typical of antisemitic canards of conspiracy or control. However, as Merker also clearly states, the use of insults appears to have been aimed at provoking Merker into ‘Unbesonnenheiten’, a tactic not entirely unbeknown to law enforcement the world over and certainly *de rigueur* in the methodology of the MfS in the early 1950s. Equally, the BStU’s article states ‘Merker ahnte, dass sein Zellengenosse für das MfS arbeitete. Trotzdem sprach er sehr offen mit ihm, wohl um auf diese Weise auf einer

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<sup>147</sup> BStU, *Vom Spitzenkader zum ‘imperialistischen Agenten’*. This phrase comes from the ‘Kammeragent’ reports of Merker’s cellmate, who was in fact a young undercover MfS officer. Their accuracy cannot be fully guaranteed as they were often recorded from memory days after events but they are generally believed to give an accurate portrayal of the content if not the exact detail of conversations with Merker. See: Kießling, *Partner im ‘Narrenparadies’*, p. 279.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 304, 323.

<sup>149</sup> Orthography true to the original transcript.



zweiten Ebene mit seinen Peinigern zu kommunizieren'. Does this perhaps indicate that Merker was knowingly seeking to communicate with others who might have cause to read these reports and potentially delegitimise the investigation against him? After all, use of such antisemitic language was already against the law in the GDR at this time and strictly enforced.<sup>150</sup> Equally, accusing a then member of the Central Committee of the KPD of having caused fascism might have ruffled some feathers within the MfS. In any case, while this language indicates potential antisemitic prejudice or at least thought patterns on the part of this individual interrogator, as we have seen above it cannot be said to demonstrate that the investigation as a whole or indeed alleged show trial concept was motivated by antisemitism on the part of the MfS or by extension the SED. Furthermore, as Kießling notes, no other such antisemitic language was used after March 1953, when the Soviet interrogators stopped coming to the interrogations, some two years before Merker's trial.<sup>151</sup> This is a nuance which is often lacking from accounts of the Merker trial.

Overall and somewhat disappointingly, the BStU's in-depth article on Paul Merker appears to accept uncritically the narratives established by Herf and does little to nuance the seemingly erroneous and often one-sided interpretation of the documents contained in their holdings. The presentation of original documents as part of the article and stated educational and research ambitions of the BStU indicate that this could have been possible. This suggests that either the state-mandated memorial institution has not actually conducted research into the Merker affair utilising its own vast resources – instead disseminating established versions of this history – or the BStU has utilised a similarly selective methodology in order to support a pre-determined thesis. The question of whether the GDR pursued an antisemitic investigation

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<sup>150</sup> As demonstrated by contemporaneous cases in Magdeburg, Gera and Frankfurt (Oder) in which strict sentencing was handed down against several people for 'antisemitische Hetzparolen' and 'Verleumdungen über jüdische Mitbürger'. [n.a.], 'Gerechte Strafe für antisemitische Hetze', *Neues Deutschland*, 29 September 1953. Equivalent hate speech legislation would not be adapted in Western countries for decades.

<sup>151</sup> Kießling, *Partner im 'Narrenparadies'*, p. 323.

via the MfS is evidently more complicated than the BStU's article suggests, but allegations of antisemitism remain nevertheless constant. The following looks at how these have been constructed within other state-mandated memory discourse.

### Merker and the Discourse of Antisemitism in State-mandated Representations

The Merker affair appears to be a recurrent *topos* within various state-mandated arenas in which antisemitism is discussed. I will now trace discussion of Merker in these memorial and educational activities, including how the affair is presented and in which discursive context it is presented.

A dossier compiled in 2006 and featured on the home page of the BpB's *Politik* portal features a series of articles under the rubric of 'Antisemitismus'. This is where we first meet Paul Merker in the work of the BpB.<sup>152</sup> The article's author is Thomas Haury, a commentator who has specialised in the subject of alleged antisemitism on the political left and particularly in the former GDR.<sup>153</sup> Haury sets the scene for Merker's entrance to his narrative with the Stalinist antisemitic show trial thesis: 'Ende 1952 nahmen diese Säuberungsprozesse eine offen antisemitische Wendung. In Prag wurden in einem Schauprozess der ehemalige KP-Generalsekretär Rudolf Slánský und zehn weitere Angeklagte, nahezu alle jüdischer Herkunft, wegen "zionistisch-imperialistischer Agententätigkeit" zum Tode verurteilt.'<sup>154</sup> This portrayal of the Slansky trial is problematic as firstly it gives the wrong number of defendants – there were fourteen in total, eleven of whom were of a Jewish background – but

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus in der DDR* (2006) <<http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/antisemitismus/37957/antisemitismus-in-der-ddr?p=all>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

<sup>153</sup> Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus von links. Kommunistische Ideologie, Nationalismus und Antizionismus in der frühen DDR* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002).

<sup>154</sup> Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus in der DDR*.

more importantly it also leads the reader to conclude that the predominantly Jewish victims of the trial were targeted for holding Zionist views, although as discussed previously in this chapter, this is something of a simplification.

Haury links the Stalinist show trial narrative to the GDR through the figure of Paul Merker: ‘Auch in der DDR hob eine antisemitische Propagandawelle an. Paul Merker, bis 1950 Mitglied in Politbüro und Zentralkomitee der SED, und andere hochrangige Parteifunktionäre wurden beschuldigt,<sup>155</sup> jahrelang als ‘zionistische Agenten’ an der ‘Ausplünderung Deutschlands’ und der ‘Verschiebung von deutschem Volksvermögen’ zugunsten amerikanischer und “jüdischer Monopolkapitalisten” gearbeitet zu haben.’

The manner in which Haury reconstructs these quotes creates the impression that Merker was accused in the first instance of being a ‘Zionist agent’ and not as is more frequently the case in the article he is quoting (and in general) as an American or imperialist agent.<sup>156</sup> An important nuance, as frequently the relationship between Zionism and American imperialism is described as replicating the logic of a Jewish conspiracy of global control. However, in state-socialist rhetoric of this time, Zionism was perceived as a bourgeois-nationalist ideology<sup>157</sup> – at odds with the interests of the majority of the world’s Jews – and Zionist organisations as providing potential networks of pro-western agents within the Eastern Bloc.<sup>158</sup> It is worth noting out that the latter point was not as wide of the mark as many might think. The famous Israeli intelligence and security agency Mossad has its origin in covert Zionist networks in Eastern Europe set up to assist Jewish Europeans to emigrate illegally up to 1948 and there is no indication that these networks and efforts had ceased to exist by

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<sup>155</sup> It is difficult to think who Haury means by other ‘hochrangige Parteifunktionäre’ as no others are mentioned as agents in the ZK’s *Lehren* article, from which Haury appears to take the subsequent quotes. This difficulty is further complicated by the fact that Haury does not provide citations for his article other than a three line bibliography. See: Zentralkomitee der SED, ‘Lehren aus dem Prozeß gegen das Verschwörerzentrum Slansky’, *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1953.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus in der DDR*.

<sup>157</sup> This interpretation is certainly not limited to 1950s state-socialists. Jewish British historian Eric Hobsbawm’s seminal book on the roots of nationalism in Europe argues similarly, as does Israeli academic Ilan Pappé. See: Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge*.

<sup>158</sup> For example: Georg Krausz, ‘Die zionistische Agentur des USA-Imperialismus’, *Neues Deutschland*, 6 December 1952.

1952/3.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, it has even been suggested that a major factor in co-operation between the FRG and Israel's intelligence services in the 1950s was the latter's superior network of agents in Eastern Europe.<sup>160</sup> The mere concept of 'Zionist agents' working in American interests is treated by commentators such as Haury or Herf as evidence of an antisemitic attitude, despite the fact that this concept is uncontroversial when advanced by non-communist authors and in pro-Zionist accounts.<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore, Haury's decontextualised quotes seem to relate 'Zionism' and Jewish 'Monopolkapitalisten' with an 'Ausplünderung' of the German people, which certainly would appear to echo fascist rhetoric. However, on closer inspection, the *Lehren* article is clearly talking about an argument Merker made in favour of the internationalisation of German resources which, the article claims, makes him an ideological ally of Adenauer, Ollenhauer and American imperialism.<sup>162</sup> This allegation against Merker is not associated with Zionism or Jewish monopoly-capitalists either explicitly or implicitly.

This does not dissuade Haury in his line of interpretation:

Der Hintergrund dieser Anschuldigungen ist bezeichnend: Merker, tief betroffen vom Schicksal der Juden, hatte sich als einziges Mitglied des Politbüros und des Zentralkomitees für die Gründung eines jüdischen Nationalstaates, die Rückerstattung

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<sup>159</sup> The illegality was both due to the British embargo on immigration to Mandate Palestine and due to restrictions in the European states on emigration, although there were exceptions such as Poland. The GDR made decisions on a case by case basis. The Jewish Agency describes Mossad's networks at this time as follows: 'Their contacts and sheer organizational magnitude were tremendous.' See: *The Jewish Agency for Israel*, 'Early Operations of Israeli Intelligence' (2005) <<http://www.jewishagency.org/secret-service/content/25347>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

<sup>160</sup> Shlomo Shpiro, 'Shadowy Interests. West German-Israeli Intelligence and Military Co-operation, 1957-1982', in *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies*, ed. by Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 169–188 (p. 172).

<sup>161</sup> For example: Tad Szulc, *The Secret Alliance* (London: Pan Books, 1992); James Srodes, *Allen Dulles Master of Spies*, p. 219. Srodes even talks of 'OSS-Zionist co-operation' before the founding of Israel.

<sup>162</sup> 'Die prinzipielle Grundlage für die Außenpolitik einer kommenden deutschen Demokratie besteht deshalb in dem freiwilligen Verzicht auf den egoistisch-nationalistischen Standpunkt, daß die in deutscher Erde lagernden Rohstoffe und die in Deutschland vorhandenen Industrien ausschließlich dem deutschen Volke gehören. Sie muß vielmehr dahin wirken, daß im Interesse des Wiederaufstieges Europas und des Wohlstandes seiner Einwohner alle Nachbarvölker an der gemeinsamen Ausnützung der deutschen Kohle, des deutschen Stickstoffs, der deutschen Chemie und Technik gleichberechtigt teilnehmen können.' See: Hermann Matern, 'Über die Durchführung des Beschlusses des ZK der SED "Lehren aus dem Prozeß gegen das Verschwörerzentrum Slansky"', in *Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Berlin: Dietz, 1954), pp. 199–219. Konrad Adenauer was of course the CDU Chancellor of the FRG at this time and Erich Ollenhauer was the chairman of the SPD.

‘arisierten’ Eigentums sowie Entschädigungszahlungen ausgesprochen. Eben dies wurde nun von der SED als Ausplünderung des ‘schaffenden deutschen Volkes’ zugunsten ‘jüdischer Monopolkapitalisten’ verfolgt.<sup>163</sup>

It is clear that Haury seeks to portray Merker as being victimised solely for being philosemitic, Zionist and supporting the compensation of Jewish victims of fascism. This is very much within the framework of Herf’s cosmopolitanism which will be discussed in more detail below. The context of the Noel Field affair is not mentioned, nor are any of the other, arguably more prominent accusations against Merker, for instance that he sought to enable Field to become embedded in the GDR or that he worked with French intelligence agencies. Furthermore, the strictly anticapitalist tenor of the SED’s position on restitution of capitalist property is ignored and the Jewish architects of this policy<sup>164</sup> are left unrepresented. This leads to a fairly clear picture – the GDR was antisemitic and the Merker affair is exemplary of this fact.

The importance of this to state-mandated political memory can be deduced by its framing. The dossier in which this article appears is introduced as follows: ‘Im Alltag äußert sich ein neuer Antisemitismus, oft verpackt als ‘Antizionismus’ oder als Wunsch, ‘mit der Vergangenheit abzuschließen.’<sup>165</sup> The reader learns that the dossier aims to provide ‘Einblicke in die Geschichte und Gegenwart des Antisemitismus. Es untersucht seine Wandlungen und hilft, ihn zu entlarven’. Interestingly, given this emphasis on the history of antisemitism and potential links to contemporary prejudice, the subject of historical German fascism and the Judeocide is limited to a subsection of an article entitled ‘Antisemitismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert’, the relative brevity of which (some 480 words) and lack of detail is

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<sup>163</sup> Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus in der DDR*.

<sup>164</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol 2, pp. 241–243. ‘Letter from Götz Berger to Hermann Matern concerning the Wiedergutmachung debates within the VVN during the 1940s’; Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 196/52, vol 1, p. 48–49, ‘Betr. Paul Merker’. Report from Bruno Haid regarding complaints he made against Paul Merker regarding the Jewish compensation question and the related thematic complex.

<sup>165</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Antisemitismus* (2007)

<<http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/41812/antisemitismus>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

thrown into sharp relief by the fact that three of the eight main articles deal with perceived left wing antisemitism (some 4200 words). To put that in context, a mere two articles deal with right wing extremism and the subject of antisemitism in the pre-unification FRG is passed over in silence.<sup>166</sup> In contrast, Haury's subject, 'Antisemitismus in der DDR', is a standalone article which leaves no doubt as to its polemic approach with its pugnacious opening: 'Die DDR verstand und präsentierte sich zeitlebens als genuin 'antifaschistischer' Staat. Doch Selbstbild und Selbstdarstellung entsprachen keineswegs der Realität.'<sup>167</sup> The framing of the article with a large picture displaying the Palast der Republik – a prominent symbol of the GDR – in foreboding gloom reinforces the negative overtones and suggests a causal link between the governance of the GDR and the subject matter of the article – antisemitism.

In 2007, Heike Radvan would pen another educational contribution, this time on 'Antisemitismus in den neuen Bundesländern'.<sup>168</sup> Interestingly, the article is framed with the exact same picture of the *Palast der Republik* as Haury's. The message is even clearer now – the GDR is responsible for antisemitism in its former territory since unification. Merker is also a key reference in Radvan's exegesis:

Die Gesellschaftsanalyse in der DDR war von einer personalisierten Kapitalismuskritik geprägt, die in ihrer Rhetorik durchaus antisemitische Elemente aufwies. In der Rede von "Agenten des US-Imperialismus", wurde Israel als "kapitalistischer Vorposten der USA" bezeichnet, Jüdinnen und Juden wurden oft als "Kosmopoliten" betrachtet, die es im Rahmen der spätstalinistischen Kampagnen gegen "Zionismus und Kosmopolitismus" zu bekämpfen galt [...] Auch in der DDR

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Haury, *Antisemitismus in der DDR*.

<sup>168</sup> Heike Radvan, *Antisemitismus in den neuen Bundesländern* (2007) <<http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/41827/antisemitismus-in-den-neuen-bundeslaendern>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

waren die in dieser Zeit stattfindenden Parteiausschlussverfahren und politischen Prozesse von Antisemitismus begleitet. Exemplarisch sei der Prozess gegen Paul Merker genannt, einem ehemaligen Mitglied des Zentralkomitees der SED, der sich für Entschädigungszahlungen an jüdische Opfer einsetzte. In antisemitischen Diffamierungen wurde er als “König der Juden”, als “Subjekt der USA-Finanzoligarchie” und “als Feind seines eigenen Volkes entlarvt” und zu acht Jahren Zuchthaus verurteilt.<sup>169</sup>

Similar to Haury’s portrayal, quotes are taken out of context and lead to some frankly inaccurate conclusions. For instance, Radvan implies that Merker was defamed as ‘König der Juden’ during his trial or other public forum. If such crass and antisemitic language had been used in a public forum such as *Neues Deutschland* or the courts of the GDR— as Radvan implies – it would certainly indicate antisemitic overtones to the SED’s policy and evidence the thesis of antisemitism being either acceptable or even promoted in the GDR. However, this is not the case. Furthermore, Radvan repeats the premise that Merker was targeted solely for his views on Jews, creating the impression that philosemitism was in some way in opposition to the SED generally, which of course raises the corollary that the SED was antisemitic. This is made all the more inflammatory as Radvan is attempting to prove the thesis that ‘aktueller Antisemitismus’ in the new *Bundesländer* is causally linked to the SED’s antisemitism.<sup>170</sup> Awkward questions regarding nationalism and the role it played in the *Wende* and unification process, as well as economic issues and how they have impacted on the rise of right-wing extremism in the former GDR are left untouched due to this skewed approach. The fact that this is a view put forward in a state-mandated pedagogical setting opens the BpB up to allegations of avoiding uncomfortable issues and seeking to present the GDR as a scapegoat. This is emphasised still further by the fact that the article appears in a

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<sup>169</sup> Radvan, *Antisemitismus in den neuen Bundesländern*.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

dossier dealing with ‘Rechtsextremismus’ in a section entitled ‘Was ist Rechtsextremismus?’ A young reader from the east of Germany today would struggle to understand the causes of right-wing extremism in their local area from this contribution as anything other than the GDR and its ‘vehementer Antizionismus’.<sup>171</sup>

Both Radvan and Haury’s contributions showcase a propensity to equate post-unification antisemitism with the GDR and to introduce Paul Merker as a key *topos* within these narrative constructions. This clearly leaves the realm of historical investigation of the past and enters into one of political discourse with implicit overtones of blame and ultimately (de-)legitimation. This will be discussed in more detail below.

Another institution of note for this discussion is the *Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*.<sup>172</sup> Of particular relevance to this thesis is the AAS’ 2008 project ‘*Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben!*’ – *Antisemitismus in der DDR*, funded by the *Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend*, the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* and the *Bundesministerium des Innern*. The project entails a travelling exhibition which was showcased in over 50 locations throughout Germany between 2008 and 2015 as well as a publication funded solely by the *Bundesministerium des Innern*.<sup>173</sup> The project can reasonably be considered a state-mandated enterprise and due to its wide-ranging reach is worthy of special attention.

The exhibition consists of 30 panels covering a range of topics surrounding the thematic complex of the GDR, Judeocide and antisemitism. We first meet Paul Merker within the exhibition in a section dedicated to the ‘Antisemitische Verfolgungswelle in den 1950er

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<sup>171</sup> The shifting of blame on to the political left is particularly blatant in some statements, for instance: ‘Gleichzeitig greifen die Rechtsextremen mittlerweile auch immer stärker globalisierungskritische, amerika- und israelfeindliche, antikapitalistische Diskurse auf und nähern sich in ihrer Symbolik und ihren Leitfiguren stark denen der Linken an. Besonders deutlich ist dies an der Veränderung des Dresscodes in weiten Teilen der rechtsextremen Szene abzulesen.’ See: Radvan, *Antisemitismus in den neuen Bundesländern*.

<sup>172</sup> The AAS was founded, primarily on the initiative of Anetta Kahane, in 1998. Kahane is a former GDR Latin American academic and was also an MfS informer for several years. However, in the mid-1980s she broke with the SED and became involved in oppositional circles. See: Anette Kahane, *Ich sehe was, was du nicht siehst. Meine deutschen Geschichten* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2004). The reader may remember Kahane co-authored an article which disseminates the Merker and antisemitic GDR narrative. See: Goldenbogen and Kahane, ‘War die DDR ein antisemitischer Staat?’.

<sup>173</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, ‘*Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben*’ *Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung* (Berlin: Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2010).



Jahren'. The first text panel in this section sets the tone by reproducing the narrative of Stalin personally increasing repression in order to secure the rule of the CPSU in the satellite parties of Eastern Europe.<sup>174</sup> The Rajk and Kostoff trials are dismissed as public show trials to this end and Noel Field is presented as an entirely concocted 'Schlüssselfigur' for these and later show trials, including Merker's.<sup>175</sup> Field is presented as having merely worked for an American aid organisation and as being arrested, without mention of why or how, in Prague before being tortured into confessing to being an American agent. This simplified narrative seems to imply that Field was interrogated in Prague and not Budapest. In any case, there is no room given to other interpretations such as those outlined in section above. The narrative continues by incorporating more specific accusations of antisemitism. Firstly, the secret trial against members of the Jewish Antifascist Committee (hereafter JAK) on charges of espionage for America is presented as a turning point in the 'Verfolgungswelle':

Ab jetzt kamen in den Säuberungsprozessen gegen "imperialistische Agenten" die Anklagepunkte des "Kosmopolitismus" und "Zionismus" hinzu; immer häufiger wurden jüdische KP-Funktionäre verhaftet und angeklagt. Ihre jüdische Herkunft wurde in den Medien des Ostblocks mit antisemitischen Zuschreibungen verbunden.<sup>176</sup>

There are several issues in this narrative which are worthy of consideration. Firstly, the trial against the JAK fits awkwardly in a narrative of public antisemitic show trials beginning in 1952 as those involved were arrested in late 1948 and the trial, although it did take place in August 1952, was held in secret. Whether the trial itself had antisemitic motivations is not the subject of this discussion as it would require an archaeological approach at least as detailed as

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p .68.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

this treatment of the Merker affair.<sup>177</sup> However, the point remains that knowledge of this event, even within the upper echelons of the SED and other communist parties would have been sporadic at most (no mention of it is made in any of the party or MfS files relating to Merker or Slansky) and that there was certainly no *public* reception of the trial. Secondly, the Rajk trial defendants had been almost universally Jewish (as were their accusers and the majority of the Hungarian Communist Party's top cadre), however, the trial took place some three years previously and was not accompanied by any overt thematisation of their Jewishness or Zionism. Indeed, none of the accused were Zionists. This nuances the issue of ethnic or religious background and raises questions about why so much is read into the Slansky defendants' backgrounds but not, as a rule, into that of the Hungarians in both contemporary and post-Cold War discourse?

Indeed, the allegation that the Jewish heritage of arrested functionaries – even in the Slansky trial – was accompanied by antisemitic ascriptions in the GDR is far from accurate. The Jewish heritage of arrested functionaries, particularly in the case of the GDR, was to all intents and purposes not thematised in the press.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, during the highpoint of the alleged antisemitic campaign, late 1952 until mid-1953, there were several articles in the GDR press from the likes of Stephan Hermlin, Klement Gottwald and Victor Stern decrying allegations of antisemitism (pertaining to the Slansky trial) and seeking specifically to differentiate between antisemitism and anti-Zionism.<sup>179</sup> This was not just the prerogative of convinced communists. Heinz Galinski, the head of the West Berlin Jewish community, was keen to stress that the trials in the eastern bloc had nothing to do with the racial persecution of

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<sup>177</sup> Although, it should be pointed out that the anti-Zionist turn in Soviet politics had not yet occurred at the time of these arrests in 1948. It is usually located during 1949 at the earliest.

<sup>178</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, 'Das ZK der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands zur Verbindung von Funktionären der SED mit amerikanischen Agenten', *Neues Deutschland*, 1 September 1950; Zentralkomitee der SED, 'Lehren aus dem Prozeß gegen das Verschwörerzentrum Slansky', *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1953.

<sup>179</sup> Klement Gottwald, 'Lehren des Slansky-Prozesses: Aus der Rede des Genossen Klement Gottwald auf der Parteikonferenz der Kommunistischen Partei der Tschechoslowakei', *Neues Deutschland*, 18 December 1952; Stephan Hermlin, 'Brot und Rosen', *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1953; Victor Stern, 'Den Zionismus entschieden bekämpfen!', *Neues Deutschland*, 10 February 1953.

the German fascists and were exclusively of a political motivation.<sup>180</sup> At the same time, public agitation by the SED against antisemitism in America and the FRG was widespread.<sup>181</sup> While this is often dismissed by scholars as instrumentalised antifascism, it is nevertheless difficult to deny that such discourse has at least a secondary normative effect in that it vilifies antisemitism and presents the GDR and its population in opposition to the phenomenon. The implication therefore that antisemitism was acceptable, or even promoted, in the press of the GDR appears to be at best lacking context and at worst misleading.

The text panel concludes by introducing the trope of a planned anti-Jewish show trial at the behest of Stalin: ‘Ein bereits in Vorbereitung befindlicher antijüdischer Schauprozess in der DDR wurde wohl nur durch den Tod Stalins im März 1953 verhindert. Trotzdem werden noch einige der Verhafteten in Geheimprozessen zu mehrjährigen Gefängnisstrafen abgeurteilt.’<sup>182</sup> As previously discussed, this trope, although well-established, is not as definitive as the exhibition suggests. Despite this, Merker is portrayed as the first of the *Verhafteten*.

A picture of Paul Merker is introduced underneath the subtitle ‘Alle Juden in der Sowjetzone befürchten eine Wiederholung der Pogrome von 1938’. This inflammatory and unreferenced quotation<sup>183</sup> is indicative of the role that Merker is ascribed within this exhibition. Merker serves as the main victim of the alleged ‘antisemitische Verfolgungswelle’ – Herf’s *Martyr*. The accompanying biographical information establishes Merker’s

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<sup>180</sup> Heinz Galinski, *Der Weg – Berliner Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland*, 23 January 1953.

<sup>181</sup> Just a few examples: Howard Fast, ‘Ethel und Julius Rosenberg in höchster Gefahr!’, *Neues Deutschland*, 23 November 1952; [n.a.] ‘Neue Niederlage der Rassen- und Kriegshetzer’, *Neues Deutschland*, 28 November 1952; [n.a.] ‘Antisemitische Pogromhetze in den USA’, *Neues Deutschland*, 29 November 1952; Stephan Hermlin, ‘Brot und Rosen’, *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1953.

<sup>182</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, ‘*Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben*’ *Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*, p. 69.

<sup>183</sup> An eagle eyed observer might notice that it is taken from an interview featured in a previous panel with Julius Meyer, the former head of the Jüdisches Gemeinde in West Berlin after leaving the GDR.

credentials as an antifascist (presumably the genuine kind) and the only western emigrant to be elected to the Politbüro.<sup>184</sup> The exhibition summarises his trial thus:

Nach Beginn des Slansky-Prozesses wurde er Ende November 1952 verhaftet und 1955 in einem Geheimprozess unter anderem wegen Unterstützung der jüdischen Wiedergutmachungsforderungen zu acht Jahren Zuchthaus verurteilt. Merker wurde 1956 wieder entlassen, bis zu seinem Tod 1969 wurde ihm die Rehabilitierung verweigert.<sup>185</sup>

Merker's trial is clearly presented in association with the Slansky trial, which on the neighbouring panel is reinforced as an 'antisemitisch[er] Schauprozess' and a 'Theaterstück'. Thanks to this association, Merker's *Geheimprozess* appears to have been part of this show trial campaign, the reason is clearly stated – his support for Jewish reparations. The wording implies that Merker made himself guilty by opposing the SED and advocating *general* restitution to Jewish victims of fascism. However, this is a simplification of the complex reparations debate in the GDR<sup>186</sup> and misleading in terms of the wording and spirit of the *Anklage* against Merker, the *Urteil* and even of the *Lehren* article in *Neues Deutschland*. Much as in the BpB articles discussed above, the specific anti-capitalist position of the SED in the debate is ignored and instead by implication the SED is impugned as opposing all reparations for Jewish victims. As the reasons why the SED struggled with the concept of Jewish reparations is never discussed, a void is left for the visitor to fill in, which arguably promotes the notion that if one does not support Jewish reparations in the form of payments

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<sup>184</sup> This is not entirely accurate, Anton Ackermann and Hermann Matern – who would later be the head of the ZPKK and author of the *Lehren des Slansky Prozess* – were both elected to the Parteivorstand or Politbüro at the same time as Merker and had both been in western European exile until 1941. Franz Dahlem was also in the same French internment camp as Merker and was also considered to be a *Westemigrant*.

<sup>185</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 'Das hat's bei uns nicht gegeben' *Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*, p. 71.

<sup>186</sup> See Angelika Timm, *Alles umsonst? Verhandlungen zwischen der Claims Conference und der DDR über 'Wiedergutmachung' und Entschädigung* (Berlin: Hefte zur DDR Geschichte, 1996).

to Israel, one must be antisemitic. This subject is discussed in more detail in a later section of the chapter.

Within this section, we find an enlarged print of an original communique taken from the MfS's files on Merker dating from shortly after his initial arrest. The accompanying description interprets this communique in a fairly unique manner, which seeks to evidence the claim of an antisemitically motivated investigation as discussed above:

Zur Vorbereitung eines Schauprozesses mit Paul Merker als Hauptangeklagten sollte dessen vermutete jüdische Herkunft bewiesen werden [...] Weil dies nicht der Fall war, mutmaßte man als seine 'Auftraggeber' ausländische Juden. Im kurz zuvor in Prag abgeschlossenen antisemitischen Slansky-Prozess war die jüdische Herkunft der Angeklagten mehrmals besonders hervorgehoben worden.

The communique itself relates to an enquiry by the MfS to Hermann Matern, head of the ZPKK and is reproduced here in full:

Der Gen. Matern bezweifelt, daß Paul Merker Jude ist. Nach seiner Auffassung wäre es wichtig, festzustellen welche Gründe Paul Merker veranlaßte, bevorzugte Stellung der jüdischen Emigranten und Bevölkerung zu fordern und ihren Eintritt in die jüdische Gemeinde zu fördern. Zu untersuchen wäre, ob die Stellungnahme Merkers zu obigen Punkten Resultat eigener Überlegung ist oder ob Merker durch ihn bekannte Personen beeinflusst wurde.<sup>187</sup>

The aforementioned interpretation appears to be based on the mere fact that an enquiry as to Merker's background was made. Given that one of the accusations laid against Merker was that he was an advocate of Jewish restitution in order to camouflage support for the infiltration of the GDR's economy by wealthy Americans, this seems a not entirely unexpected question to ask. Whether this indicates that the MfS believed Merker to be Jewish or that this was the

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<sup>187</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 'Das hat's bei uns nicht gegeben' Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, p. 71.

suggested construct for a show trial however, is an entirely different matter. Indeed, the communique seems to suggest the opposite as Matern had authored the *Lehren des Slankys Prozesses*, often viewed as the opening salvo by advocates of the antisemitic show trial thesis, yet did not suggest Merker was Jewish either in the article or here when asked by the MfS. Furthermore, as head of the ZPKK – which was heavily involved in the Merker investigation – Matern had a great deal of influence and yet he suggests a line of enquiry which does not exclude the possibility that Merker’s *Stellungnahme* was ‘Resultat eigener Überlegung’. Further, the proposed alternative’s formulation of ‘die ihm bekannte Personen’ who could have influenced Merker’s views does not exactly equate to the exhibition’s description of ‘ausländische jüdische Auftraggeber’.<sup>188</sup> While the concept of an antisemitically motivated show trial construct cannot be proven or dismissed on the basis of this communique, the interpretation offered in the exhibition is certainly something of an exaggeration. This is significant as the communique is presented as prime evidence of a planned antisemitic trial in the GDR. The impression for an uninitiated visitor must surely be that the files of the BStU have definitively revealed that such a trial was indeed planned and therefore official antisemitism existed at the heart of the self-proclaimed antifascist state.

This raises the question of the motivations behind the exhibition more generally. The AAS claim the project was conceived in order to spark a debate about antisemitism in the GDR.<sup>189</sup> However, in the very next sentence the limits of this debate are clearly set out: ‘Im Gegensatz zum Mythos vom Antifaschismus in der DDR gab es auch Antisemitismus von staatlicher Seite.’ Furthermore, while the project is advertised as the work of some 76 local young people from various regions of the former GDR,<sup>190</sup> on closer inspection it appears that

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>189</sup> Antonio Amadeu Stiftung, ‘Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben!’ – Ausstellung zu Antisemitismus in der DDR <<http://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/die-stiftung-aktiv/themen/gegen-as/was-tut-die-stiftung/as-ddr/>> [accessed 20 December 2018]

<sup>190</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, ‘Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben!’ – Antisemitismus in der DDR Eine Ausstellung [flyer] (2010) <[https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/w/files/pdfs/flyer\\_antisemitismus\\_ddr.pdf](https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/w/files/pdfs/flyer_antisemitismus_ddr.pdf)> [accessed 20 December 2018]

a *Redaktion* of AAS associates and a *wissenschaftlicher Beirat* were responsible for producing the finished exhibition.<sup>191</sup> In particular, Thomas Haury – who as discussed above has worked for the BpB on the subject of antisemitism in the GDR – is named as the responsible party for the *Überarbeitung* of the exhibition.<sup>192</sup> This is particularly of relevance as the presentation of the exhibition as a sort of grassroots school project intended to illuminate as part of a democratic debate is not borne out in the execution. The state’s role in financing the project and utilising established state-mandated commentators is obscured by this claim. Indeed, one finds the almost wholesale reproduction of the predominant narratives in other state-mandated portrayals.

This holds true for the accompanying publication as well. Published in 2010 as a sort of ‘Zwischenbericht’ and reaction to the criticism the organisers had encountered, described as the ‘Skepsis, Infragestellung oder Abwehr, mit der alle Beteiligten in der Projektvorbereitung und -durchführung häufig konfrontiert waren’.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, the exhibition appears to have been received quite negatively by many visitors. According to an analysis of the guest book entries and media coverage, some 30% of entries were strongly critical.<sup>194</sup> In response, the *Begleitbuch* seeks to address certain ‘Leerstellen’.<sup>195</sup> In this section, we find Paul Merker again taking up a crucial role as the focal point of the GDR’s alleged antisemitism:

Wie die Parteiführung der SED Verdächtigungen wegen angeblicher amerikanischer Spionagetätigkeit und antisemitische Ressentiments miteinander verknüpfte, lässt sich

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.: *Redaktion*: Anetta Kahane, Bettina Leder, Heike Radvan, Katharina Stengel, Frank Sobich. *Wissenschaftlicher Beirat*: Lothar Mertens, Peter Fischer, Hermann Simon, Thomas Haury.

<sup>192</sup> Haury is one of the most strident proponents of the antisemitic GDR thesis. See: Haury, *Antisemitismus von Links – Kommunistische Ideologie, Nationalismus und Antizionismus in der frühen DDR*.

<sup>193</sup> Heike Radvan, “‘Mein Großvater hat gesagt, da lernst Du Sachen, die es gar nicht gab’” Lokalhistorische Recherchen zum Antisemitismus – Pädagogische Überlegungen’, in ‘*Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben*’ *Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*, ed. by Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, pp.11–14.

<sup>194</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, *Auswertung der Gästebucheinträge zur Ausstellung* (2010) < <https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/aktuelles/debatte-um-ausstellung-antisemitismus-ddr/> > [accessed 20 December 2018].

<sup>195</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, *Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben*’ *Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*, p. 5.

sehr gut am Beispiel Paul Merkers nachzeichnen, gegen den ein Schauprozess geplant und vorbereitet wurde.<sup>196</sup>

This contribution from Martin Jander goes on to reproduce the narratives emanating from historians Kießling and Herf, the emphasis on Merker as the ‘wohl bedeutenste Initiator eines Wiedergutmachungsgesetzes in der DDR’ and statements such as that his accusers presented him as representing the interests of ‘reicher kapitalistischer Juden’ serve to cement the impression that Merker was solely targeted due to antisemitic prejudice.<sup>197</sup> The content of the investigation is not discussed.

Jander formulates a key theme of the AAS’ interpretation of an antisemitic campaign of the 1950s – with Merker at the centre – as aimed at destroying the solidarity between the different groups persecuted by German fascism. Jander explains that this solidarity no longer worked in the Cold War context and so the communists of the GDR saw America, the western democracies and Israel now as their primary enemies. In order to pursue this *Feindbild* Jander claims a ‘nur dürftig antikapitalistisch verbrämter Antisemitismus’ was mobilised. Furthermore, he claims that ‘Überlebende Juden wurden darüber hinaus öffentlich als ‘unkontrollierte, böswillige Kosmopoliten, Profitjäger ohne Wurzeln und ohne Gewissen’ beschuldigt, verfolgt, vertrieben und auch umgebracht’.<sup>198</sup>

Revealingly, Jander borrows this argument from Herf’s concept of ‘Entsolidarisierung’. As we have seen throughout the previous discussions, Herf’s approach to the Merker affair forms the foundation of many state-mandated portrayals. The BStU and various contributions under the auspices of the BpB utilise Herf’s 1994 article to formulate

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<sup>196</sup> Jander, p. 45.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., pp. 45–46.

<sup>198</sup> It should be noted that Jander’s quote ‘Unkontrollierte, böswillige Kosmopoliten, Profitjäger ohne Wurzeln und ohne Gewissen’ which he claims is from the infamous Pravda article (discussed below) and which he cites from Azadovskii and Egorov, does not appear in any conceivable form in either the Pravda or cited source article, even allowing for translating between German, English and Russian. A google search indicates that Jander obtained this dubious translation of unknown origin from a Wikipedia entry. See: Konstantin Azadovskii and Boris Egorov, ‘From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 4.1 (2002), 66–80; *Wikipedia*, ‘Wurzelloser Kosmopolit’ <[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wurzelloser\\_Kosmopolit](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wurzelloser_Kosmopolit)> [accessed 20 December 2018].



their portrayal of the Merker affair. The AAS' publication goes as far as to describe Herf's *Divided Memory* as 'das beste Buch zu den Verfolgungen in der DDR der 1950er Jahre'<sup>199</sup> and Karin Hartewig's landmark study of communist Jews in the GDR published by the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* specifically recommends Herf's interpretation.<sup>200</sup> This seemingly predominant interpretation centres around one primary concept – 'Purging Cosmopolitanism'.

In keeping with the thesis that the predominance of an idea and the lack of challenge to it is indicative of its ideological capital within a given discourse, it is profitable to analyse and contextualise the concept of cosmopolitanism in socialist discourse and how it plays into the Merker affair. The following section seeks to do so with a particular reference to Herf's influential *Purging Cosmopolitanism* interpretation.

### Purging cosmopolitanism? Merker's Opposition in the 'Jewish Question'

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Herf constructs Merker's opposition as a 'Märtyrium', which represented a 'philosemitische Minderheitstradition'<sup>201</sup> opposed to the SED's position in 'the Jewish question' – defined by Herf as 'the whole complex of anti-semitism, the Holocaust and the place of the Jews in Germany and Europe'.<sup>202</sup> This interpretation posits that Merker was a chief representative of cosmopolitanism due to his western emigration and support for Jewish restitution and Israel.<sup>203</sup> Herf is categorical that

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<sup>199</sup> Jander, p. 51.

<sup>200</sup> Karin Hartewig, *Zürückgekehrt Die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000). Other examples include Sebastian Voigt, *Das Verhältnis der DDR zu Israel* (2008) <<http://www.bpb.de/internationales/asien/israel/45014/ddr-israel?p=all>> [accessed December 2018].

<sup>201</sup> Jeffrey Herf, 'Antisemitismus in der SED. Geheime Dokumente zum Fall Paul Merker aus SED- und MfS-Archiven', pp. 635–667.

<sup>202</sup> Jeffrey Herf, 'East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of Paul Merker', p. 627.

<sup>203</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, p. 113.

‘for German Communist eyes and ears in 1949, there was no doubt that these cosmopolitans were Jews’. Furthermore, Herf describes Merker’s cosmopolitan opposition as the only ‘extended confrontation with the Jewish catastrophe by a member of the SED Central Committee in the history of German and East German communism’.<sup>204</sup> Still further, Herf’s thesis contends, as many western commentators do, that cosmopolitan is an antisemitic chiffre for Jewishness.<sup>205</sup> Herf does not engage with the definition of cosmopolitanism, nor does he seek to historicise it, this is typical of most treatments of the so-called anti-cosmopolitan campaign.<sup>206</sup> While the antisemitic interpretation is popular in academic discourse about the socialist bloc, on closer inspection it appears to be too simplistic and devoid of context, rendering it inadvisable as a shorthand interpretation. It is therefore imperative to contextualise.

Many scholars identify an ‘anti-cosmopolitan campaign’ in the European socialist states of the early Cold War.<sup>207</sup> The main reference of this campaign is usually identified in an article in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* – ‘About one anti-patriotic group of theater critics’.<sup>208</sup> The tone of this article is seen as antisemitic due to the use of the phrase ‘rootless cosmopolitan’,<sup>209</sup> this phrase has been almost universally interpreted *prima facie* as an antisemitic chiffre; however, it is rarely placed within its discursive and synchronic context

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<sup>204</sup> This is a particularly unfortunate formulation as at least two members of the SED’s Central Committee had been confronted head on by the Jewish catastrophe in Auschwitz—Hermann Axen and Robert Alt<sup>204</sup> – and several others had lost numerous relatives – Alexander Abusch, Albert Norden, Hanna Wolf, Hilde Benjamin to name but a few.

<sup>205</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, pp. 108–112.

<sup>206</sup> A slight exception is Cathy Gelbin’s account which tantalisingly mentions the Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky before incorrectly stating that Stalin misappropriated the phrase ‘rootless cosmopolitan’ from him. Equally, Azadovskii and Egorov trace the usage of the lexical item cosmopolitan to Zhdanov in 1946 but stop at that and do not make any serious attempt to engage with its context or history. Cathy S. Gelbin, ‘Rootless cosmopolitans: German-Jewish writers confront the Stalinist and National Socialist atrocities’, *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 23.5-6 (2016), 863–879.

<sup>207</sup> Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948-1967: A Documented Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 183–184; Azadovskii and Egorov, pp. 66–80; Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin’s Russia* (London: Lane, 2007), p. 494.

<sup>208</sup> ПРАВДА, ‘Об одной антипатриотической группетеатральных критиков’, 28 January 1949.

<sup>209</sup> Rootless is not the only translation of the word, some commentators such as Erik van Ree prefer ‘homeless cosmopolitans’, see: Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), p. 204.

nor is it generally accompanied by source analysis or reference to such.<sup>210</sup> Take for example this passage from Cathy Gelbin’s 2016 article:

Too similar in sound were Hitler’s references in his 1924 *Mein Kampf* to a “poison injected by the international and cosmopolitan Jew[s]”, who had formed a conspiracy to destroy the Aryan race, to Stalin’s 1950s charges that the Jews were ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ and had created an international Zionist conspiracy to destroy the Soviet Union and undermine its sphere of political influence in the post-war Eastern bloc.<sup>211</sup>

Similarly unevicenced interpretations can be found in the pertinent literature which seem to reproduce uncritically the trope of Stalin’s or a Stalinist campaign against cosmopolitanism as a thinly veiled antisemitic attack.<sup>212</sup> Despite this there is no record that Stalin ever used the phrase ‘rootless cosmopolitan’ in connection with Jews,<sup>213</sup> nor was the concept of a Zionist conspiracy to destroy the Soviet Union or allies a feature of Soviet anti-Zionism either from Stalin or other Soviet politicians. Zionism was conceived of as a bourgeois-nationalist construct and the idea of a Zionist state dismissed as it had been by Jewish and non-Jewish Marxists for decades.<sup>214</sup> However, since the declaration of the state of Israel and subsequent

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<sup>210</sup> An exception is Benjamin Pinkus’ reproduction of the article in his study, however, he cuts out several lengthy sections which deal with the aesthetic aspects and details of the debate, arguably this creates a false impression designed to go along with his interpretation of the phrase as a chiffre for Jews. See: Pinkus, *The Soviet Government and the Jews 1948-1967*, pp. 183–5.

<sup>211</sup> Gelbin, p. 865. This is not the only example: “‘Rootless cosmopolitanism’ soon stood synonymous for “Jew” and the term was quickly integrated into Soviet antifascist ideology, the mirror image of the Nazis’ conflation of Bolshevism with the Jews’ and ‘From 1949 onwards, then, a new series of openly antisemitic purges and executions began across the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, when Jews were charged explicitly with harbouring an international Zionist-cosmopolitanist conspiracy.’ None of these fairly bold statements are evidenced with citations.

<sup>212</sup> See footnote 207; Ulrich Weißgerber, *Giftige Worte der SED-Diktatur: Sprache als Instrument von Machtausübung und Ausgrenzung in der SBZ und der DDR* (Münster: LIT, 2010).

<sup>213</sup> Indeed, the one usage attributed to Stalin himself is as part of a conversation with creative intellectuals in 1946 first published in Russia in 1997: ‘The positive hero is derided and inferiority before all things foreign and cosmopolitanism, so characteristic of the political leftovers, is applauded. In the theatre repertoire Soviet plays are being pushed aside by disgraceful plays of foreign bourgeois authors.’ Joseph Stalin, *сочинения*, 16, 1946–1952, (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Picatel, 1997) pp. 49–53.

<sup>214</sup> From reformist SPD politicians such as Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky ‘Die Aussichten des Zionismus. Eine Antwort an Karl Kautsky’, *Vorwärts*, 18 December 1929, to Leon Trotsky, ‘On the Jewish Problem’, *The Fourth International*, 6.12 (1945), 377–379, and Rosa Luxemburg, ‘Nach dem Pogrom’, in *Marxisten gegen Antisemitismus*, ed. by Iring Fetscher (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1974), pp. 127–135; ‘Rückzug auf der ganzen Linie’, in *Marxisten gegen Antisemitismus*, ed. by Fetscher, pp. 136–140; ‘Diskussion’, in *Marxisten gegen Antisemitismus*, ed. by Fetscher, pp. 141–150. While not necessarily a Marxist, prominent Jewish intellectual and socialist Einstein was also of this view, see: Fred Jerome, *Einstein on Israel and Zionism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), pp.173–174.

alliance with the interests of American imperialism it was now perceived as an enemy of world socialism, but not as being the driving force behind any sort of conspiracy. The Soviet position was more that Zionism was a pawn of the Americans rather than the other way around.<sup>215</sup> While some might still consider this to be antisemitic, it is materially different to the old canard of a Zionist conspiracy which some commentators imply.<sup>216</sup>

In any case, the *Pravda* article does not mention – even cryptically – Jews or Zionism, and the fact that some of the named critics were of a Jewish background is arguably negated by their use of ethnic Russian sounding pseudonyms, making it exceedingly unlikely that even intellectual readers would have been aware of this background. In addition, the Soviet theatre critics are not merely labelled laconically as ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ but this epithet is built into a wider critique of among other things ‘bourgeois hurrah-cosmopolitanism’, ‘petty aestheticism’ and ‘liberal connivance’<sup>217</sup> for taking the position of ‘art for art’s sake’ against politically conscious art. It is difficult to see, when actually reading the article in detail, quite how these things are inherently Jewish and therefore an obvious coded attack or example of ‘outspoken anti-Jewish policy’.<sup>218</sup>

One of the most influential accounts of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the West is Konstantin Azadovskii and Boris Egorov’s 2002 article.<sup>219</sup> However, the article showcases a worrying lack of attention to detail and propensity to make egregious claims. For instance: ‘terms such as *rootless cosmopolitans*, *bourgeois cosmopolitans*, and *individuals devoid of*

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<sup>215</sup> For instance, Georg Krausz, ‘Die Zionistische Agentur des USA Imperialismus’, *Neues Deutschland*, 6 December 1952 ‘Die Regierung Israels, eine reaktionäre, kapitalistische Regierung, an deren Spitze der rechtssozialdemokratische Zionist Ben Gurion steht, hat die vollkommene Unterwerfung der Wirtschaft Israels unter den amerikanischen Imperialismus und die Umwandlung des Landes in einen militärisch - strategischen Stützpunkt der USA vollzogen.’ Krausz was the special correspondent for *Neues Deutschland* during the Slansky trial in Prague. Krausz was himself Jewish.

<sup>216</sup> For instance: Gelbin, p. 865; Herf, *Divided Memory*, p. 112.

<sup>217</sup> ПРАВДА, ‘Об одной антипатриотической группетеатральных критиков’ 28 January 1949, ‘буржуазные ура-космополитизм’ (English: bourgeois hurrah-cosmopolitanism) it should perhaps be noted that the term hurrah-patriotism is the Russian equivalent of jingoism and so this phrase is an obvious antonym thereof; ‘Надо решительно и раз навсегда покон-чить с либеральным попустительством всемэтим эстетствующи ничтохествам’ (We must decisively and once and for all put an end to the liberal connivance of all this aestheticism of nothingness.).

<sup>218</sup> Benjamin Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 154.

<sup>219</sup> Azadovskii and Egorov were Soviet oppositionals in the late 1980s. Azadovskii and Egorov, ‘From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism’.

*nation or tribe* continually appeared in newspaper articles. All of these were codewords for Jews and were understood as such by people at that time. (One non-Jew, Aleksandr Veselovskii, was also officially consigned to the rootless.).<sup>220</sup> The claim that only one non-Jew was subject to anti-cosmopolitan criticism is inaccurate. Pinkus' more scholarly account published some ten years before performed a fairly comprehensive survey of the press at the time and came up with a figure of 50% of those named three or more times during the campaign as being Jewish. Leaving aside a moment that the selection of a three or more parameter is also potentially misleading,<sup>221</sup> this would seem to indicate that at least half of those prominently labelled 'rootless cosmopolitans' were not in fact Jewish.

Furthermore, it is rarely mentioned in accounts of the so-called campaign that the accusers –who included some Jews, but were predominantly non-Jewish – actually came out of the affair worse off than the accused. Stalin himself is said to have criticised the entire affair and called for a halt, especially to the occasional practice of revealing people's surnames, which if the person in question had an apparently Jewish surname could be construed as antisemitic or at least as potentially stoking antisemitism.<sup>222</sup> This particular nuance pulls unevidenced claims such as 'the antic cosmopolitan campaign had clearly been initiated and inspired by Stalin' into sharp relief.<sup>223</sup>

There also appears to have been several aspects to the question of cosmopolitanism influenced by the context of the time which provide some illumination of the perspective among Soviet and GDR intellectuals. The *Pravda* article clearly references the history of anti-cosmopolitanism in Russia in the form of Vissarion Belinsky – a democratic and ironically westernising influence – who first coined the phrase 'passportless vagabonds', a

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., pp. 75–76.

<sup>221</sup> The main group of theatre critics attacked in the original *Pravda* article were largely Jewish and were often referenced in passing at least in other articles, which clearly raises the number of times Jews were mentioned, however, their Jewish identity was rarely thematised which calls into question the relevance of tallying up the named persons by religio-ethnic background. See: Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The History of a National Minority*, p. 157.

<sup>222</sup> Erik van Ree, p. 205.

<sup>223</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, p. 109.

famous quote which clearly inspired the phrase ‘rootless cosmopolitans’ and indeed is considered to have also been an antisemitic chiffre by some modern commentators.<sup>224</sup> 1948 had marked the 100th anniversary of his death and numerous publications and events were produced or held in the USSR as well as the Soviet Zone of Occupation and subsequent GDR.<sup>225</sup> It is noteworthy that the literary scholars most associated with promoting Belinsky’s anti-cosmopolitanism and his critical patriotism which rejected *Bierkrugpatriotismus* during this period, Nicolai Leontievich Brodskij and Alexander Zeitlin, were themselves Jewish. Furthermore, the patriotism espoused was explicitly internationalist: ‘Belinskij – glühender Patriot, Feind des Despotismus, Freund der werktätigen aller Länder, genialer Beurteiler der großen Errungenschaften der Dichtung aller Völker’.<sup>226</sup> It is reasonable to point out that this wave of commemoration had a dialectical effect on the cosmopolitanism conjuncture, popularising the term and theory behind it.

The concept that cosmopolitanism is per se an antisemitic chiffre is challenged by further discursive context of the time. By the 1940s, the term was in use with two related but distinct meanings; firstly, as a politico-legal term to describe international (synonymous with cosmopolitan in this instance) organisations, as well as the efforts to integrate, co-operate and so on at an international level. A particularly poignant example of this usage is the world citizen movement, founded by Gary Davis in September 1948, with his provocative returning of his American passport while on UN territory in Paris. This cosmopolitan movement caused quite the sensation with over 50 articles in the West German press between September 1948 and February 1949 and attracted many prominent supporters such as Albert Camus, Andre

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<sup>224</sup> Yaacov Ro’I, ‘Anticosmopolitan Campaign’, *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (2010) <[http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Anticosmopolitan\\_Campaign](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Anticosmopolitan_Campaign)> [accessed 20 December 2018].

<sup>225</sup> For example, Alexander Zeitlin, ‘Belinskijs Bedeutung für die Weltliteratur’, *Neues Deutschland*, 5 June 1948; Nicolai L. Brodskij, *W.G. Belinskij Der große revolutionäre Demokrat, Philosoph, Kritiker* (Berlin: SWA Verlag, 1948).

<sup>226</sup> Brodskij, p.122.

Breton and Albert Einstein.<sup>227</sup> Interestingly, however, an interview with Camus in the *Welt* demonstrates that even West German liberals perceived this movement as ultimately playing into the hands of American imperialism: ‘Sehen Sie nicht, daß Davis dem amerikanischen Imperialismus dient?’<sup>228</sup> This is certainly an important nuance which demonstrates that cosmopolitanism was an international phenomenon at this time, that there were various perspectives thereof and that the idea that the conjuncture in early 1949 was born of the antisemitic Stalinist imagination is too simplistic. Particularly as it was none other than Jürgen Kuczynski – the Jewish German economist (and dissident Marxist) who had served in American Intelligence during the War – who first discusses this form of cosmopolitanism (and its alleged ideological cover for American hegemony) in the party organ *Neues Deutschland*. He describes it as: ‘Die Weltstaatideologie, der Kosmopolitismus, die christliche Abendlandgemeinschaftsidee, das Ideal des Weltbürgertums, wobei unter Welt natürlich nur eine kapitalistische Welt zu verstehen ist.’<sup>229</sup> In many respects, this Marxist-Leninist view of cosmopolitanism bears many of the hallmarks of anti-globalisation rhetoric<sup>230</sup> and could perhaps be seen as an antecedent of that movement.

The other definition as we have seen already is that of modernism in cultural and philosophical production, primarily in the forms of formalism, aestheticism and nihilism. Again the communist commentators in these debates were largely Jewish. Hermann Axen – an Auschwitz survivor, Central Committee member and head of the *Abteilung Agitation und Propaganda* – would complain in 1950: ‘Abgesehen von einzelnen und sehr sporadischen Ausnahmen, gibt es keine laufenden grundsätzlichen Auseinandersetzungen mit den

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<sup>227</sup> E.g. American Museum of Natural History, ‘World Government’, <<https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/einstein/global-citizen/world-government>> [accessed 20 December 2018] and [n.a.], ‘World Citizen Gains Support’, *Manchester Guardian*, 22 November 1948.

<sup>228</sup> [n.a.], ‘Ist Davis verdächtig? Ein Streitgespräch zwischen Albert Camus und der Menge’, *Die Welt*, 29 December 1948.

<sup>229</sup> Jürgen Kuczynski, ‘Was verstehen wir unter Amerikanismus? Geschichte und Politik des Amerikanismus — Eine soziologische Studie zu aktuellen Themen’, *Neues Deutschland*, 29 October 1948.

<sup>230</sup> See for example Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

verschiedenen Erscheinungsformen des Amerikanismus und Kosmopolitismus.<sup>231</sup>

Interestingly, Axen is right that the visibility of anti-cosmopolitan sentiment was quite sporadic and an overview of contributions resists categorisation as a *campaign*. Nevertheless, of the sporadic contributions, in addition to Kuczynski and Axen, other Jewish commentators included Hanna Wolf,<sup>232</sup> Gerhart Eisler,<sup>233</sup> Ilja Ehrenburg,<sup>234</sup> Albert Norden,<sup>235</sup> and most prolifically Stefan Heymann.<sup>236</sup> Not a single contribution whether by a Jewish or non-Jewish author makes an overt or elliptic connection between Judaism or Zionism and cosmopolitanism. On the contrary, cosmopolitanism is consistently and explicitly linked to America or Anglo-American and other western bourgeois currents both in terms of art and politics.

All of this context is important in order to look again at the narratives surrounding the Merker affair in state-mandated memory. Cosmopolitanism, interpreted as being a cipher for Jewish, is entirely uncontested in post-1990 discourse surrounding this period in general and is a key component to the predominant interpretations of the Merker affair specifically.

This can be seen clearly in an article published in the BpB's *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (APuZ) dedicated to the history of antisemitism: 'Im Stalinismus verband sie sich mit der *Verschwörungsfantasie des Kosmopolitismus* [My emphasis A.B.]. Schauprozesse und Säuberungen in der Sowjetunion, in Ungarn, Polen und weiteren Ländern trafen Juden nicht direkt als Juden, aber durch die quasi beiläufig erwähnte jüdische Herkunft der Beschuldigten entstand der Eindruck einer Unzuverlässigkeit dieser Minderheit gegenüber dem

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<sup>231</sup> Hermann Axen, 'Zu einer Presse von neuem Typus!', *Neues Deutschland*, 10 February 1950.

<sup>232</sup> Hanna Wolf, 'Ideologische Wachsamkeit tut Not', *Neues Deutschland*, 12 August 1949.

<sup>233</sup> Gerhart Eisler, 'Sowjetmenschen wollen den Frieden', *Neues Deutschland*, 02 September 1949.

<sup>234</sup> Ehrenburg quoted in Friedrich Ebert, 'Referat Die Lebensfrage unseres Volkes', *Neues Deutschland*, 19 October 1949.

<sup>235</sup> Albert Norden, 'Was unsere Presse tun muß', *Neues Deutschland*, 17 February 1950; *Um die Nation. Beiträge zu Deutschlands Lebensfrage* (Berlin: Dietz, 1952). In his book, Norden produces one of the most detailed depictions of cosmopolitanism as an instrument of American cultural and economic hegemony from an SED viewpoint (pp. 195–210).

<sup>236</sup> Stefan Heymann, 'Kosmopolitismus und Formalismus', *Neues Deutschland*, 1 December 1949. Interestingly, Heymann had also published a book in 1948 which dealt specifically with racism and antisemitism demonstrating he was clearly sensitive to the issue. Stefan Heymann, *Marxismus und Rassenfrage* (Berlin: Dietz, 1948).



sozialistischen Staat.<sup>237</sup> This conjures up the image of a conspiratorial fantasy in which cosmopolitanism is clearly considered to be an antisemitic chiffre and instrumentalised product of the Stalinist imagination. This approach is evident in several articles published or hosted by the BpB. For instance, the following: ‘Um die “zionistischen Agenten des Weltjudentums”<sup>238</sup> zu “enttarnen”, initiierte Moskau zahlreiche Parteisäuberungsaktionen in Osteuropa. Die Opfer [...] wurden des “bourgeois Kosmopolitismus”, des Liberalismus oder der Spionage bezichtigt.’<sup>239</sup>

The *Begleitbuch* to the *Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*’s exhibition discussed above, contains an interesting discussion concerning cosmopolitanism as an ‘aberwitzige Anklage’ during the ‘Entlarvung der Zionisten’. Following an erroneous assignment of the epithet ‘wurzellosen Kosmopoliten’ to the unrelated Doctors’ plot article in Pravda (no such formulation appears in this article)<sup>240</sup> the author states the following: ‘Kommunistischen Funktionären [Merker] wurde vorgeworfen, ihre Unterstützung jüdischer Forderungen nach Wiedergutmachung und der Rückgabe “arisierter” jüdischen Eigentums sei nichts anderes als die “Propagierung des Kosmopolitismus”’.<sup>241</sup>

The source of this is the Central Committee’s *Slansky Lehren* directive which first discussed the charges against Paul Merker.<sup>242</sup> However, the AAS’ portrayal has demonstrably misinterpreted the accusation of cosmopolitanism against Merker as an antisemitic chiffre and implied that this was the key to Merker’s indictment. The statement from the *ND* article

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<sup>237</sup> Gideon Botsch ‘Von der Judenfeindschaft zum Antisemitismus. Ein historischer Überblick’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 28–30 (2014) <<http://www.bpb.de/apuz/187412/von-der-judenfeindschaft-zum-antisemitismus?p=all>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

<sup>238</sup> Although this incendiary and clearly antisemitic language is given in quotation marks, Muschik does not provide a citation. The only other instance of this language I have been able to find is in Karin Hartewig’s *Zurückgekehrt* study, she also fails to provide a citation. The tone and antisemitic implication of the phrase ‘Weltjudentum’ are not likely to have been acceptable in public or even private discourse within SED circles at this time and certainly I have been unable to find even a vaguely similar formulation in internal communication, published articles or memoirs of contemporaries.

<sup>239</sup> Muschik, ‘Die SED und die Juden 1985–1990 Eine außenpolitische Charmeoffensive der DDR’.

<sup>240</sup> ПРАВДА, ‘Подлые шпионы и убийцы под маской профессоров-врачей’, 13 January 1953.

<sup>241</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, ‘Das hat’s bei uns nicht gegeben’ *Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*, p. 135.

<sup>242</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, ‘Lehren aus dem Prozeß gegen das Verschwörerzentrum Slansky’, *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1953.

is as follows: ‘Merker benutzte die Zeitschrift ‘Freies Deutschland’ zur Propagierung des Kosmopolitismus und der Ausplünderung Deutschlands durch die imperialistischen Mächte.’ Concretely, Merker’s cosmopolitanism is defined as stating that German resources and industry should not belong to the German people exclusively anymore and should be internationalised. The interpretation of this, against the background of the emerging European Coal and Steel community,<sup>243</sup> is that Merker ‘spricht, wenn auch mit anderen Worten, die gleiche Sprache wie die Adenauer, Ollenhauer und andere Agenten des amerikanischen Imperialismus’.<sup>244</sup> This is evidently an example of cosmopolitanism conceived as an ideological camouflage for Americanisation and has nothing to do with antisemitism. This can again be seen from a *Vermerk* in Merker’s internal MfS file:

Merker steht auf dem Standpunkt des Kosmopolitismus, der amerikanischen Lehre über die Ausplünderung fremder Länder und will auch die deutsche Industrie und die deutschen Rohstoffe den amerikanischen Monopolisten in die Hände spielen. In seine These über die zukünftige Außenpolitik heißt es: ‘Eine künftige deutsche Außenpolitik muß vor allem der Wiedergutmachung des den Völkern durch die nazistischen Verbrecherbanden zugefügten Schaden dienen. Sie muß deshalb die Widerspiegelung der Innenpolitik der kommenden deutschen Demokratie sein, basierend auf dem wirklich kosmopolitischen Grundsatz, daß die Erhöhung des Lebensstandards der Völker, die der Unterdrückung durch den deutschen Imperialismus zum Opfer gefallen waren, überflügelt’.<sup>245</sup>

The origin of these state-mandated misinterpretations is again Jeffrey Herf who characterised the fifteen-page Supreme Court verdict as one of the ‘major documents of the history of the

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<sup>243</sup> Indeed the *Urteil* in Merker’s trial refers to this position as follows: ‘Diese im wesentlichen vom amerikanischen Monopolkapitalisten inspiriert Konzeption liegt auch der westdeutschen Montanunion zu Grunde.’ Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol 3, pp. 138–152, ‘Court Judgement against Merker’.

<sup>244</sup> Matern, pp. 208–209.

<sup>245</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol 1, pp. 67–71 ‘Vermerk’.

Jewish question in twentieth-century German communism’ and that ‘Merker’s writings and actions concerning the Jewish question played a decisive role in the indictment’.<sup>246</sup> However, this is a somewhat misleading characterisation of the actual court judgement. It should be noted in advance that the entire document is characterised by the agent hysteria of the time and would certainly not be seen as legally proper from a modern western liberal perspective.

The fifteen-page document begins by detailing Merker’s biography and any points of suspicion or disloyalty therein. The purpose it seems is to establish whether it is likely that he would have been susceptible to recruitment by Western agencies. The primary legal points of relevance (within the context of the Cold War in the 1950s) is that Merker is found to have become an agent of the French intelligence services before emigrating to Mexico: ‘Aus diesen Umständen ergibt sich die Überzeugung des Gerichts, dass der Angeklagte zum Agent des II ième Bureau, spätestens bei der Erteilung des Ausreisevisums aus Frankreich, geworden ist’ and his relations to the defendants in the Czechoslovakian Slansky trial, which are perceived as murky. The brief mention of Jewish thematics is related exclusively to his relations to capitalist emigrés, who had been named by the witnesses, and are provided as evidence of a political mistake – one of many it should be added – rather than as constituting an offence per se:

Um sich einen Rückhalt in der Emigration zu schaffen, stützte er sich nicht auf die politische, sondern auf die rassische Emigration. Hierbei suchte er insbesondere Anschluss an emigrierte kapitalistische, jüdische Kreise zu finden. Er forderte die ausnahmslose Entschädigung aller aus Deutschland emigrierten Juden, unabhängig davon, ob sie nach Deutschland zurückkehren wollten und unabhängig davon, ob sie aus großkapitalistischen oder anderen Kreisen stammten.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, p. 152.

<sup>247</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol 3, pp. 138–152.

Again, while some may find such formulations insensitive, it is worthwhile repeating that the testimony regarding this came exclusively from Jewish emigrés themselves.<sup>248</sup> Intriguingly, and also unmentioned by Herf in any of his accounts, one of the three judges was also Jewish – *Oberrichter* Heinrich Löwenthal.<sup>249</sup> While it is possible for a person of Jewish ethnicity or religion to hold antisemitic prejudices, the mere collocation of anticapitalism and *specific* Jewish capitalists does not reasonably constitute such a strong accusation of self-hatred, which is how this phenomenon is often termed. The fact that Merker’s Zionist activity was not considered to be material to his indictment as Herf claims can also be read into the ruling of the court which legally rehabilitated him in 1956. It clearly states:

Diese Handlungen waren nur deshalb strafrechtlich zu beurteilen, weil nach seiner Rückkehr im Jahre 1946 ein staatsfeindliches Verhalten des Verurteilten Merker festgestellt wurde. Da diese Feststellungen jedoch nicht mehr aufrecht erhalten werden können, verliert das Verhalten des Verurteilten in der Zeit von 1936 bis 1946 seinen strafrechtlich bedeutsamen Charakter, so daß auch wegen dieser Handlungen Merker nicht verurteilt bleiben kann.<sup>250</sup>

The *Handlungen* referred to include Merker’s behaviour while in exile, his exclusion of the Stibis and their supporters, his proven contacts with French intelligence agents, Mexican government officials, Zionist and other organisations. The *staatsfeindliches Verhalten* refers to Merker’s connections to Noel Field and particularly to the testimony of Otto Katz, both of which had been publicly acknowledged as mistakes of an overbearing justice apparatus after

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<sup>248</sup> All witnesses called to testify at trial were Jewish and the accusation that Merker had maintained close relationships with Jewish capitalist emigrés and offered them restitution of capitalist property in a future German state came exclusively from non-capitalist Jewish emigrés.

<sup>249</sup> It is also noteworthy that Löwenthal is described by the virulently anticommunist Karl Wilhelm Fricke as a ‘hochintelligenter Jurist’. His involvement in several other trials of this nature, with zero reference to Jewish thematics, indicates his presence was not as some sort of window dressing. See: Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Akten-Einsicht Rekonstruktion einer politischen Verfolgung* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1997), pp. 114–115.

<sup>250</sup> Berlin, BstU, MfS AU 192/56, vol 1, p. 208. Judgement of the *Oberstes Gericht der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, 13 July 1956.

Merker had already been released.<sup>251</sup> While Merker was clearly also the victim of a similarly hypervigilant and unforgiving legal apparatus, this apparatus does seem to have investigated him and convicted him based on an honest belief that he was on balance of probabilities an agent (a complex concept which is clearly never entirely black and white with a contract of employment). After the revelation that Field was indeed not an American spy and the doubt this cast on the Slansky trials and Merker's connections to any sort of agent network, the SED actually took it upon themselves to re-investigate and to pardon<sup>252</sup> Merker before beginning formal legal proceedings for rehabilitation and compensation. This is contrary to Herf's account,<sup>253</sup> replicated in state-mandated narratives,<sup>254</sup> which claims that Merker was never publicly rehabilitated or compensated. However, Merker was in fact very publicly rehabilitated via a communique of the Central Committee on the front page of the party organ *Neues Deutschland* which stated in no uncertain terms: 'Das Zentralkomitee stellte nach Prüfung der Angelegenheit Paul Merker fest, daß die ihm zur Last gelegten Anschuldigungen in der Hauptsache politischer Natur sind, die eine strafrechtliche Verfolgung nicht rechtfertigen.' Furthermore, contrary to Herf's claims of personal enmity between Ulbricht and Merker,<sup>255</sup> it appears that Ulbricht personally approved compensation for Merker in the amount of 50,000 DM.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> See for instance: [n.a.], 'Ungarn festigt sozialistische Gesetzlichkeit Rede Matyas Rakosis vor dem Parteiaktiv in Havec Laszlo Rajk rehabilitiert', *Neues Deutschland*, 30 March 1956.

<sup>252</sup> See: Berlin, BStU, MfS HA IX no. 21711 p. 19. Copy of official pardon, dated 17 January 1956. Note this is before the Twentieth Conference and the upsurge which it brought in questioning the politicised justice system of the Stalin era.

<sup>253</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, pp. 154–157.

<sup>254</sup> See for instance: Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 'Das hat's bei uns nicht gegeben' *Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*, p. 71. 'Merker wurde 1956 wieder entlassen, bis zu seinem Tod 1969 wurde ihm die Rehabilitierung verweigert.'

<sup>255</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, pp. 154, 157.

<sup>256</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS HA IX no. 21711, pp. 20–21. Letter from Walter Ulbricht to *Generalstaatsanwaltschaft der DDR* dated 7 September 1956. 'Dem Genossen Paul Merker und seinen Angehörigen sind durch ungerechtfertigte Haft materielle Schäden entstanden. Er teilt uns mit, daß er bei der Staatskasse Schadenersatz beantragt hat. Ich bitte, mit Merker eine Verständigung herbeizuführen und diesen Schadenersatz zu gewähren'.

## Paul Merker and the ‘Wiedergutmachungsfrage’

While the political overtones of 1950s state socialist justice may seem alien to a modern readership, this does not mean that exaggerations such as Merker’s trial centring on the ‘Jewish question’ should stand unchallenged. It is clear that such hyperbolic conclusions are predicated on a simplistic approach to the thematics of restitution and reparations or *Wiedergutmachung* of the victims of fascism. This topic is a complex one, rich in political implications and is therefore also worthy of exploration and contextualisation.

At the heart of the alleged antisemitism in the Merker affair is the question of reparations for the Judeocide. The following is taken from the BpB’s *Deutschland Archiv* journal:

Aber die SED war nicht gewillt, eine gesamtdeutsche Verantwortung für den Holocaust anzuerkennen. Ostdeutsche Politiker wie beispielsweise Politbüromitglied Paul Merker, die sich der besonderen Bedeutung des Genozids an den Juden bewusst waren und darum die Entschädigung jüdischer NS-Opfer als moralische Verpflichtung des deutschen Volks betrachteten, wurden politisch kaltgestellt. Die Partei sah gemäß ihrer antifaschistischen Legitimationsdoktrin keinen Anlass für Entschädigungszahlungen an die Juden.<sup>257</sup>

The construction of Merker’s arrest and trial as being primarily due to his views on *Wiedergutmachung* is clear. The wider purpose of the article is to discuss the ‘Charmeoffensive’ of the SED towards Jews and Israel during the late 1980s, framed as a cynical ploy on the part of the socialists. While Muschik may have merely intended to provide some background to his discussion, the reader is likely to be struck by this powerful and damning indictment, especially as it is accompanied by an imposing photograph of

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<sup>257</sup> Muschik, ‘Die SED und die Juden 1985–1990 Eine außenpolitische Charmeoffensive der DDR’.

Merker. Its inclusion further demonstrates that the Merker affair has become an established touchstone within state-mandated memory of Jews in the GDR, which expressly raises the spectre of antifascist legitimisation in a negative light.

In an article dedicated to the history of German *Wiedergutmachung* published in the BpB's flagship journal *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*,<sup>258</sup> the *Ostdeutscher Weg* is described as follows:

Zugespielt kann man daher sagen, dass das Politbüro der SED die "Arisierung" jüdischen Vermögens durch das NS-Regime zum Einstieg in die Sozialisierung umfunktionierte. Paul Merker, ein Funktionär, der aus der Westemigration zurückgekommen war und sich für die Rückgabe von Immobilien und mittelständischen Betrieben an jüdische Eigentümer einsetzte, wurde alsbald kaltgestellt und 1952 verhaftet. Das SED-Zentralkomitee warf ihm unter anderem vor, dass er die Entschädigung der jüdischen Vermögen nur forderte, um dem USA-Finanzkapital das Eindringen in Deutschland zu ermöglichen.<sup>259</sup>

The GDR is portrayed as not acknowledging the guilt of Germans towards the victims of the Judeocide. This stands in stark contrast to the portrayal of the FRG:

In den Gründerjahren der Bundesrepublik haben gerade solche Politiker den Wiedergutmachungsbegriff hoch geschätzt, die klarer als andere erkannten, dass die Deutschen sehr viel zu ersetzen, zu bezahlen und zu sühnen hatten. Adolf Arndt oder Carlo Schmid, Franz Böhm oder Theodor Heuss sahen in diesem Sprachgebrauch ein Zeichen der Anerkennung von Schuld und Verbrechen und einen moralischen Appell,

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<sup>258</sup> Hans Günter Hockerts, 'Wiedergutmachung in Deutschland 1945–1990. Ein Überblick', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 25–26 (2013) <<http://www.bpb.de/apuz/162883/wiedergutmachung-in-deutschland-19451990-ein-ueberblick?p=all>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

um die Selbstbezogenheit und Teilnahmslosigkeit des überwiegenden Teils der deutschen Bevölkerung zu überwinden.<sup>260</sup>

Additionally, the initial *Globalabkommen* reparations agreement between the FRG and Israel is spoken of favourably as the ‘früheste, wichtigste und bekannteste Vertragswerk dieser Art’. Intriguingly the *Abkommen* is included in a Presseinformation published by the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*, which marks the anniversary as an important date ‘aus der Geschichte der kommunistischen Diktaturen und von Opposition und Widerstand in Mittel- und Osteuropa’ and describes it as follows: ‘Das Luxemburger Abkommen tritt in Kraft. Danach sichert die Bundesrepublik den jüdischen Opfern des Nationalsozialismus Wiedergutmachungszahlungen zu.’<sup>261</sup> Despite the connection with the history of the GDR being somewhat tenuous, this appears to be secondary to the opportunity to laud the FRG’s seeming commitment to the victims of fascism.

Haury’s ‘Antisemitismus in der DDR’ article for the BpB is clear in its dismissive contempt for the SED’s approach to *Wiedergutmachung*:

Mittels ihrer kommunistisch verbrämten Schlussstrichargumentation lehnte es die SED auch bis kurz vor ihrem Ende ab, irgendwelche Zahlungen an Israel oder internationale jüdische Organisationen zu leisten. Mit der Enteignung der Kapitalisten, so behauptete die SED jahrzehntelang, habe sie die beste Wiedergutmachung geleistet, die überhaupt nur denkbar sei. Ebenso lehnte die SED auch jegliche Rückerstattung “arisierter” jüdischer Betriebe oder eine Entschädigung für von den Nazis enteignete jüdische Vermögen ab. Zahlungen oder Rückgaben an im Ausland lebende “jüdische Kapitalisten” oder deren Erben seien vom sozialistischen Deutschland nicht zu erwarten, lautete die deutlich von antisemitischen

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung, *Presseinformation Erinnerung als Auftrag: 50. ‘Historischer Kalenderdienst’* (2013) <[https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/2013-pdf/hkd\\_50.pdf](https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/2013-pdf/hkd_50.pdf)> [accessed 29 November 2018].



Bildern geprägte Argumentation der SED. Die “arisierten” Betriebe wurden in sozialistisches deutsches “Volkseigentum” überführt.<sup>262</sup>

The repetition of the concept of aryanisation creates the impression that the GDR is somehow associated with the phenomenon, perhaps even guilty of it. More concretely, Haury’s formulation also implies that the GDR viewed victims of the Judeocide in a stereotypically antisemitic fashion as ‘jüdische Kapitalisten’. This is, however, an oversimplification. While the *Slansky Lehren* article does refer to American Jewish capitalists as the recipients of a proposed restitution scheme, it does not insinuate all Jews as being capitalists per se nor does it seek to demonise Jews or present them as the instigators of a conspiracy. This would, of course, reproduce the classical antisemitic canards of Jews being endogenously linked with capital and of Jews seeking control of the world. On the contrary, the article contains the following formulations:

Die Spekulation des amerikanischen Imperialismus geht dabei darauf hinaus, sich zunutze zu machen, daß vor allem die Werktätigen in den volksdemokratischen Ländern, die im Geiste der Völkerfreundschaft und des proletarischen Internationalismus erzogen werden, Antisemitismus nicht dulden und sich mit den vom Faschismus so stark verfolgten Juden solidarisch fühlen.

[Er] denkt gar nicht an die werktätigen Juden, sondern vor allem an die reichen jüdischen sogenannten Wirtschaftsemigranten.<sup>263</sup>

While some readers, particularly today, might find the collocation of Jewish and capitalist uncomfortable and insensitive, it is nevertheless an exaggeration to imply the SED reproduced an antisemitic canard as some interpreters have claimed.<sup>264</sup> It is clear from the tone and wording of the document that the SED’s position was strictly anticapitalist and not

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<sup>262</sup> Haury, *Antisemitismus in der DDR*.

<sup>263</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, ‘Lehren aus dem Prozeß gegen das Verschwörerzentrum Slansky’, *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1953.

<sup>264</sup> For instance: Timm, *Hammer Zirkel Davidstern. Das gestörte Verhältnis der DDR zu Zionismus und Staat Israel*, p. 117.

racially based. This is highlighted in another unfortunate but clear formulation: ‘Merker fälschte die aus den deutschen und ausländischen Arbeitern herausgepreßten Maximal-Profite der Monopol-Kapitalisten in angebliches Eigentum des jüdischen Volkes um. In Wirklichkeit sind bei der Arisierung dieses Kapitals nur die Profite “jüdischer” Monopol-Kapitalisten in die Hände “arischer” Monopol-Kapitalisten übergewechselt’.<sup>265</sup>

Some readers might still consider this cold anticapitalist approach to be antisemitic or have overtones of the same, however, it does nuance the idea that the SED opposed Jewish *Wiedergutmachung*, when in fact they strictly opposed capitalist restitution and that in all its forms. After all this goes to the heart of the Marxist fundamentals of class struggle: ‘Die Geschichte aller bisherigen Gesellschaft ist die Geschichte von Klassenkämpfen’ and the *labour theory of value*.<sup>266</sup> Indeed, at the time that this article was published, the GDR was in the midst of its forced push to socialism in the period before the events of June 1953, which brought about a more combative approach to the bourgeois classes in general.

Furthermore, the claim that the GDR was pursuing some sort of *Schlussstrich* argumentation is not entirely accurate. Otto Grotewohl, the Ministerpräsident and official head of government, had been in negotiations with Israel concerning a *Wiedergutmachungsabkommen*<sup>267</sup> and as late as October 1952, Ernst Goldenbaum led a *Volkskammer* delegation to discuss *Entschädigungsfragen* for Jewish victims of fascism in Bonn.<sup>268</sup> This demonstrates that there was no antifascist *Schlussstrich* mentality in the question of *Wiedergutmachung* as insinuated by Haury. However, the SED decided that no

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<sup>265</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, ‘Lehren aus dem Prozeß gegen das Verschwörerzentrum Slansky’, *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1953. It should be noted that this comment is solely in reference to the nature of proprietorial relations and not a justification of aryanisation.

<sup>266</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘Manifest der kommunistischen Partei’, in *Marx Engels Werke*, 39 vols, (Berlin: Dietz, 1956–1968), iv (1968); Karl Marx, ‘Das Kapital Erster Band, in *Marx Engels Werke*, 39 vols, (Berlin: Dietz, 1956–1968), xxiii (1962).

<sup>267</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/71281ZPKK document referring to the *Wiedergutmachungsfrage* in relation to Julius Meyer.

<sup>268</sup> See: Olaf Groehler, ‘Antifaschismus und jüdische Problematik in der SBZ und der frühen DDR’, in *Die SED-Politik, der Antifaschismus und die Juden in der SBZ und der frühen DDR*, ed. by Olaf Groehler and Mario Keßler (Berlin: Helle Panke, 1995), pp. 5 – 31 (p. 17)

agreement was possible until diplomatic relations between the two German states (and Israel) were in place. It should not be forgotten that this was the era of the revanchist *Hallstein Doctrine* according to which the FRG was the only German state which represented the entire German people and which sought to punish third party countries who recognised the GDR.<sup>269</sup> Hallstein's words at a diplomatic conference in 1956 indicate how related the geopolitical issues of support for Israel and isolation of the GDR really were: 'Zwei Probleme beschäftigen uns besonders: das Problem der Anerkennung des Pankower Regimes und das Problem Israel.'<sup>270</sup>

An aspect that is seldom mentioned in accounts of the GDR's approach to Jewish *Wiedergutmachung* is that the restitution of capitalist property to Jewish emigrés was opposed in the first instance by Jewish members of the SED. For instance, Merker's primary opponents in discussions in 1946-47, when discussing a *Wiedergutmachungsgesetz*, were two Jewish communists, Götz Berger<sup>271</sup> and Bruno Haid. Indeed, it is also evident that it was Haid who first drew attention to and criticised Merker's call for Jews to enter the *Jüdische Gemeinde*: 'Als Merker nach Berlin zurückkehrte, gab es mit ihm die Differenz, weil er die jüdischen Genossen anrief, der jüdischen Gemeinde beizutreten. Als ich davon Kenntnis erhielt, habe ich an Gen. Dahlem eine entsprechende Mitteilung gemacht und auf das Falsche dieser Linie von Merker aufmerksam gemacht.'<sup>272</sup> At the time, – as well as being perceived as anathema to the atheistic attitude required for membership in the SED – it was suspected that this was a precursor to receiving aid packages from western charitable organisations, specifically JOINT,

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<sup>269</sup> Although the policy of *Alleinvertretungsanspruch* was only officially formulated in 1955, it had been practised by the FRG since 1948. See: William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>270</sup> Walter Hallstein in: Torben Güllstorff, 'Die Hallstein-Doktrin – Abschied von einem Mythos', *Deutschland Archiv* (2017) <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/253953/die-hallstein-doktrin-abschied-von-einem-mythos#fr-footnode7>> [accessed 7 December 2018].

<sup>271</sup> Berger would go on to make a name for himself as a legal defender of oppositionals, including Robert Havemann and Wolf Biermann. Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 192/56, vol. 2, pp. 241–243. 'Letter from Götz Berger to Hermann Matern concerning the Wiedergutmachung debates within the VVN during the 1940s'.

<sup>272</sup> Bruno Haid Berlin, BStU, MfS AU no. 196/52 vol 1, pp. 48–49, 'Betr. Paul Merker'. Report from Bruno Haid regarding complaints he made against Paul Merker regarding the Jewish compensation question and related events and topics.

seen as providing a supply line and information network to western intelligence agencies, the logic being that being in receipt of such packages made one dependent upon them and susceptible to recruitment. This was one of the question marks against Merker and has subsequently been used as evidence of antisemitism on the part of the MfS, the logic being that it is antisemitic to insinuate that a Jewish charitable organisation could contain western agents. The fact that this is a matter of record is not mentioned in such accounts. This aspect is worthy of a little contextualisation, sorely missed in practically all accounts of the Merker affair.

It is certainly inaccurate to portray the history of Zionist and Jewish interactions with American security services as entirely one of collaboration. Indeed, the Jewish American publication *Forward* conducted a review of the de-classified files concerning surveillance of Jewish organisations during the Second World War and came to the conclusion that no piece of information was too small and no Jewish leader too obscure for the “Palestinian Desk”.<sup>273</sup> Equally, a review of early infiltration of JOINT and Bricha by the Americans indicates they were concerned at Soviet influence and infiltration of these organisations as well. Inasmuch, the over-simplified portrayal of Zionism as *merely* an American instrument in some SED narratives are wide of the mark. However, the same is true of those accounts which seem indignant that any Zionist or Jewish organisation could be accused of espionage.

Such accusations are then interpreted as evidence of antisemitism. There were of course more nuanced accounts in the GDR, for instance Georg Krausz’ which talks of the turn in 1949 with the first credit accepted by Israel from the USA in the amount of 100 million dollars.<sup>274</sup> In any case, previously confidential de-classified American records reveal that JOINT was subject to a major infiltration and intelligence gathering operation by the Americans as early as 1946. Initially, this was in order to investigate whether there was a

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<sup>273</sup> David Gurvitz and Nathan Guttman, ‘During World War II US intelligence targeted American Jews’, *Forward*, 23 March 2016.

<sup>274</sup> For example: Georg Krausz, ‘Die zionistische Agentur des USA-Imperialismus’, *Neues Deutschland*, 6 December 1952.

socialist network operating between Palestine and the eastern Europe; however, the investigation also had the stated objective of ‘collect[ing] intelligence on Soviet order of battle as well as economic and political information behind the Iron Curtain’. One progress report speaks of targeting ‘any Jewish members of the Armed Forces of the USSR, either of military or civilian status’.<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, de-classified cables and memoranda from 1950 indicate that the Israeli government fully understood what being an American ally entailed in the Cold War era, offering to manufacture arms and ammunition for the ‘Western World’ of American calibre, to be used initially in Greece, Turkey and Iran (all under unsteady Western hegemony at the time and potential conflict zones) and to allow the US to utilise its territory in the event of war with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the Israelis requested that the Americans begin stockpiling fuel, food and other supplies for the American military in Israel and to increase the training of Israeli military personnel in America.<sup>276</sup>

Of particular interest from a memory politics point of view is the suggestion by Chaim Herzog<sup>277</sup> and Teddy Kollek<sup>278</sup> that their current Czech arms ‘which conform to those used by the German Army could be used by the US in equipping Western German divisions’ in the fight against communism.<sup>279</sup> Publicly, the Israeli government would denounce West German rearmament plans only a month later.<sup>280</sup> This provides an important nuance to the Merker affair and to the wider question of *Wiedergutmachung*. As Israel had positioned itself within a camp hostile to the interests and even existence of the GDR, is it not perhaps logical

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<sup>275</sup> Saint Austria, *Progress Report – LILAC Project SYMPHONY* <[https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/SYMPHONY%20%20%20VOL.%201\\_0053.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/SYMPHONY%20%20%20VOL.%201_0053.pdf)> [accessed 20 December 2018].

<sup>276</sup> Frederick Aandahl and William Z. Slany, eds, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, v, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978). Document no.: 790.5/12–2950 (p. 1052), 784.A.5/12–2850 (p. 1085).

<sup>277</sup> (1918–1997). At the time Israeli Military, Naval, and Air Attaché in the United States. Herzog would be President of Israel from 1983–1993.

<sup>278</sup> (1911–2007). Kollek is listed as a Minister at the Embassy of Israel. Kollek had a background in intelligence for the Jewish Agency during WW2 and worked for *Haganah* before the founding of Israel. He would go on to become a key figure in Ben Gurion’s governments of the 1950s and a long time Mayor of Jerusalem.

<sup>279</sup> Aandahl and Slany, p. 1085.

<sup>280</sup> [n.a.], ‘Israel Parliament Protests German Rearmament; Calls for Complete Demilitarization’, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 11 January 1951.

that the SED began to re-think the question of reparations, which could be used against them and their allies? Indeed, many of the contemporary criticisms of the West German Luxemburg Agreement of 1952, for instance by the then editor of *Die Zeit*, centred on the fact that it inevitably meant arms exports into an ongoing conflict.<sup>281</sup> The free weapons deliveries agreed as part of the *Luxemburger Abkommen* are said to have enabled former Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion to derail peace negotiations being conducted between his successor Moshe Sharett and Egyptian President Nasser, leading to a more bellicose situation in the Middle East.<sup>282</sup> Indeed, the government of the FRG appear to have admitted that only around fifteen percent of the monies given to the Claims Conference over its entire history have actually benefited victims of fascist persecution.<sup>283</sup>

In light of this context, the framing of reparations as a mere question of moral obligation towards victims displays a political naivety and disregard for the often cynical context of the Cold War. Most significantly, however, these simplistic accounts legitimise if not lionise the FRG by excluding the complex ethical, moral and political dilemmas of the time. This enables the presentation of the FRG in this instance as the ‘better Germany’, the more consequently antifascist, whereby philosemitism and support for Israel are seen as the measuring stick for genuine antifascism. This phenomenon is laden with political connotations and exploration thereof helps to explain the Merker affair and how it has been reconstructed in state-mandated discourse.

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<sup>281</sup> See: Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes und Moshe Zimmermann, *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2010), p. 577.

<sup>282</sup> Helmut Mejcher, ‘Geschichte der arabischen Welt’, in *Der arabische Osten im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert 1914–1985*, ed. by Ulrich Haarmann (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2004), pp. 432–501 (p. 484).

<sup>283</sup> Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry Reflection on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 86.

## Conclusion: Antisemitism and Antifascism – The Faultlines of National Legitimation

This investigation into the Merker affair and representations thereof has raised a range of significant points of relevance to understanding the FRG's post-1990 memory landscape. From discursive shifts to genealogies of interpretations and detailed textual analysis, the question remains, however, as to what ideological implications we can discern from these state-mandated portrayals? The key word in answering this question appears to be antifascism. It is well documented that antifascism was an important component of the GDR's identity and discourses of self-legitimation. The number of volumes advancing the thesis of an instrumentalised and therefore somehow inauthentic antifascism, casting doubt on the GDR's primary legitimation are myriad,<sup>284</sup> and the voices resisting this tide and urging nuance are few.<sup>285</sup> The many representations of the Merker affair in state-mandated memory appear to fit very well into the former category. In such contexts Merker serves as a welcome figurehead with which the narrative of an antisemitic GDR can be personified. The portrayals analysed in detail in this chapter tend to centre disproportionately on Merker as a pro-Zionist martyr subjected to repression due to opposition in the *Wiedergutmachungsfrage*. The complex contexts of the Noel Field affair, Cold War agent hysteria, question marks over emigration and more are largely omitted or dispatched in fleeting caricatures. The emphasis of Jewish thematics clearly goes to the heart of the issue of antifascism and the GDR. Merker is utilised as evidence in chief of alleged antisemitism within the SED across a range of post-

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<sup>284</sup> Other than Herf's seminal *Divided Memory*, other important examples include the following: Olaf Groehler, 'Verfolgten- und Opfergruppen im Spannungsfeld der politischen Auseinandersetzungen in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', in *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten*, ed. by Jürgen Danyel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), pp. 17–30; Manfred Agethen, Eckhard Jesse and Ehrhart Neubert, *Der missbrauchte Antifaschismus: DDR Staatsdoktrin und Lebenslüge der deutschen Linken* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002).

<sup>285</sup> Peitsch and Sayner, pp. 100–118; Bill Niven, 'Remembering Nazi Anti-Semitism in the GDR', in *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*, ed. by Bill Niven and Chloe Paver (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 205–213; Joanne Sayner, *Reframing Antifascism: Memory, Genre and the Life Writings of Greta Kuckhoff* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Wolfgang Wippermann, *Dämonisierung durch Vergleich. DDR und Drittes Reich* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 2009).

1990 state-mandated sources establishing the alleged antisemitism of the GDR as a trope in German discourse. From an ideological perspective, these interpretations of the Merker case appear to be based on certain political and theoretical assumptions.

For instance, there is a clear tendency to associate genuine antifascism with support for Zionism and conversely to hold anti-Zionism in deep suspicion if not to treat it as essentially antisemitic.<sup>286</sup> This is ably demonstrated by a *Deutschlandfunk* article which claims that ‘Die antisemitische Propagandawelle der DDR erlebte ihren Höhepunkt mit der Anklage gegen Paul Merker’ before going on to dismiss all communist Jews as Jews: ‘Keiner der [jüdischen] Funktionäre der DDR [...] hat als Jude in der DDR agiert.’<sup>287</sup> This sentiment is obvious in all approaches to the Merker case and to the related concept of antisemitism in the GDR. Non-Zionist Jews are denied a voice both implicitly in the fact that they are almost never acknowledged as Jews – notably in this case the judges and witnesses in Merker’s trial or his chief opponents in *Wiedergutmachung* debates – or by not considering their views in any detail. This tendency to excise anti-Zionist Jews by implication presents them as sheepish collaborators without the courage to stand up to the cartoonishly portrayed Stalinists. That anti-Zionism, or rather, in positive terms, other forms of Jewish national identity or even lack thereof have been constant within Ashkenazi Jewish communities, and even at times been the majority view,<sup>288</sup> is not taken seriously. This entire approach raises the question as to whether denying these Jewish voices credibility, and the implication that one is not a real Jew unless one is a Zionist, should be considered to have antisemitic overtones of its own.<sup>289</sup> In any case,

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<sup>286</sup> This is a development which has become increasingly mainstream as evidenced by the flood of recent publications on the subject. See, for example: Robert Fine and Philip Spencer, *Antisemitism and the Left: On the Return of the Jewish Question* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Eunice G. Pollock, ed, *From Antisemitism to Anti-Zionism: The Past and Present of a Lethal Ideology* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017); David Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>287</sup> Thomas Klatt, *Antisemitismus in der DDR Propaganda gegen Israel und Juden* (2015) <[https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/antisemitismus-in-der-ddr-propaganda-gegen-israel-und-juden.886.de.html?dram:article\\_id=340619](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/antisemitismus-in-der-ddr-propaganda-gegen-israel-und-juden.886.de.html?dram:article_id=340619)> [accessed 2 December 2018].

<sup>288</sup> See: Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*.

<sup>289</sup> See for instance, Moshe Zuckermann, *Der allgegenwärtige Antisemit oder die Angst der Deutschen vor der Vergangenheit* (Frankfurt/Main: Westend, 2018), pp. 154–159.



it is indicative of a problematic approach to a complex subject – which can and does fill volumes<sup>290</sup> – which prejudices discussion of the GDR and antisemitism from the outset.

The open indignation at the very concept of Zionist agents or indignation as the collocation of capitalism and (specific) Jewish individuals is apparent throughout the state-mandated portrayals analysed and is indicative of a certain degree of *philosemitism*. Although this phenomenon has often been considered to be the logical inverse of antisemitism, as Simon Wiesenthal admonished: ‘Wer von Juden erwartet, dass sie niemals ein Kriegsverbrechen begehen, niemals Menschen ungerechtfertigt verfolgen, ja vielleicht sogar töten könnten, der beweist damit nur, dass er uns noch immer nicht für gleichberechtigt mit anderen Völkern hält – gleichberechtigt im Guten wie im Schlechten. Wer nur zu uns hält, solange wir ausschließlich die Rolle des Opfers spielen, der ist auf eine andere Weise der alte Antisemit geblieben.’<sup>291</sup>

It is precisely this philosemitism that one scholar has seen as an important pillar of West German national *Sinnstiftung*. Moishe Postone sees the discourse of antisemitism as having been instrumentalised into an ideology of legitimisation in the BRD, which as it approaches antisemitism only, or at least primarily, in the form of a prejudice covers up the internal dynamics of German fascism and antisemitism and the problem of uncomfortable continuities post-1945.<sup>292</sup> It is comprehensible how portrayals of the GDR, the other Germany, as antisemitic fit into such legitimacy narratives, simultaneously legitimising the FRG by comparison and further delegitimising the example of socialism on German soil. Furthermore, it fits well into the totalitarian models favoured by many within the state-

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<sup>290</sup> Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso, 2009); Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge* (London: Verso, 2014).

<sup>291</sup> Simon Wiesenthal, *Recht nicht Rache* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1992), p. 278. For a fascinating overview of philosemitism in the FRG and its psychological and ideological implications see: Frank Stern, *Im Anfang war Auschwitz: Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1991), pp. 241–266.

<sup>292</sup> ‘The condemnation of Nazi anti-Semitism, in other words, has also served as an ideology of legitimation for the present system. This instrumentalization was only possible because anti-Semitism has been treated primarily as a form of prejudice, as a scapegoat ideology, thereby obscuring the intrinsic relationship between anti-Semitism and other aspects of National Socialism.’ See: Moishe Postone, *Anti-Semitism and National Socialism* (London: Chronos, 2000), pp. 3–4.

mandated institutions by seemingly corroborating the *reductio ad Hitlerum* of such models. There is a discernible tendency within state-mandated memory, which is now promoting this narrative, to see antisemitism and right wing extremism after 1990 as having its roots in the GDR. This is demonstrated clearly in the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*'s conference *Antisemitismus in der DDR und die Folgen* and in the *Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*'s travelling exhibition and accompanying publication *Das hat's bei uns nicht gegeben! Antisemitismus in der DDR*. In both instances Merker is seen as a prime example of the GDR's anti-Semitism.

However, this impulse to associate the GDR with antisemitism and related undermining of the GDR's antifascism is certainly not limited to the example of Paul Merker alone. Indeed, beyond the examples discussed in the course of this chapter, the AAS has compiled an entire educational programme, which under the title *Ausgeblendet?* seeks to demonstrate that the destruction of European Jews and Jewish victims were not represented within the cinema and literature of the GDR due to latent antisemitism.<sup>293</sup> Interestingly, this interpretation is entirely contradicted by another prominent proponent of the antisemitic GDR thesis, Chaim Noll,<sup>294</sup> who in the BpB's *Deutschland Archiv* bemoans the fact that Jews were too *often* presented as victims and positive portrayals of religious Jews were lacking.<sup>295</sup> One sees here how writers with seemingly contradictory opinions can nevertheless unite around a particular *topos*. In both cases, the unifying factor is the vilification of the GDR and that questions surrounding Judaism take on a disproportionate weighting in doing so, arguably indicating how significant these issues are within the ideological framework of the FRG. Why is this the case? The AAS' project '*Das hat bei uns nicht gegeben!*' *Antisemitismus in der DDR* provides some insight in its stated mission, positing that right wing extremism has

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<sup>293</sup> Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, *Ausgeblendet? Der Holocaust in Film und Literatur der DDR* (Berlin: Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2011).

<sup>294</sup> Noll's father Dieter Noll was a prominent anti-Zionist communist of Jewish extraction – his mother had been persecuted under fascism as a 'Halbjüdin' – and is most famous for writing the antifascist novel *Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt*. Chaim, born Hans, converted to Judaism in the 1980s and emigrated to Israel via West Berlin.

<sup>295</sup> Chaim Noll, 'Juden und Judentum in der Literatur der DDR', *Deutschland Archiv*, 6 (2009), 1033–1400 (p. 1037).

become *Alltagskultur* in some areas of the former GDR and that this phenomenon is expressly not due to ‘Verwerfungen im deutschen Vereinigungsprozess’.<sup>296</sup> Instead, the project sets out to find the reason in the GDR’s approach to Zionism and memory of the Holocaust. The clear connotation that the social and economic turbulence caused by a unification process characterised by mass privatisation, unemployment, structural and cultural change is somehow not the main reason for right wing extremism in the territory of the former GDR appears to be an important defensive formulation for the German state and its institutions. It is far easier to scapegoat the GDR than to reflect critically on the mistakes and failures of the past. That is not to say that there are not aspects of the GDR’s culture of remembrance worthy of criticism; however, the space given to such treatments – often in de-contextualised polemical terms – in state-mandated memory is telling. Indeed, this has been demonstrated again recently with the publication of a state-mandated volume in late 2018 entitled, *Nach Auschwitz: Schwieriges Erbe DDR*<sup>297</sup> which in light of the recent success of the AfD and Pegida seeks to locate the roots of modern right wing extremism in the GDR, nearly thirty years after unification.

A recent monograph from Israeli-German psychoanalyst Moshe Zuckermann has discussed the subject of antisemitism and its relation to the ideology of the FRG at length. He too identifies the instrumentalisation of philosemitism within the FRG but highlights the specific development towards utilising allegations of antisemitism against the political left – and the space this unintentionally gifts to the antisemitic right – concluding as follows:

Aber deutsche Antisemitenjäger und Israelfreunde haben andere Sorgen. Nicht etwa der Antisemitismus als ein traditioneller Erbteil rechter und rechtsextremer

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<sup>296</sup> Anette Kahane, ‘Mit Stumpf und Stiel ausgerottet? Antisemitismus in der DDR’, in *Das hat bei uns nicht gegeben! Antisemitismus in der DDR Das Buch zur Ausstellung der Amadeu Antonio Stiftung*, ed. by Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, pp. 6–10 (p. 6).

<sup>297</sup> Enrico Heitzer, Martin Jander, Anetta Kahane and Patrice Poutrus, eds, *Nach Auschwitz: Schwieriges Erbe DDR* (Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag, 2018).

Ideologien, nicht der Faschismus und seine Ausformung als Nazismus in Deutschland, der die unsägliche Katastrophe über die Juden Europas gebracht hat, sind Ziel ihrer ideologischen Agitation, sondern der ‘linke Antisemitismus’. Den gilt es zu brandmarken. Konnten sich Deutschlands Revisionisten, Neonazis und Faschisten je einen schöneren Schlusstrich wünschen?<sup>298</sup>

The GDR as the only socialist state ever constructed on German soil takes up an exemplary role for such political marginalisation of the left. In other words, if previous socialist experiments were antisemitic, contemporary socialist projects and political parties are guilty of antisemitism by association.<sup>299</sup>

Although Israeli academic Frank Stern is speaking about the topic of the Holocaust in cinema of the GDR, he raises a wider point that the replication of Cold War anti-communist polemic lies at the heart of this wider phenomenon, summarising:

[...] dass einige der hervorragendsten deutschsprachigen Filme, die jüdische Charaktere, die deutsch-jüdische Erfahrung und die Shoah repräsentieren, in Babelsberg produziert worden sind [...]. Die gewagte These, dass die Kultur der DDR sich nicht mit jüdischen Themen oder Antisemitismus befasst hat, gehört zur apologetischen Publizistik des Kalten Krieges oder zur Wiederholung antikommunistischer Illusionen in der bundesdeutschen Nach-Vereinigungs-Kampfliteratur.<sup>300</sup>

This anti-communist approach does indeed appear prominently at every turn in representations of the Merker affair. All actions by the GDR and its associated actors are de-

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<sup>298</sup> Zuckermann, *Der Allgegenwärtige Antisemit*, p. 165.

<sup>299</sup> This can be seen to a certain attempts by attempts to discipline the SED's successor party *die Linke* for alleged antisemitism and 'Israelfeindlichkeit'. See: Deutscher Bundestag, *'Linke soll Bekenntnis gegen Antisemitismus ablegen'* (2011) <[https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2011/34536798\\_kw21\\_de\\_linke/205436](https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2011/34536798_kw21_de_linke/205436)> [accessed 30 November 2018]; Armin Pfahl Traugber, 'Antisemitismus und Israelfeindlichkeit in der Partei "Die Linke"', *Deutschland Archiv*, (2011) <<http://www.bpb.de/53060/antisemitismus-und-die-linke?p=all#fr-footnodeid26>> [accessed 30 November 2018].

<sup>300</sup> Frank Stern in Heinz Kersten, 'Die gefrorenen Blitze', *Freitag* (2003) <<https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/die-gefrorenen-blitze>> [accessed 30 November 2018].

contextualised and simplified into de-legitimatory stereotypes which do not appear to require supporting evidence: ‘show trials’; ‘antisemitism’; and ‘Machiavellian power struggles’. The actions of the FRG are consistently encoded as lacunar discourse, which occasionally comes out expressly in comparisons to emphasise the impact as in the case of representations of the *Luxemburger Abkommen*. In other words, de-legitimation of the GDR’s antifascism, predicated on anti-communist stereotypes, is a core component of constructing a national *Sinnstiftung* or discourse of legitimation for the FRG.

In general, the Merker case is constructed as the incriminating evidence in chief that the GDR exhibited antisemitism and is utilised to undermine the myth of its antifascist credentials. However, as seen throughout the discussions in this chapter it is possible to say that these allegations are often exaggerated and certainly rely on a great deal of de-contextualisation and distortion of historical records. This betrays an uncritical anti-communist and philo-Zionist prejudice which assumes both guilt and innocence respectively thereby rendering a critical engagement with the sources and previous interpretations thereof unnecessary. As Althusser maintained, ideology is profoundly unconscious and the uncritical acceptance of these shibboleths in the Merker case indicates that the ideological framework in the FRG is concerned with a combative and programmatic undermining of the legitimatory discourses of the GDR (antifascism) and support for the lacunar corollary that the FRG was the better Germany in such matters. The manner in which the Merker affair has been constructed in state-mandated memory serves therefore as a stark reminder of the political implications of representations of the past, the pitfalls of de-contextualisation and appears to justify calls for a re-assessment of dominant approaches to antifascism, anti-Zionism and anti-communism. These wide-ranging interfaces demonstrate the strikingly multifaceted manner in which the concept of opposition in the GDR is reconstructed in post-1990 discourse. The next chapter moves on from this early period and the relatively obscure

phenomenon of 1950s inner-SED strife to the middle period of the GDR and one of the most famous figures of opposition – dissident *Liedermacher* Wolf Biermann.



# Wolf Biermann – a Dragonslayer?

## The GDR and its Dissidents

### Introduction

This chapter is formed of a case study which looks at the figure of the poet, author and *Liedermacher* Wolf Biermann within state-mandated memory and wider German discourse. It does so in order to gain insight into communist-oriented opposition as it relates to the concept of the *dissident* and there is arguably no more prominent dissident in the GDR context than Wolf Biermann. His *Ausbürgerung* in 1976 caused an international furore which propelled him to unparalleled levels of recognition and acclaim on the one hand and denigration and hostility on the other. Indeed, Biermann's biography and legacy continues to be hotly contested despite certain narratives appearing to enjoy more prominence than others as will become clearer in the ensuing discussion.

The term dissident is often ill-defined in discussions of the GDR. Etymologically speaking, dissident is a Latin term meaning 'sitting apart' and was used until the mid-twentieth century to refer to Protestant Christians and their relation with the Church of Rome's claim to authority and orthodoxy. With the rise of totalitarian theory from the 1940s onwards, the term came to be used to describe oppositionals within the socialist camp. The main difference between dissidents and say Christian anti-communists, however, is that dissident is often collocated with terms such as Marxist or communist. This indicates that a dissident is someone who maintains a claim to be or is presented as a communist but disagrees with or dissents from a particular authority, theory or action. However, this definition is somewhat broad and does not seem to do justice to how the term is employed in writing about the GDR. One need only cast a glance at the range of individuals who have



been described as being dissident: the ‘Widerstandsikone’ Bettina Wegner,<sup>1</sup> the ‘loyal dissident’<sup>2</sup> Christa Wolf<sup>3</sup> or the allegedly ‘bekannteste Dissident der DDR’ Robert Havemann.<sup>4</sup> These individuals have little in common other than a broad commitment to some form of socialism and differences of opinion with the SED. Perhaps, a key commonality is the manner in which all were well-known for precisely these differences with the SED. In other words, the content of dissent is secondary to the mere fact of dissent, which played well in western Cold War journalism, politics and cultural debates. This begs the question as to how seriously these figures’ views were actually taken by their advocates in the West and, indeed, in the East. Furthermore, it raises a more fundamental question: can we speak of a structural element or function to the dissident within the Cold War context which supercedes the minutiae of cultural or political debate? During the course of this chapter, these theoretical and semantical questions arising from the thematic field of the *dissident* will be pursued and clarified.

The chapter is structured into three thematic sections: The first section traces the stations of Biermann’s biography up to and including his ‘inner exile’ in the wake of the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee. The second deals with the infamous *Ausbürgerung* in 1976. The third and final section looks at Biermann’s role in political discourse and memory surrounding the GDR since his *Ausbürgerung* in 1976 with a focus on

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<sup>1</sup> Bettina Wegner (1947–). A founding member of the singing group *Oktoberklub*, Wegner was sentenced to a year’s imprisonment for distributing leaflets protesting the Warsaw Pact’s actions in Prague 1968. Following her release, Wegner performed as a critical singer-songwriter and poet, publishing songs in both the GDR and FRG before being faced with a charge of tax avoidance in 1983. She chose to emigrate to the FRG. Despite retiring in 2007, Wegner remains a left-wing artist to this day. Peter Wensierski, ‘DDR-Widerstandsikone Bettina Wegner’, *Der Spiegel* (2015) 1 October 2015, <<http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/ddr-widerstandsikone-liedermacherin-bettina-wegner-a-1055416.html>> [27 December 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Julia Hell, ‘Loyal Dissidents and Stasi Poets: Sascha Anderson, Christa Wolf, and the Incomplete Project of GDR Research’, *German Politics and Society*, 20.4 (2002), 82–118.

<sup>3</sup> Christa Wolf (1929-2011). Perhaps one of the best known writers from the GDR, Wolf embodies the conflicting loyalties of many GDR authors as she held several official positions, even having candidate status within the Central Committee of the SED at one point (1963-1967), but maintaining an independent and critical position over the years. She was one of the most prominent protestors of the decision to revoke Biermann’s citizenship in 1976 and would become an influential voice in later inner-SED oppositional circles.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Havemann (1910-1982). An academic chemist, Havemann was involved in anti-fascist resistance before 1945. His SED membership and licence to teach were both revoked in 1964 following an allegedly unauthorised interview which sharply criticised the SED and the Humboldt University in the *Hamburger Echo*. A prominent left wing dissident until his death in 1982.

post-1990 debates and conjunctures. Equally, in the course of this chapter I will seek to trace various points of contestation and to analyse the genesis of particular perspectives on Biermann and the groups which uphold them. While Biermann forms the focal point of this analysis of GDR dissidents, analysis of other individuals, events and phenomena is pursued as they are integral parts of the story of dissent during the middle period of the GDR (roughly 1961-1980). Indeed, Biermann has been selected as the primary figure for this case study precisely because of the many intersections his biography shares with other dissidents and the wider field of communist-oriented opposition in the GDR. Furthermore, Biermann has played a seemingly unparalleled role in post-Wall cultural criticism, debates and memory work surrounding the GDR; this makes him an ideal and fascinating aperture through which to delve into the post-unification memory landscape and its portrayals of the GDR opposition.

### Biermann: Stages of an Exile

The aims of this section are twofold, firstly to introduce the man Biermann and the context in which he lived in order to shed light on his development into a dissident. Secondly, to draw out some of the points of contention and to indicate the dividing lines between various interpretations in order to highlight the contours of the deeply political phenomenon that is the dissident Biermann and how even some of the most basic facts of his biography are subject to re-working and contestation. It draws heavily on Biermann's own autobiographical writings, primary source archival materials and the memory writing of other actors involved in various stages of Biermann's life.

## Early life

Wolf Biermann's biography appears to have destined him to be a communist. Born in 1936 into an actively anti-fascist family, his mother, Emma, came from prominent socialist stock in Halle. As was characteristic for many working class families during the economic turmoil of 1920s Germany, the family was compelled to move in order to find work. They ended up in Hamburg, via Kiel, where Emma's father Karl Dietrich worked as a hodcarrier and was a leading cadre in the *Rotfrontkämpferbund* as well as being a close companion of Ernst Thälmann.<sup>5</sup> Biermann's father, Dagobert, was of Jewish heritage and worked as a welder in the thoroughly proletarian environment of the Hamburg docks. After the rise of German fascism, Emma and Dagobert Biermann were involved in anti-fascist resistance, acting as couriers for the banned KPD and helping to publish the illegal party newspaper the *Hamburger Volkszeitung*. Dagobert was sentenced to two years imprisonment for his involvement. On his release in 1935, he re-entered the struggle against fascism through his work as a welder on the docks of Hamburg. In 1937, during the raging Spanish Civil War, the German fascists were providing secret shipments of arms to their allies under Franco. Dagobert was part of an effort to sabotage these shipments and reveal them to the world. For his communist allegiance and this anti-fascist activity, he was sentenced to six years in the concentration camp system and was ultimately killed in 1943 in Auschwitz. This relatively untypical milieu almost certainly conditioned the path which Biermann was to take and Biermann has consistently stressed his familial background as a core part of his identity and political credentials.<sup>6</sup> However, he has often sought to link this seeming legitimation to his

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<sup>5</sup> Ernst Thälmann (1886-1944). Chairman of the KPD from 1925 until his arrest in 1933. Subsequently in concentration camps until his murder in 1944. It is said that Thälmann was murdered on the personal orders of Hitler. See: Peter Przybylski, *Mordsache Thälmann*, (Berlin: Militärverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> See: Wolf Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2016), p. 7. The question of Biermann's credentials as a Communist are central to many discussions surrounding him. Many struggle to understand how a proponent of 'true' communism could become an outspoken anti-communist. This will be returned to later on in the chapter.

own dissidence. He emphasises his father's own alleged non-conformity, claiming that his father was attacked as an 'Abweichler' by orthodox KPD members.<sup>7</sup> Biermann sees no contradiction in seeking to portray the legacy of his KPD father, whom he never actually met, as being integral to his own anti-communist turn, declaring in his inimicably grandiose style: 'Durch ihn [his father] bin ich ein frecher Zweifler geworden, dann ein frommer Ketzer, ein tapferer Renegat des Kommunismus.'<sup>8</sup>

However, Biermann's early life appears to have been less heroically simplistic than this caricature. Living in Hamburg in the FRG, he was organised in communist youth organisations from a young age; the fourteen-year-old Wolf would take part in the first *Deutschland-Treffen* of the GDR's youth organisation the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ) in East Berlin. Biermann was even given the honour of speaking on behalf of the 800 FDJ members from West Germany, shaking the then head of the FDJ Erich Honecker's hand and delivering a solemn declaration of loyalty.<sup>9</sup>

### From West to East: The First Emigration

In 1953, Wolf Biermann emigrated to the GDR. A seemingly understandable move for a young communist at the time, he was certainly not alone as 31,792 emigrated in the course of 1953.<sup>10</sup> However, even this decision is hotly contested, demonstrating the extent to which Wolf Biermann's story has been subjected to different explanatory approaches. Take for instance a pamphlet dedicated to Wolf Biermann authored by the state-mandated

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<sup>7</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7. This claim is perhaps nuanced by the fact that Biermann never actually knew his father and his mother famously never gave up her own communist allegiances or membership of the DKP.

<sup>9</sup> 'Wir geloben daß für uns die Deutsche Demokratische Republik, an deren Spitze unser großes Vorbild, unser Präsident Wilhelm Pieck, steht, die Grundlage für ein schöneres, besseres Leben ist. Wir kennen keine Zonengrenze. Für uns gibt es nur ein Deutschland mit seiner Hauptstadt Berlin'. See: [n.a.] 'Biermanns Lied', *Die Zeit*, 3. August 1973.

<sup>10</sup> See: Andrea Schmelz, *Migration und Politik im geteilten Deutschland während des Kalten Krieges: Die West-Ost-Migration in die DDR in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren*, (Opladen: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2002), p. 39. For the next four years, between 72,000 and 77,000 people would annually make the same decision. Coincidentally, 1953 is also the year that another future GDR poet with Jewish roots, Jürgen Rennert, would go from West to East.

*Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*<sup>11</sup> which prefaces Biermann's decision by highlighting the strikes and demonstrations of June 1953. Interpreted along a quite particular *Volksaufstand* narrative, that is to say that June 1953 embodied a people's uprising calling for 'freie Wahlen, Absetzung der Regierung, deutsche Einheit',<sup>12</sup> this establishes a polemic and anti-communist interpretation of the GDR from the outset of the pamphlet. This is particularly striking as the event has little to do with Biermann or his decision to emigrate to the GDR, he actually emigrated in May 1953 and was living in a boarding school in Gadebusch near Schwerin at the time. According to the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*'s own memorial web presence dedicated to 17 June 1953, this area was almost entirely unaffected.<sup>13</sup> This particular framing appears to serve the purpose of rhetorically establishing that Biermann's early allegiance to the GDR should be seen as misguided. This is further clarified by the author, Robert Grünbaum, 'Dort, wo man die Ideale seines Vaters *scheinbar* [my emphasis A.B.] verwirklichte, dort wollte er leben und studieren'. The overarching narrative employed seems to establish Biermann's early credentials as a communist, while simultaneously denegrating the GDR's socialism as little more than a superficial totalitarianism. This is particularly interesting as the entire trope is seemingly negated by Biermann's own autobiography, in which he downplays the notion that June 1953 was a turning point for him, stating: 'Vom Volksaufstand in Berlin am 17. Juni kriegte ich kaum was mit.'<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, some of Biermann's critics present a different view of his reasons for emigrating. Gisela Steineckert, an erstwhile friend and collaborator in the early 1960s,

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Grünbaum, *Wolf Biermann 1976 Die Ausbürgerung und ihre Folgen* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>13</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Bezirk Schwerin* (2003) <<http://www.17juni53.de/karte/schwerin.html>> [27 December 2018].

<sup>14</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, p.65. The description of the Volksaufstand as being 'in Berlin' is of further interest as it disagrees with the concerted efforts of the state-mandated memorial bodies to present the 17 June 1953 as a GDR-wide event.

emphasises Biermann's connections to the future *Volksbildungsministerin* Margot Honecker. The then Margot Feist's parents were close friends of Biermann's grandmother from Halle and during the final years of the Second World War, Margot and her father stayed with the Biermanns in Hamburg during a period of *Illegalität* on behalf of the KPD. After her father was arrested, Margot was seemingly adopted by Biermann's mother Emma. While in Hamburg, Margot even witnessed the moment the boy Wolf Biermann was informed of his unknown father's death and 'vor mir mit geballten Fäusten [...] alles rausschrie'.<sup>15</sup> According to these left-wing critics of Biermann, Margot Honecker invited Biermann to the GDR, ensured he was accepted into a prestigious boarding school, provided with a large apartment in Chausseestraße in Berlin and even drove a Volkswagen car, a rare luxury in the GDR, especially in the early 1950s.<sup>16</sup> While there may be some truth to these accusations, particularly the ease with which the single Biermann was assigned a large family flat in the centre of Berlin in the late 1950s, in 1953 Margot Honecker was not yet established as *Volksbildungsministerin*. Indeed, both she and future husband Erich Honecker were seemingly in disfavour with the party following the birth of their daughter out of wedlock in late 1952. Erich was compelled to divorce his then wife Edith Baumann<sup>17</sup> and he and Margot were sent on separate year-long study courses in Moscow in order to distract from any potential scandal (Baumann was also a senior politician at the time). It appears therefore that Margot would have had little influence in Biermann's decision to emigrate or the GDR's decision to enable his studies.

There is an open letter written to Biermann in 1965 from a childhood friend, Peter Suhling, which perhaps provides insight into a less overtly political motivation of the young

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<sup>15</sup> Margot Honecker cited in Rudolf Andert and Wolfgang Herzberg, *Der Sturz: Honecker im Kreuzverhör* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau, 1991), pp. 316–317.

<sup>16</sup> See for example: Gisela Steineckert, *Eines schönen Tages: Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 2016), p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> Edith Baumann (1909–1973) held several senior official positions within the FDJ and SED over her lifetime, including being a founding member of the leadership of the *Demokratische Frauenbund Deutschlands* and a candidate member of the Politbüro (1958–1963).

Wolf Biermann which most commentators appear to ignore. Suhling writes ‘Beide erhielten wir die Möglichkeit, in der DDR das zu lernen, was uns als Arbeiterkindern in Westdeutschland versagt blieb’.<sup>18</sup> Certainly Biermann’s proletarian circumstances and single-parent family practically precluded a higher education in the young FRG,<sup>19</sup> and emigration to the GDR enabled him to not only complete his *Abitur* but also to undertake two degrees at the Humboldt University. In any case, these varying interpretations demonstrate how contested the biography of Wolf Biermann really is and point to the need to de-mystify both criticism and praise of the *Liedermacher* in order to better understand what happened in the life of this iconic dissident and how he is being utilised in the political memory of the FRG.

#### Biermann and ‘die bedeutsamste Rede des Kommunismus’

After gaining his *Abitur* in 1955, Biermann applied to study political economy at the Humboldt University in Berlin. At this time, encouraged by his KPD mother, he felt that economics was the best subject in order to do his part in building communism.<sup>20</sup> Shortly after taking up his place in Berlin, a seismic event for the international communist movement took place – the Twentieth Conference of the CPSU and Khrushchev’s so-called ‘secret speech’. The impact of this speech would prove to be a key turning point in the biographies of many figures who would come to be known as dissidents.

Following Joseph Stalin’s death in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev became First Secretary of the CPSU and over the next few years began a program of renewal and reform within the Soviet economy and Communist Party. As part of this, Khrushchev gave a speech at the

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Suhling, ‘Offener Brief an Wolf Biermann’, *Neues Deutschland*, 9. December 1965.

<sup>19</sup> See for example: Ralf Dahrendorf, *Arbeiterkinder an deutschen Universitäten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965).

<sup>20</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, p.72.

Twentieth Conference in February 1956 in which he roundly attacked the leadership of Stalin and various practices during his tenure as General Secretary. It cannot be overstated that this was to be a devastating blow to the global communist movement. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Hobsbawm notes that the speech marked a violent caesura in the history of state socialism, dividing it ‘irrevocably into a “before” and “after”’ and is perhaps even the moment which destroyed the world communist movement.<sup>21</sup>

Stalin had been the figurehead of said movement, celebrated as the party helmsman who guided the newly born Soviet Union from a civil war-torn, largely agrarian economy into a global industrial power which played the largest part in defeating European fascism. Khrushchev’s portrayal on the other hand accused Stalin of having shown cowardice during the war, being unprepared for the war, having built a cult of personality to ensure his own dictatorship and much more besides. Interestingly, the content of the speech is almost universally accepted within mainstream academic discourse and especially within German state-mandated memory work. Take, for instance, a special anniversary edition of *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* dedicated to the *Krisenjahr 1956*. It contains two accounts written by communist renegades, Ralph Giordano and Wolfgang Leonhard. Giordano’s account is representative of many young western communists of the time:

Im Februar 1956 erfuhren wir, was Chruschtschow auf dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU gesagt hatte. Dieser kleine Türspalt, den er geöffnet hatte, traf uns wie ein Schlag mit dem Vorschlaghammer vor die Stirn. Wir fielen vom Fleische, trotz der Emanzipation, der Distanzierung von der Partei, die wir schon vollzogen hatten. Nun war der Klassengegner in dem, was er über das System gesagt hatte, bestätigt!

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<sup>21</sup> See p. 5 of this thesis for the complete quotation. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 214.



Leonhard agrees fundamentally – though his own renunciation of communism came about via Titoism and defection to the West some five years previously – describing the event as ‘die bedeutsamste Rede in der Geschichte des Kommunismus’.<sup>22</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, Biermann’s own autobiographical portrayal of this particular period at Humboldt conspicuously avoids detailed discussion of his own reaction to the speech, his more general political views or activity with regards to the SED – he focuses instead on his pursuit of women.<sup>23</sup> However, there is an interesting indication from Biermann’s MfS files that he was actually active *against* leftist turbulence among the students following the events of 1956. The *Eröffnungsbericht* of the MfS’ OV Lyriker<sup>24</sup> states the following: ‘Im Jahre 1956 stand er während der Auseinandersetzungen an der Universität fest zur Partei und stellte sich den Einsatzgruppen der Partei zur Verfügung.’ This is noteworthy as Biermann has never – to my knowledge – admitted that he played an active role in quelling student unrest, but more importantly, it indicates that Biermann took the SED line after the events of the Twentieth Conference of the CPSU and Khrushchev’s famous speech. This is significant because – as I will show below – Biermann tends to present himself (as do his proponents) as an anti-Stalinist dissident committed to revolutionising and democratising state socialism through his own uncompromising non-conformity. This episode is certainly anomalous in such a context.

However, Biermann does signal the centrality of the speech to his own identity elsewhere in his autobiography, thereby reaffirming that the speech is something of a shibboleth for the *dissident*:

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<sup>22</sup> Author of *Die Revolution entlässt ihrer Kinder*, Leonhard’s conversion led him from being an SED functionary to defecting to Yugoslavia to working for the *Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen’s SBZ Archiv* within the space of two years. See: Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1955).

<sup>23</sup> ‘Man traf sich am Wochenende zu Tanzvergnügungen in der Mensa. Und ich schleppte, wie ein Schmetterlingssammler, meine Beute ab.’ Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> The codename for the MfS’ monitoring of Wolf Biermann.

Der totalitäre Diktator Stalin war 1953 gestorben. Sein Nachfolger, der zum Parteichef ernannte Nikita Chruschtschow, hatte 1956 auf dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU eine spektakuläre Geheimrede gehalten, in der er zum ersten Mal die Verbrechen Stalins thematisierte. Er hob einen Zipfel des blutigen Tuches, das über der ganzen Sowjetunion lag: Millionen politisch verfolgt und unschuldig ermordeter Menschen, die in sogenannten Säuberungen, in Schau- und Geheimprozessen gefoltert, verurteilt, durch Zwangsarbeit vernichtet oder gleich hingerichtet worden waren. [...] Chruschtschow leitete die “Entstalinisierung” ein mit einem Bündel von politischen, wirtschaftlichen und gesellschaftlichen Reformen, die auch zum Ziel hatten, den Personenkult um Stalin zu beenden. Nach dem Titel eines Buches von Ilja Ehrenburg nannten wir diese neue Politik “Tauwetter”.<sup>25</sup>

That the speech had a resounding impact on the global communist movement is indubitable, but there is a growing body of work which has called many of Khrushchev’s claims into question, work which plays no role in the way that dissidence more widely, and Biermann in particular, are represented in state-mandated memory. For instance, Geoffrey Roberts, a British military historian, who has carefully reconstructed the existing archival and memory writing materials of participants to make a strong case that Khrushchev’s claims of Stalin’s cowardice and unpreparedness for war, among other things, are far from accurate.<sup>26</sup> Far more polemically, Grover Furr, a Professor of English Literature, identifies 61 main theses in Khrushchev’s speech and seeks to demonstrate, on occasion convincingly, that they are either lies or exaggerations.<sup>27</sup> More significantly though, Furr and Roberts among others have pointed to the political nature and context of the speech, asking the pertinent question as to what Khrushchev hoped to gain by giving the speech. Domenico Losurdo’s masterly tracing

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<sup>25</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, p.98.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, pp. 3-4. See also, Kotkin, *Stalin. Waiting for Hitler 1928-1941*, p. 893.

<sup>27</sup> Furr, *Chruschtows Lügen*.

of the ‘black legend’ of Stalin also presents an interesting jumping off point for the reception of many anti-Stalinist tropes in western discourse.<sup>28</sup> While the details of the speech are not the subject of this investigation and so I will not attempt to give a definitive answer, it seems clear that much of what Khrushchev said, and which was believed by many communists, was exaggerated and worthy of further interrogation. It is also clear that this interrogation has remained limited to a small number of academic Sovietologists and committed Marxist intellectuals.

The seemingly uncritical acceptance of the speech’s veracity by historiographers points to how anchored the anti-Stalinist strand of anti-communism is within western academic discourse and indeed wider societal ideology. However, why was it so earnestly accepted by many fervent communists of the time? Perhaps, ironically, the answer lies in the concepts of uncritically accepting Soviet authority and party discipline – after all it was the head of the CPSU making the allegations – normally associated with *Stalinism*. In any case, if the turning point of 1956 is not as simple as it seems, the question arises as to how this affects our image of the communist dissident? As the speech is such a turning point in the biographies of so many dissidents and indeed the associated *de-Stalinisation* became such a cornerstone in their self-identity is it not necessary to look back upon this *topos* in European history with a more critical gaze? As Eric Hobsbawm said, there were a great many ex-communists who could only free themselves from the ‘God who failed’ by turning him into Satan.<sup>29</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that the state-mandated memory institutions of the FRG, tasked as they are with the *Aufarbeitung* of the ‘communist dictatorship’, have not yet paid this question any meaningful attention. This is certainly an area of research worthy of further pursuit; however, for reasons of space it cannot be done justice in the remit of this chapter. Nevertheless, it points to an intriguing blind spot in memory of the GDR, its dissidents and

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<sup>28</sup> Domenico Losurdo, *Stalin: Geschichte und Kritik einer schwarzen Legende*.

<sup>29</sup> Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 217.

indeed the wider world of European socialism. Biermann's later omission of his actual reaction to the speech and attempt to incorporate the caesura into his biography indicates that the trope of the 'secret speech' is imbued with a potent ideological content which the reader would do well to bear in mind when considering the concept of communist-oriented opposition in the GDR.

### Lyrikabend: The Birth of a Legend?

After two years at the Humboldt, Biermann would drop out and pursue a two year and seemingly unsuccessful career as an assistant at the *Berliner Ensemble*. In 1960 he returns to his alma mater in order to read philosophy. It is during this period that Biermann comes to the attention of the public for the first time and this is largely to do with the famous *Lyrikabend*. The following section traces the history of the *Lyrikabend* and its importance to Biermann's biography.

In Autumn 1961, Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko read a poem entitled *Babij Yar* which discusses the infamous execution of Soviet Jews by fascists near Kiev during the Second World War.<sup>30</sup> This turned out to be the opening salvo of what would become a resounding *Lyrikerbewegung* which would sweep the socialist states of Europe and beyond.<sup>31</sup> Unsurprisingly, the GDR was not left untouched. Indeed, the *Lyrikerbewegung* cannot be seen in isolation from the SED initiated *Bitterfelder Weg* which sought to do in culture what the programmes of nationalisation had achieved in the economy.<sup>32</sup> As one key participant, erstwhile Minister for Culture Hans Bentzien, describes it retrospectively with a hint of irony:

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<sup>30</sup> See, Yevgeni Yevtushenko, *Mit mir ist folgendes geschehen. Gedichte* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1963), pp.153–160.

<sup>31</sup> The impact of Yevtushenko was felt even in the capitalist West where the Soviet poet would be invited to perform, for instance at the London Royal Court Theatre in 1962. See: [n.a.], 'Mensch, du hast Mut', *Der Spiegel*, 30 May 1962.

<sup>32</sup> Ever eager to adhere to party initiatives, the MfS had already held two young *Lyrik* evenings by the end of 1961.

‘Eine durchaus emanzipative kulturelle Aktion zur Unterstützung des ehrgeizigen Chemieprogramms.’<sup>33</sup> In October 1962, a range of authors such as the co-founder of *da da* and the Weimar era *Malik Verlag*,<sup>34</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, and the famous writers Franz Fühmann and Stephan Hermlin organised an event entitled *Zeitgenössische Lyrik*.<sup>35</sup> The event was very well-received and indicates that the GDR public was also ripe for the *Lyrik* bug.

Following the readings, a discussion ensued, during which these established figures of the GDR literary scene declared themselves willing to promote the unheard voices of younger authors.<sup>36</sup> This perhaps indicates that there was a growing hunger for a more critical public forum and literary forms which addressed the concerns of the young and intelligent. True to his word, Hermlin published several notices in the GDR press inviting young authors to submit up to six poems to him, from which he would present a selection at a public reading entitled: ‘Junge Lyriker: unbekannt und unveröffentlicht.’<sup>37</sup> The event went ahead, advertised as an official event of the *Akademie der Künste*, on 11 December 1962 in front of an over-capacity crowd at the Robert Koch Auditorium in Berlin. The evening was opened with two pre-recorded songs from the as yet unknown Wolf Biermann, before Hermlin read a selection of poems. Nothing particularly controversial occurred during this part of the evening and the poems were for the most part well received.<sup>38</sup> However, the ensuing three hour long discussion would become a major *event* in GDR literary and cultural history.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Christian Eger, ‘Bitterfelder Konferenz Ein Dichter sagte: Das wird ein bitterer Feldweg werden’, *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, 24 September 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Publishing house in Weimar Berlin associated with the political and aesthetic avantgarde of the Weimar Republic, major themes included: pacifism, *da da* and in the latter stages of the Republic more overtly socialist art and literature. See: Ulrich Faure, *Im Knotenpunkt des Weltverkehrs. Herzfelde, Heartfield, Grosz und der Malik-Verlag 1916–1947* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> [n.a.] ‘Jugend hörte zeitgenössische Lyrik’, *Neues Deutschland*, 7 October, 1962.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘Zur Förderung junger, bisher unbekannter Lyriker erklärten sich hierbei Stephan Hermlin, Wieland Herzfelde, Kuba und weitere namhafte Mitglieder der Akademie bereit, im November einen Abend mit unveröffentlichter Lyrik zu veranstalten und die von jungen Autoren eingereichten Arbeiten selbst vorzutragen.’

<sup>37</sup> See for example: [n.a.], ‘Junge Lyriker: unbekannt und unveröffentlicht’, *Sonntag*, 28 October 1962; [n.a.], ‘Junge Lyriker: unbekannt und unveröffentlicht’, *Junge Welt*, 14 November 1962.

<sup>38</sup> Alan G. Ng, *The Lyrikabend of 11 December 1962: GDR Poetry’s ‘Geburtsstunde’ as Historiographic Artifact* (2002) <<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.460.2493&rep=rep1&type=pdf>> [28 December 2018], pp. 9–12.

<sup>39</sup> See for instance Emmerich who considers it to be the ‘Geburtsstunde’ of the GDR’s lyrical scene. Wolfgang Emmerich, ‘Deutsche Demokratische Republik’, *Geschichte der deutschen Lyrik vom Mittelalter bis zum Gegenwart*, ed. by Walter Hinderer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983), pp. 576–604 (p. 589).

Regardless of its wider sociological significance, Biermann is often portrayed as being at the centre of the *Lyrikabend* in related discussions, indeed Jay Rosellini's seminal biography<sup>40</sup> refers to Biermann as the 'Mit-Initiator' of the wider *Lyrikerbewegung*. State-mandated *Aufarbeitung* of the *Lyrikabend* is relatively cursory in comparison with say Biermann's *Ausbürgerung*. However, this began to shift slightly from 2009 as the *Bundestiftung Aufarbeitung* funded a research project by Eyk Henze who declares, 'der Archivbestand zum Thema ist noch längst nicht erschöpfend erfasst [...] Lyrik fand dabei bisher kaum besondere Aufmerksamkeit'.<sup>41</sup> The results of this research have not yet been published. However, other state-mandated sources do thematise Biermann as part of the *Lyrikbewegung*, for instance the BpB's and *Deutschlandfunk*'s collaborative project which refers to the *Lyrikabend* as the beginning of a spring or short summer in 'in dem grauen eingemauerten Ostdeutschland' at which Wolf Biermann came to prominence.<sup>42</sup>

Intriguingly, Alan Ng's thesis traces a narrowing of focus on to Biermann as a political development. Whereas in 1964 a *Neue Linke* periodical, *Alternative*, writes, 'am Hermlinschen Dichterkimmel begannen im Dezember 1962 drei Sterne zu steigen. Wolf Biermann sang sich mit größtem Erfolg durch den Abend' (the other two stars are Volker Braun and Micaela Lübke),<sup>43</sup> by 1970, the *Lyrikabend* has been abbreviated to be little more than Biermann's show, reflecting, according to Ng, the growing political capital associated with Biermann in western discourse.<sup>44</sup> However, contrary to the portrayal that the *Lyrikabend* represents Biermann's first public performance<sup>45</sup> – like many others – his performance on the

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<sup>40</sup> Published in 1992, Rosellini's was one of the first and most comprehensive accounts of Biermann's life during the flood of memory writing lent authenticity by virtue of appearing *post-wall*. Jay Rosellini, *Wolf Biermann* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Eyk Henze, *Die Politisierung von Lyrik in der DDR: Verlage, Institutionen und Diskurse* (2009)

<<https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/pdf-2009/henze.pdf>> [accessed 18 December 2018].

<sup>42</sup> Marcus Heumann, *Das Kahlschlag-Plenum*. [CD-ROM] (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Friedemann Berger, 'Zur "Deckung des Lyrikbedarfs"' *Alternative. Zeitschrift für Literatur und Diskussion*, 35 (1964), 4–5.

<sup>44</sup> Ng, p. 72.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Joachim Wittkowski, *Lyrik in der Presse: Eine Untersuchung der Kritik an Wolf Biermann, Erich Fried und Ulla Hahn* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991), pp. 16–17.

night was not scheduled but instead occurred impromptu during the discussion following Hermlin's readings. The public debate had culminated in a suggestion by Erhard Scherner<sup>46</sup> that any poets present should read if *willing*. Biermann, who alleges he had not prepared for this eventuality was on hand with guitar and several pages of typed out poems. He would go on to read or play several, but one in particular is often cited as the cause of provocation – 'An die alten Genossen'. Wittkowski, for instance, locates Biermann's reading of this poem as the primary 'Folgeergebnis' of the entire evening and insinuates a direct link between it and Hermlin's later dismissal as 'Sekretär der Klasse Dichtkunst und Sprachpflege der Akademie der Künste'.<sup>47</sup> Wittkowski's source for this is Biermann himself. In a letter to Wittkowski from the late 1980s, published in excerpted form, Biermann describes the situation as follows:

Größter Stein des Anstoßes wurde ein bis dahin unbekanntes Gedicht von mir das Hermlin nicht ausgesucht und also nicht vorgetragen hatte, als er dem großen Publikum eine Reihe bis dahin unbekannter junger Lyriker vorstellte [...]. Nach der Pause kam keine Diskussion in Schwung – und so sollten die anwesenden "jungen Dichter" noch was von sich aus vorlesen. Rainer Kirsch las damals ein Sonett über einen Alten Genossen vor – und da fiel mir ein, daß ich ja grad auch sowas geschrieben hatte und zog, wirklich zufällig! mein Gedicht "An die alten Genossen" aus der Tasche – und las es vor. Dann kippte alles. Riesige Schreierei. Der "ND"-Feuilleton-Chef Köhler schrie von oben runter auf die Bühne zu Hermlin, daß hier eine "feindliche Plattform" entstehe... Das war eine äußerst ernste Drohung, und Hermlin verstand sie. Entsetzt und wütend rief er zurück: "Ich waaaarne Siiiiiiie!" – Fritz Cremer brüllte dazwischen und forderte uns Jungen auf, uns von den alten

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<sup>46</sup> Erhard Scherner (1929-) was a sinophile poet and erstwhile *Neulehrer* who, following an extended period in China, became a prominent figure in the cultural circles of the SED.

<sup>47</sup> Wittkowski, pp.17–19.

Stalinisten nicht länger einschüchtern zu lassen. John Heartfieldt [sic] schrie sich an den Rand eines Herzinfarkts, als er mich gegen Angriffe von Erhard Scherner (Literaten-Stasi beim ZK der SED, genannt “Murks das Schwein”) verteidigte.<sup>48</sup>

Notably, Biermann states in no uncertain terms that the poem is responsible for the provocation of *ND*'s Köhler and subsequent commotion and descent into argument. In other words, it is Biermann and his poetry which transformed an innocuous poetry reading into an act of rebellion against the SED cadre present and SED orthodoxy in general. Furthermore, enduring celebrities such as Fritz Cremer and John Heartfield no less took it upon themselves to defend Biermann personally. This creates the impression that Biermann is not only at the centre of the *Lyrikabend* but that he is responsible for substantiating the *topos* of the *Lyrikabend* in memory of the GDR. This formulation is also repeated and indeed further embellished in Biermann's 1997 account.<sup>49</sup> However, in his 2016 autobiography, Biermann's memory of events is strikingly different:

Ganz vorn in der Mitte der ersten Reihe saß Erhard Scherner – auf strategisch vorgeschobenem Posten. Scherner war ein ZK-Mitarbeiter, ein verkrafter DDR-Lyriker, ein chinaverliebter Germanist und persönlicher Sekretär des Chefs der Politbürokommission für Kultur, Alfred Kurella. Wir nannten ihn “Murks das Schwein”. Der Appatschik improvisierte gutgelaunt. Er hatte die Idee, dass der ein oder andere noch selbst ein Gedicht zum Besten gibt. [...] Ich sang irgendein Spottliedchen, das aber noch nicht an Toleranzgrenze der Obrigkeit kratzte. Hermlin hatte ein Sonett vorgetragen von Rainer Kirsch: “An einen alten Genossen”. Ich griff in meine Jacke und zog aus der Brusttasche überm Herzen drei zusammengefaltete DIN-A4 Blätter, das holzige Durchschlagspapier aus volkseigner Produktion. Was ‘n

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<sup>48</sup> Wolf Biermann, Letter to Wittkowski in: Wittkowski, p. 212.

<sup>49</sup> Wolf Biermann, *Wie man Verse macht und Lieder: Eine Poetik in acht Gängen* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer und Witsch, 1997), pp. 30–37.



Zufall! Mein Titel wie der von Kirsch, bloß im Plural. Das war nun rabiatere Poesie, getippt in der feinen Perlschrift meiner Erika-Schreibmaschine. [Biermann reproduces the text of his poem] Ich sang noch ein paar Lieder, der Abend ging lebendig weiter. Hermlins junge Garde trat der Reihe nach an die Rampe und trug neue Gedichte vor, natürlich nicht so wirkungsvoll wie Maitre Hermlin. [...] Hermlins Junge-Lyrik Sammelsurium gefiel den Leuten. Er konnte sich bestätigt fühlen, das Publikum war zufrieden. So konnte jeder seinem Affen Zucker geben. Doch dann entbrannte eine Maulschlacht! Hermlin, unser Mentor, beklagte sich darüber, dass seit zehn Jahren kein Gedicht mehr von ihm zu lesen war im *Neuen Deutschland*. [...] Die allgemeine Wut auf die Kulturpolitik entzündete sich an der Frage, ob diese jungen Lyriker auch eine Chance haben sollen in den Medien der DDR. Erhard Scherner gab sich moderat. Er würde im ND zwar nicht das Gedicht „An die alten Genossen“ abdrucken, aber das ein oder andere Gedichte von Biermann oder Mickel schon. Jetzt sprang oben der alte Genosse Fritz Cremer auf. Er schrie, spuckte und fauchte einen Wortschwall ins Auditorium: „Lasst euch nicht einschüchtern! Die Stalinzeiten sind vorbei!“<sup>50</sup> Auch der alte, kranke Johnny Heartfield quälte sich hoch und kreischte. Seine Worte überschlugen sich, er forderte mehr Freiheit in der Kultur.<sup>51</sup>

In this account, Biermann’s poem is seemingly well received and crucially does not provoke any sort of discussion. This honour falls to Hermlin and his own complaints about the fact his poetry is not being published in *Neues Deutschland* anymore.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, unlike in Biermann’s letter to Wittkowski or 1997 account, Heartfield and Cremer are no longer presented as defending him personally against attacks from Scherner. Indeed, Scherner’s

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<sup>50</sup> In 1997, Biermann reports Cremer as saying ‘Die Zeiten des Maulkorbs sind vorbei!’ with no mention of Stalinism. See Wolf Biermann, *Wie man Verse macht und Lieder: Eine Poetik in acht Gängen*, p. 36.

<sup>51</sup> Wolf Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, pp. 100–104.

<sup>52</sup> A slightly bemusing claim as Hermlin had stopped writing poetry some three years earlier in 1958. See, Klaus Wagenbach, *Die Freiheit des Verlegers* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach), p. 191.

‘Angriffe’ have been modified into a ‘moderat’ seemingly dispassionate reaction in which Scherner agreed in principle to publish both Biermann and Mickel. While both accounts are characterised by a hostility towards the SED and its representatives and there is a clear attempt to disassociate himself from them, while associating himself with famed and, importantly, non-orthodox members of the GDR’s cultural elite. Much of Biermann’s cultural capital stems from the perception of him as a righteous opponent of the SED, but also as being associated with many of the GDR’s most internationally renowned cultural elite, such as Hanns Eisler, whom he met a handful of times between 1960 and 1962. In any case, what can justify such a volte face in portrayals of the *Lyrikabend*, other than, perhaps, the fickle nature of the human memory?

Perhaps it lies in the fact that since 1989 the facts of the evening have been more thoroughly researched and commented upon. As one commentator summarises: ‘As it grew late [...] the limits of polite exchange, moderated by Stephan Hermlin with only a light hand, were exceeded at several points by heated, politically and emotionally charged outbursts’.<sup>53</sup> The debates were broadly concerned with why these poems had not been published previously, a not unfair question on the one hand, but also somewhat banal as the evening was entitled ‘Junge Lyriker: unbekannt und unveröffentlicht’. Despite the title, several of the poems had indeed been published or there were already plans to publish, as Paul Wiens, one of the poets involved, points out.<sup>54</sup> The question points to a contemporary problem which the GDR faced, censorship and the perception thereof. However, the lack of a published or publicised ‘young’ generation of authors in the GDR of the late 1950s and early 1960s cannot be simply reduced to questions surrounding censorship or control. Famed Germanist and implacably independent thinker Hans Mayer points to a distinct lack of young and critical

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<sup>53</sup> Ng, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 10. Indeed, the vast majority would go on to be published in one form or another.

voices in *both* the GDR and FRG around this time.<sup>55</sup> Mayer and indeed others such as Wolfgang Emmerich and Werner Mittenzwei identify the pre-occupation with incorporating exile literature and various forms of anti-fascist, renewal and indeed *Aufbau* and *Erbe* literature as being responsible.<sup>56</sup> As Emmerich highlights in his *Kleine Geschichte der DDR Literatur*, literary currents do not necessarily overlap with political or socio-economic ones, certainly not neatly in any case.<sup>57</sup> One should therefore perhaps be wary of simplistic schemas such as the oft-cited cultural liberalisation following the erection of the German-German border in 1961.<sup>58</sup> Thomas Brasch nuances both the trope of the post-wall liberalisation and of Biermann's centrality to the *Lyrikabend*, when asked about the significance of the same with specific reference to Biermann he replies:

Ich glaube, diese Lyrik-Bewegung ist etwas Anderes, etwas wichtigeres. Als die Mauer gebaut wurde und niemand mehr nach West-Berlin gehen konnte und sich Hemingway kaufen oder *Vom Winde verweht* angucken im Kino, was immer die intellektuellen Bedürfnisse waren, hielt Walter Ulbricht eine sehr interessante Rede, die sagte, daß die Künstler der DDR jetzt die kulturellen Bedürfnisse der DDR-Bürger selbst befriedigen müßten und daß wir jetzt, wo die Mauer zu ist, anfangen müssen, kritisch zu uns selber zu sein, weil die Westberliner Besserwisser nicht ständig Beifall klatschen, wenn jemand mal kritisiert. Und so entstand 1961, Anfang 1962 eine sehr lockere, sehr freie und sehr selbstbewußte Atmosphäre in der DDR. Das heißt nicht alle schielten mehr nach dem Westen.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Hans Mayer, 'Zur Gegenwartsfrage unserer Literatur', *Sonntag*, 2 December 1956.

<sup>56</sup> See: Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literatur Geschichte der DDR* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1981), pp. 41–49; Werner Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen. Literatur und Politik in Ostdeutschland 1945-2000* (Leipzig: Faber und Faber, 2001), pp. 184–187.

<sup>57</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literatur Geschichte der DDR*, p. 125.

<sup>58</sup> For instance, as recently as 2015, in one state-mandated account: Michael Lüthmann, 'Wer nicht für uns ist, ist gegen uns. Es gibt keinen Dritten Weg', *Deutschland Archiv* (2015)

<<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/216974/wer-nicht-fuer-uns-ist-ist-gegen-uns-es-gibt-keinen-dritten-weg>> [accessed 2 January 2019].

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Brasch, 'Interview', *DDR Schriftsteller sprechen in der Zeit. Eine Dokumentation*, ed. by Gerd Labrousse Ian Wallace (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1991), pp. 55–68 (p. 57).

While Brasch broadly agrees with the post-wall liberalisation thesis, he interestingly identifies the cause thereof not in a sudden raft of freedoms bestowed by a previously domineering SED but in a more autonomous sense of freedom felt by socialist authors in the space now free from *western* interference,<sup>60</sup> a nuance rarely observed in discussions of the period. Notably, he appears to resist the portrayal of Biermann being central to the *Lyrikerbewegung*, stating this was more important than any one figure.

The analysis of Mayer, Emmerich, Mittenzwei and Brasch raises the question as to whether the GDR's *Lyrikbewegung* can be seen as a dambusting following 16 years of tight cultural control by the SED or as a more natural changing of the guard with a generational, social and intriguingly German aspect common to both states? Or, indeed, a dialectic of the two. In any case, approaches to the *Lyrikabend* which predicate analysis on questions that fit into totalitarian or similar schemas does not appear to be entirely effective in understanding this highly symbolic *topos*.

In spite of this, Alan C. Ng identifies the uniformity with which most (western) interpreters approach the *Lyrikabend*, particularly a certain bias which is 'a symptom of larger critical agendas focusing on social discontent and resistance in GDR literature'.<sup>61</sup> This is still true of more recent treatments, for instance Karsten Krampitz' brief but illustrative take. Krampitz foregrounds Biermann as the leader of a new generation no less, and cites no other than Hermann Kant to lionise Biermann: 'Hier kam etwas Neues. Hier kam ein toller Mann, keine Frage.'<sup>62</sup> The completed quotation, however, points to a much more nuanced appraisal of Biermann from Kant:

Ich glaube, Biermann ist wirklich ein spezieller Fall von Egozentrik. Ich gehörte nicht zu seinen Freunden sondern nur zu den Leuten, die eine Weile versucht haben, ihm

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<sup>60</sup> See also Frank Beyer in Marcus Heumann, *Das Kahl Schlag-Plenum*.

<sup>61</sup> Ng, p. 118.

<sup>62</sup> Hermann Kant in Karsten Krampitz, *1976 Die DDR in der Krise* (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2016), p. 120.

schöpferischen Raum zu geben. [...] Aber die Freunde, die Wolf Biermann, die hat er alle vor den Kopf gestoßen, wenn es ihm paßte, wenn er glaubte, er sei nicht genügend gewürdigt worden. [...] Ich war dabei, als er zum ersten Mal in der Akademie bei Stephan Hermlin in der Veranstaltung auftrat, und es war unverkennbar: Hier kam etwas Neues. Hier kam ein toller Mann, keine Frage. Bloß war das bei ihm gekoppelt an die Vorstellung, alle anderen hätten die Dinge so zu sehen wie er.<sup>63</sup>

Viewed in the light of the full quotation, Krampitz' portrayal is somewhat misleading. Krampitz continues by presenting a de-contextualised snippet of Biermann's poem *An die alten Genossen* in order to satirise its contemporary condemnation– 'In der DDR sah er den besseren deutschen Staat; die alten Männer sollten allerdings abtreten: 'Setzt eurem Werk ein gutes Ende indem ihr uns den neuen Anfang lässt'. Was für ein Skandal!'. Biermann did not simply stand and read an uncontroversial poem reflecting a change of guard as Krampitz suggests. Indeed, the poem was read against the backdrop of the heated exchanges discussed above and contained some more controversial ideas and language.<sup>64</sup> Even Biermann acknowledged shortly afterwards that the poem was provocative at the time, especially as there had been discussion of Ulbricht stepping down which made the poem appear as a personal attack on the head of the SED.<sup>65</sup>

Equally, there is some evidence that Biermann actually altered the text of *An die alten Genossen* from that read at the *Lyrikabend*. In 2017, a recording of the original reading surfaced and differs from that published in the West in 1965 as part of *die Drahtarfe* collection in a few aspects.<sup>66</sup> Firstly, the published version is prefaced with 'Seht mich an,

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<sup>63</sup> Hermann Kant in Irmtraud Gutschke, *Hermann Kant Die Sache und die Sachen* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011), p. 105.

<sup>64</sup> See: Wolf Biermann, 'An die alten Genossen', *Die Drahtarfe* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1965), pp. 67–68.

<sup>65</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 24/24453, vol 3. Report from Anni Seidl to the FDJ 'Information über die Tagung des Clubs junger Philosophen an der Humboldt-universität am 17.3.64'.

<sup>66</sup> Wolf Biermann, *Gedicht 'An die alten Genossen' (Einspielung)*, online video recording, Youtube, 16 May 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYIRX-flTuk>> [accessed 4 January 2019].

Genossen / Mit euren müden Augen / mit euren verhärteten Augen / Den gütigen’, whereas the original begins ‘Seht mich unzufrieden mit der Zeit / Die ihr mir übergebt’. These lines are softened and come across less petulantly than the published version thanks to the prefacing above. Another notable example is in the second stanza, ‘Hör ich Berichte eurer Leiden’ is expanded with ‘...eurer Niederlagen’.<sup>67</sup> This might seem superficial to many readers looking back from the comfort of twenty-first-century western liberal academies, although we are still today faced with the challenge of self-censorship and negotiating nuance in order to achieve *credibility*. However, such small negative connotations and challenges to the older generation of the party could have far more resonance in the context of a heated debate in the GDR of the early 1960s. Furthermore, Biermann chooses to emphasise in his 2016 autobiography that when he read the poem to Margot Honecker in 1976 – she had come to plead with him to change his ways – that it had the *exact* same wording as the one in 1962. Although possible, the emphasis Biermann places on this is unlikely to be mere coincidence. As with many aspects of Biermann’s biography, there appears to be several layers of mythologisation, fiction and of course uncomfortable truth which shroud the object of analysis and make it difficult to judge the significance of these events from anything like an objective standpoint. However, a close reading of Krampitz’ 2016 account indicates that a Biermann-oriented narrative of the *Lyrikabend* is still reflected in some recent treatments. The fascinating question then remains as to why Biermann’s participation in the *Lyrikabend* has been seemingly lionised and why this appears to have been unchallenged by the majority of commentators,<sup>68</sup> indeed, it is only Biermann himself who has prominently, albeit not fully, set the record straight.

Alan C. Ng provides some insight into this phenomenon:

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<sup>67</sup> One further example, the published line ‘Stürz ich mich in die Kämpfe der Klassen, die neueren...’ which has a clear commitment to the Marxist concept of class conflict reads ‘Stürz ich mich in die neuen Schlachten’ in the original. Perhaps Biermann felt the need to emphasise his avowed socialism between the reading and the publication of the poem in 1965.

<sup>68</sup> With honourable exception. See Alan C. Ng’s contribution cited above.

Accusations in the East become praises in the West. Victims of demotions and public rebuke become heroic martyrs. Those who seek to improve GDR society are cast as provocateurs seeking to overthrow that society. Self-contradictions do not seem to disturb Western commentators. The *Lyrikabend*, for example, is at times cast both as an innocent victim of Party discipline and in the same breath as an instance of bold anti-SED rebellion, and then simultaneously as an example of SED liberalization!<sup>69</sup>

Ng describes the phenomenon of western commentators seizing on events which fit into a pre-conceived framework of opposition and that these are then subsequently utilised in a myriad of ways which seem incoherent and even contradictory. The underlying unity of which appears to be undermining the SED and celebrating opposition to it – the cultural logic of anti-communism. Revisiting the minutiae of actual events in light of archival findings or memory writing or a reflexive critique of the political approach of previous accounts, be they Cold War or post-wall era, does not appear to have gained much traction in accounts of Biermann's involvement in the *Lyrikabend*.

#### From *Jugendkommunique* to the 'Kahlschlag Plenum'

However, there is certainly another reason that Biermann is associated strongly with the early 1960s – the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED. This event was initially intended as a plenum to discuss the interim results of the *Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung* (NÖSPL). The NÖSPL was decreed at the VI. Party Conference of the SED in January of 1963, it was intended to reform the GDR's economic system by introducing elements of de-centralisation, notably more autonomy and leeway for individual

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<sup>69</sup> Ng, p. 2.

management teams in industry.<sup>70</sup> However, in the end it turned into a distinctly cultural event, which ended up criticising a wide range of cultural actors and production ranging from DEFA to authors such as Werner Bräunig and indeed the subject of this case study – Wolf Biermann.<sup>71</sup>

Before dealing with Biermann's role in the Plenum directly, it is useful to explore the wider context and background of the event. The cultural havoc with which this plenum is associated has led to it often being conceived in some quarters as the *Kahlschlag Plenum*.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the Eleventh Plenum is often seen as being a turning point away from liberalisation in the youth policy of the SED. This liberalisation is associated with the so-called *Jugendkommunique*. The first communique, published in February 1961, sought to encourage youth participation in both the cultural and work environments of the GDR and indeed criticised the bureaucratic methods of the SED under headings such as 'Bürokratisches Verhalten bremst die Jugend', the Politbüro offered tentative self-criticism: 'Wenn junge Menschen in unseren sozialistischen Betrieben mitunter noch ohne Lust und Begeisterung arbeiten, hat das oft in ihrer falschen Behandlung und im bürokratischen Verhalten ihnen gegenüber seine Ursache [...] Oft wird die Initiative Jugendlicher gehemmt, gute Vorschläge Jugendlicher werden nicht selten geringschätzig bewertet, es wird noch ungerechtfertigt gezögert'.<sup>73</sup>

It is not difficult to imagine that such discourse emanating from the highest organ of the SED would have felt like encouragement to the young and critical in the GDR and indeed have been received as an indication of liberalisation. As one commentator summarises: 'Das erste Jugendkommuniqué war gekennzeichnet durch herbe Selbstkritik der politischen

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<sup>70</sup> Jörg Roesler, 'Konservative, Reformen und das 'Neue Ökonomische System' Die Auseinandersetzungen innerhalb der SED-Führung um die Lenkung der DDR-Wirtschaft Anfang der 1960er Jahre', *Deutschland Archiv* (2013) <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/160233/neues-oekonomisches-system>> [accessed 2 December 2019].

<sup>71</sup> Erich Honecker, 'Aus dem Bericht des Politbüros an die 11. Tagung des ZK', *Neues Deutschland*, 16 December 1965.

<sup>72</sup> See: Günter Agde, *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991).

<sup>73</sup> Zentralkomitee der SED, 'Kommunique des Politbüros zu Problemen der Jugend', *Neues Deutschland*, 11 February, 1961.



Führung, aber auch durch relativ weitgehende Zugeständnisse.’<sup>74</sup> However, the publication date again warns against the simplified notion of a liberalisation ensuing after the fortification of the GDR’s border to the FRG as this would not happen for another six months. The initial communique’s tentative calls for more independent cultural space was reinforced more powerfully in the second *Jugendkommunique* which found its impulse in the VI. Party Conference of the SED in early 1963. The Politbüro’s communique was finally published in *Neues Deutschland* in September 1963; it detailed a raft of progressive measures, past reactions to criticism and authoritarian leadership styles were strongly rebuked: ‘Unser Jugend ist früher reif und will darum früher ernst genommen werden; sie ist kritisch und erträgt schlechte Leiter nicht oder nur für kurze Zeit [...] Es geht nicht länger an ‘unbequeme’ Fragen von Jugendlichen als lästig oder gar als Provokation abzutun, da durch solche Praktiken Jugendliche auf den Weg der Heuchelei abgedrängt werden.’<sup>75</sup> The subject of youth culture should be left to the young themselves: ‘Niemandem fällt es ein, der Jugend vorzuschreiben sie solle ihre Gefühle und Stimmungen beim Tanz nur im Walzer- oder Tangorhythmus ausdrücken. Welchen Takt die Jugend wählt ist ihr überlassen: Hauptsache, sie bleibt taktvoll!’<sup>76</sup>

Even the subject of gender equality and evolving sexual morals due to societal and economic change was pushed to the fore by the SED’s Politbüro: ‘Die Mädchen und Jungen von heute sind früher reif als die Generation vor Jahrzehnten. Zum anderen führt die volle Gleichberechtigung von Jungen und Mädchen die jungen Menschen im Leben bei der Arbeit, beim Lernen und in der Freizeit – auf der Basis gemeinsamen Strebens – viel früher und viel enger zusammen als in der Vergangenheit. Verbote, Prüderie, Heimlichtuerei und

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<sup>74</sup> Laura Schiffner, *Jugendliche Subkulturen und Beatmusik zwischen Liberalisierung und Repression in den 1960er Jahren der DDR. Eine Analyse und Dokumentation zwischen Liberalisierung und Repression und Dokumenten der politischen Führung* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2009), p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Politbüro der SED, ‘Der Jugend Vertrauen und Verantwortung’, *Neues Deutschland*, 21 September 1963.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Bestrafungen können diese Probleme nicht lösen [...]. Wir wollen echte, tiefe, saubere menschliche Beziehungen und keine klösterliche Moral.’<sup>77</sup> Equally, the *communiqué* highlights that even this seeming self-criticism and liberalisation should not be taken as a dictum from on high, but should instead inspire the youth to critically take up the tasks of building socialism themselves: ‘Dieses Kommuniqué ist eine Anleitung zum eigenen Denken und Handeln, aber kein Dogma.’<sup>78</sup>

Monika Kaiser points to the significant social upheaval brought about by the *communiqué*, among both conservative functionaries who could not fathom how the party was supposed to lead a country in which everyone was suddenly entitled to criticise uninhibitedly and young FDJ functionaries who for weeks carried copies of the *communiqué* everywhere in order to claim the Politbüro’s support in their own small-scale conflicts with party and leadership structures. Interestingly, Kaiser highlights that much of the older generation’s rejection of fashion trends and attitudes among the young at this time was not a ‘systemspezifisches Problem, sondern ebenso in Westdeutschland zu betrachten’,<sup>79</sup> a nuance often missing in discussions which emphasise SED repression. In any case, the *Jugendkommuniqué* certainly appears to have heralded a time in which Biermann’s brand of critical individualised socialism would find more acceptance than any other time. Indeed, given the close contemporaneity of Biermann’s increasingly critical attitude with the *communiqué*, it is perhaps not to be ruled out that Biermann’s criticism of the SED was encouraged, somewhat counter-intuitively, by the Politbüro itself. Certainly, some other dissident writers of the time appear to have felt this way.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Monika Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), p. 158.

<sup>80</sup> See for instance: Brasch, ‘Interview’, p. 57.

However, by December 1965, Biermann would be a publicly decried artist and – not for the last time – the subject of international furore. Biermann was named personally by Erich Honecker in his report to the Eleventh Plenum and criticised in no uncertain terms:

Die Orientierung auf die Summierung von Fehlern, Mängeln und Schwächen wird von Kreisen genährt, die daran interessiert sind, gegenüber der Politik der DDR Zweifel zu erwecken und die Ideologie des Skeptizismus zu verbreiten. Zu diesen Kreisen gehört zum Beispiel Wolf Biermann. In einem Gedichtband, der im Westberliner Wagenbach-Verlag erschien, hat Biermann die Maske fallen lassen. Im Namen eines schlecht getarnten spießbürgerlich-anarchistischen Sozialismus richtet er scharfe Angriffe gegen unsere Gesellschaftsordnung und unsere Partei. Mit seinen von gegnerischen Positionen geschriebenen zynischen Versen verrät Biermann nicht nur den Staat, der ihm eine hochqualifizierte Ausbildung ermöglichte, sondern auch Leben und Tod seines von den Faschisten ermordeten Vaters. Biermann wird systematisch vom Gegner zum Bannerträger einer sogenannten, literarischen Opposition der DDR, zur Stimme der ‘rebellischen Jugend’ gemacht. Davon zeugen Sendungen westdeutscher Rundfunkstationen, Berichte in der westdeutschen Presse und Rezensionen zu seinem in Westberlin erschienenen Gedichtband. Biermann wird dort als ein ‘äußerst freimütiger und kühner Kritiker des mitteleutschen Regimes’ gefeiert. Biermanns sogenannte Gedichte kennzeichnen sein spießbürgerliches, anarchistisches Verhalten, seine Überheblichkeit, seinen Skeptizismus und Zynismus.<sup>81</sup>

How did the language of the SED’s senior organs change so drastically within the space of two short years? Equally, how did Biermann come to be so personally involved in such a high level discussion? The following will analyse the portrayal of Biermann’s role in the

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<sup>81</sup> Honecker, ‘Aus dem Bericht des Politbüros an die 11. Tagung des ZK’.

events of 1965 in state-mandated representations, seeking to both tell the story and critique the narrative simultaneously.

One of the primary state-mandated accounts of the Biermann-Kahlschlag thesis stems from the BStU's Bernd Florath.<sup>82</sup> This contribution was published as one of the BStU's education and research platform's background dossiers, which serve to introduce topics considered culturally significant and documents considered to substantiate the BStU's interpretation. Florath's interpretation clearly seeks to establish Biermann's centrality to the plenum, positing that he represents a carefully selected 'Ouvertüre' to the so-called *Kahlschlag*.<sup>83</sup> Florath's account begins by describing what he perceives to be the opening salvo – an article in *Neues Deutschland* penned by a member of its cultural editorial team Klaus Höpcke:<sup>84</sup>

Einen "Skandal" meinte Klaus Höpcke, Kulturredakteur des "Neuen Deutschland", am 5. Dezember 1965 öffentlich anzuprangern zu müssen: In West-Berlin war ein Gedichtband erschienen, dessen Autor in Ost-Berlin lebte. Und das schwarze Quartheft voller Lieder wurde vom westdeutschen Feuilleton überdies weitgehend mit erstauntem Lob aufgenommen. Wenn aber der "Feind" im Westen einen Dichter im Osten lobt, so schloss der Palmström des Zentralorgans messerscharf, so müsse dieser Dichter zwangsläufig ein Feind sein. Denn es könne nicht sein, was nicht sein darf - frei nach Hans Christian Morgenstein [sic!].<sup>85</sup>

Florath is somewhat disingenuous with his quoting of Höpcke as he does not use the word scandal to describe Biermann's decision to publish in the FRG. Equally, the satirical tone and quoting of Morgenstern's poem does not accurately communicate Höpcke's intended

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<sup>82</sup> Florath is listed as the BStU's 'Ansprechpartner für Wolf Biermann'.

<sup>83</sup> Bernd Florath, *Ouvertüre zum Kahlschlag* (2015)

<[https://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Presse/Themen/Hintergrund/20151204\\_biermann.html](https://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Presse/Themen/Hintergrund/20151204_biermann.html)> [accessed 18 December 2018].

<sup>84</sup> Höpcke (1933–) would go on to become deputy Minister for Culture from 1973 to 1989, was a part of Egon Krenz's abortive attempts to reform the SED in the Autumn of 1989 and would be a founding member of the Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus (PDS) serving as a member of the Thuringian *Landtag* from 1990–1999.

<sup>85</sup> Bernd Florath, *Ouvertüre zum Kahlschlag*. Note The poet is in fact named Christian Morgenstern and not Morgenstein.

argument, instead it delegitimises the logic as if it were a priori ridiculous. Höpcke does not merely denigrate Biermann due to his praise in the FRG, instead he asks a pertinent question which many journalists and political scientists still consider an integral component of intellectual investigation – cui bono?<sup>86</sup>

While the tone of some of Höpcke's statements – such as Biermann insulting GDR border guards who are merely fulfilling their socialist patriotic duty – may seem hopelessly outdated to a modern readership, the logic of cultural production being influenced by political conflicts and having political consequences, even perhaps beyond the consciousness of their creator, is not a self-evidently derisory postulate.<sup>87</sup> Florath's disregard for this methodology speaks to his own evidently idealist approach to intellectual production, that is, Biermann's avowed socialist confession means he and his work should be read as such without doubt. Höpcke, despite his crude orthodox Marxist-Leninist manner, common in the Cold War era, however, is arguably approaching the question from a slightly more sophisticated position, which holds that Biermann's own subjective intentions are not mechanistically linked to an epistemological survey of the impact of his literary output within the discursive conjuncture of that time. As he writes: 'Vielleicht fühlt sich Biermann als Erneuerer. Aber seine Verse zeigen: Er bringt nichts Neues. Er wiederholt die dürftigen Postulate des bürgerlichen Individualismus, er nähert sich der Übermenscheneideologie eines Nietzsche.'<sup>88</sup> This approach is also evident in Höpcke's emphasis on the praise for Biermann in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* coupled with the bitter rejection of other poets who had just recently been perceived in the FRG as dissidents such as Sarah and Rainer Kirsch and Volker Braun.<sup>89</sup> It would be remiss of any investigation into Cold War literature if it were to treat the notion of instrumentalisation of literary debates as ridiculous. Commentators in the GDR would often

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<sup>86</sup> Latin: Whom does it benefit?

<sup>87</sup> See for instance, Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*.

<sup>88</sup> Klaus Höpcke, 'der nichts so fürchtet wie Verantwortung', *Neues Deutschland*, 5 December 1965.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

claim progressive western authors as part of a global anti-imperialist movement and their counterparts in the FRG displayed a similar pre-occupation with dissident or democratic voices behind the so-called Iron Curtain.<sup>90</sup>

Florath continues his account by personally attacking Klaus Höpcke: ‘Die ideologisch geleitete Beschränktheit des Redakteurs – er sollte in späteren Jahren zum obersten Zensor der DDR-Literatur avancieren<sup>91</sup> – vermochte die Einforderung der Gegenwart durch den unbotmäßigen Barden der nachgewachsenen Generation nicht zu begreifen.’<sup>92</sup> Florath appears to designate Biermann’s positions as not only correct but representative of an entire generation. In contrast, Höpcke’s approach is painted as the result of ideological narrowmindedness. While this simplistic juxtaposition does not accurately reflect the conflicts and various positions of the GDR’s political culture in 1965, it is furthermore problematic<sup>93</sup> as it recreates the narrative of Biermann’s centrality to the wider cultural scene in the GDR, painting Biermann as the voice of a generation, despite a distinct lack of evidence that this was the case.

Somewhat counterintuitively, Florath goes on to highlight that: ‘Nur wenige Gedichte konnten, verstreut in einigen Anthologien, in DDR-Verlagen erscheinen.’ Equally:

Doch von wenigen Gedichten abgesehen, wagte kein DDR-Verlag, Biermanns Texte zu drucken, kein volkseigenes Schallplattenunternehmen seine Lieder auf Vinyl zu pressen. Er reiste durch die ostdeutsche Republik und begeisterte sein Publikum, weil

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<sup>90</sup> A swift survey of Marcel Reich Ranicki, Fritz J. Raddatz or David Bathrick’s writings from the era before the fall of the wall demonstrate a marked propensity to focus on such figures and narratives.

<sup>91</sup> Höpcke was often referred to as the ‘Bücherminister’ – official title: Leiter der HV Verlage und Buchhandel – during the late period of the GDR. A one-sided portrayal as a mere orthodox censor is not entirely fair, as he also sought to create space for critical discourse within what he saw as the permissible parameters of the day which led him into conflict with some in his own party. Notably he was subjected to disciplinary proceedings after authorising a licence for Volker Braun’s *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*. See: *Wer war wer in der DDR?*, ‘HÖPCKE, KLAUS’ <<https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363;-1424.html?ID=1488>> [accessed 2 January 2019]; Volker Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1985); Detlef Nakath and Gerd Stephan, *Entweder es geht demokratisch - oder es geht nicht: Klaus Höpcke: Bücherminister der DDR, Parlamentarier in Thüringen, Unbotmässiger Streiter* (Berlin: GNN, 2004).

<sup>92</sup> Florath, *Ouvertüre zum Kahlschlag*.

<sup>93</sup> One could also point out that this amounts to a personal attack on an erstwhile elected politician of the PDS by a state-mandated researcher. Arguably by association Höpcke’s party and electors are brought into disrepute by such argumentation and this raises questions around the purpose and scope of these state-mandated institutions.

er dessen Erfahrungen mit der sozialistischen Realität (und dem sozialistischen Realismus, der diese Realität mit falscher Heiterkeit verbog) kongenial auf den Begriff brachte.<sup>94</sup>

Biermann himself promotes the same narrative: ‘Das Verrückte daran: Dort wurden meine Werke zerrissen, die es nirgends zu lesen gab. Kafka pur. Es war ja in der DDR von mir kein einziges Buch gedruckt, keine einzige Schallplatte gepresst!’<sup>95</sup> However, this is not as simple as Florath or Biermann make out. Some of the other critical poets, who had also been popularised via the *Lyrik* events, had already managed to publish their first collections by the end of 1965,<sup>96</sup> and Biermann was also offered this opportunity. As Gisela Steineckert insists in her 2016 memoir:

Ich ging den Verlagen in Berlin auf die Nerven, bis mir der Chef des Verlages “Das Neue Berlin” zusagte einen Band Balladen von Biermann zu veröffentlichen. Das teilte ich am Telefon dem Künstler mit, freudig. Seine Antwort war ‘Bist du wahnsinnig? Ich habe die Rechte längst an Wagenbach in Westberlin gegeben und habe nicht die Absicht, in der DDR etwas zu veröffentlichen.’ – ‘Und warum hast du mich losgeschickt?’ – ‘Ich dachte doch nicht, dass du es schaffst’.<sup>97</sup>

Some might argue Steineckert’s memory has been impaired by the intervening decades or consequences of the historic defeat the loyal socialist no doubt felt with the end of the GDR; however, there are contemporaneous documents which indicate that Steineckert’s was not the only opportunity offered to Biermann between 1963-65. In a memorandum compiled by the *Leiter des Büros des Minister für Kultur* in December 1965, designed to provide information

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<sup>94</sup> Florath, *Ouvertüre zum Kahlschlag*.

<sup>95</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, p. 172.

<sup>96</sup> See, Volker Braun, *Provokation für mich. Gedichte*. (Berlin/Weimar: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1965); Sarah Kirsch and Rainer Kirsch, *Gespräch mit dem Saurier* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1965).

<sup>97</sup> Steineckert, p. 37.

on all the dealings which the Ministry had with Biermann up to that point, there is an interesting passage:

Vor ca. zwei Jahren oder noch länger zurück fanden Verhandlungen über ein Manuskript Wolf Biermanns mit dem Henschelverlag 'Kunst und Gesellschaft', dem Aufbauverlag und dem Eulenspiegelverlag statt. Alle Verhandlungen scheiterten an der Frage der Gesamtrechte. Im Gespräch mit dem Minister wurde Wolf Biermann abermals angeregt, ein Manuskript dem Aufbauverlag zu übergeben. Wolf Biermann hat ein solches Manuskript nie vorgelegt. Im Sommer 1965 bot Wolf Biermann dem Henschelverlag 'Kunst und Gesellschaft' sein Manuskript 'Drahtharfe' an zur Veröffentlichung zu einem Zeitpunkt an, als er bereits mit dem Wagenbach-Verlag in Westberlin in Verhandlung stand. Um zu verhindern, daß die in der vorgelegten Auswahl enthaltenen feindlichen Gedichte in der Sammlung des Wagenbach-Verlages erscheinen können, wurde erneut die Frage der Gesamtrechte gestellt, die Biermann wiederum bewegte, sein Manuskript beim Henschelverlag zurückzuziehen. [...] Beim VEB Deutsche Schallplatten wurden am 2. und 3.2.65 sechs Chansons von Biermann für eine Schallplatte produziert. Weitere Titel von Biermann liegen als Umschnitte bei VEB Schallplatten vor. Von einer Produktion wurde in Einvernehmen mit dem Genossen Czerny und der Abt. Musik des Ministeriums Abstand genommen, nachdem Wolf Biermann die Gespräche mit dem Minister und dem Genossen Bork im Kreise seiner Freunde und Bekannten in entstellender Weise dargestellt und dabei behauptet hätte, daß er dem Minister und seinen Stellvertreter seine Meinung gesagt habe.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Dietmar Keller and Matthias Kirchner, *Biermann und kein Ende: Eine Dokumentation zur DDR-Kulturpolitik* (Berlin: Dietz, 1991), pp. 40–41. It is perhaps worth noting that acquiring the *Gesamtrechte*, that is the rights to publish a work in both East and West, was pursued on occasion by the GDR's cultural functionaries in order to try and hinder the publishing of material adjudged to be damaging to the GDR's interests abroad. Stefan Heym famously refused such an overture. See: Sara Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism: Negotiating Space in the GDR Literary Sphere* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 94–115.



This contemporary document indicates that Steineckert's version of events is certainly possible and would appear perhaps even plausible. Certainly, Florath's definitive statements that no publishers or nationalised record label would dare publish Biermann is nuanced by this significant context. Equally, Biermann has clearly omitted some important nuance which goes to the heart of his own legend. The document paints a picture of the complex relations and negotiation processes that existed in the GDR's cultural sphere. It is also worth pointing out that the document indicates that Biermann threatened to go to Erich Honecker, a personal acquaintance thanks to his connection to Margot, in order to support his complaint against a cultural ministry official.<sup>99</sup> There is a certain bitter irony that Biermann appears to have considered his future accuser an ally only a few months beforehand. Equally, Biermann had several encounters with Kurt Hager, from 1963 the member of the ZK responsible for cultural issues; before 1965, Hager even overturned the cancellation by overzealous minor functionaries of some concerts organised by Biermann.<sup>100</sup> In light of this, the presentation of Biermann as a sort of *enfant terrible* censored for speaking truth to power does not seem entirely convincing. Certainly, it lacks nuance and context.

This is not the only misleading aspect of Florath's portrayal, he claims that as early as 1964: 'Sie [die Gedichte] wurden vom MfS sorgfältig analysiert, gewogen und als "besonders unter der Jugend ... Opposition herausfordernd und organisierend" etikettiert.'<sup>101</sup> However, the review document in question, prepared by the MfS's Agitation Abteilung for the Ministry of Culture, reveals a far less damning judgement by the reviewer Ackermann. Indeed, the document or 'Kritische Einschätzung' is filled with praise for Biermann and almost seems to defend him at times. For instance, the summary: 'Die lyrischen Dichtungen Wolf Biermanns

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<sup>99</sup> Keller and Kirchner, pp. 38–39.

<sup>100</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, p. 124.

<sup>101</sup> Florath, *Ouvertüre zum Kahlschlag*.

sind in Form und Inhalt außerordentlich vielseitig, zeigen die dichterische Begabung des Autors und einen hohen künstlerischen Gehalt. Sie lassen jedoch in einigen Fällen bei der Gestaltung politischer und politisch-ideologischer Probleme falsche Deutung zu und können so indirekt negative Reaktionen fördern.<sup>102</sup> Equally, the seemingly definitive quote employed by Florath fails to communicate the actual sentiment of the reviewer, who is not simply designating the poems as fostering or organising opposition, on the contrary, he states subjunctively that thanks to the use of symbolic and allegorical ‘Wortspiele’, ‘können, besonders unter der Jugend, durch ihren verändernden fordernden Charakter (z. B. in den Gedichten über Sitzungswesen, Handel, Versorgung der Bevölkerung, über die Köpfe der Menschen reden und entscheiden usw.), durch die satirisch-überspitzte Kritik an Mißständen, auch wenn die Aussage positiv gemeint ist, negativ aufgefaßt werden und so Opposition fördernd und organisierend wirken.’<sup>103</sup> Whereas Florath’s portrayal states that the MfS rigorously reviewed Biermann’s oeuvre and designated it oppositional in nature, a close reading of the document and particularly the fuller citation of the reviewer’s language indicates that Biermann was in essence given the benefit of the doubt; indeed, the reviewer also points out that some 47 of the 72 songs have either a purely lyrical quality or a discernedly positive political quality and a mere 13 contain aspects of a ‘mißdeutiger or bzw. zur Fehleinschätzung führender Tendenz’. This document does not seem to represent evidence of a burgeoning campaign against Biermann by the MfS and SED, as Florath seems to imply.

This begs the question then as to how within a year of this review Biermann came to be named at the Eleventh Plenum as one of the troubling artists from the perspective of the Central Committee? The BStU’s account does not seem to have an answer, other than the somewhat banal narrative of dissident artist posing a threat to the SED. While clearly

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<sup>102</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS AOP No. 11806–85, vol. 5. ‘Kritische Einschätzung Nr. 114 – 19/64’

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

Biermann's decision to publish his record and collection of poetry with overtly anti-SED overtones in the FRG made him a target and the praise he received and demonstrably encouraged for his efforts from western reviewers only served to increase animosity towards him, it does not fully answer the question. However, if we broaden the focus from Biermann's person to the wider cultural conjuncture at this time another interpretation is possible.

The significance of the *Jugendkommunique* in relation to the dynamic between Erich Honecker, then head of the FDJ and member of the Politbüro and the head of the SED, Walter Ulbricht was first hinted at by Leonore Krenzlin in 1991.<sup>104</sup> Subsequent research, notably by Monika Kaiser, has fleshed out suspicions of a power struggle between Honecker and Ulbricht, which played out during this period.<sup>105</sup>

In 1963, Ulbricht personally sent Kurt Turba, the young and critical editor of *FORUM* magazine who pushed for a new programmatic subheading 'Zeitung für geistige Probleme der Jugend',<sup>106</sup> to head a youth commission designed to hammer out the details of a reform in youth policy, the result of which was the aforementioned communique. However, this does not appear to have occurred with the well wishes or indeed collaboration of Erich Honecker or the other senior functionaries of the FDJ; indeed, Turba was an 'Intimfeind' of Honecker's who had initiated Turba's relegation from the *Zentralrat* of the FDJ on the grounds of his bourgeois heritage and 'political mistakes' around the 17 June 1953.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, Turba is said to have been essentially smuggled in to the FDJ Youth Commission<sup>108</sup> by Ulbricht and that it

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<sup>104</sup> Leonore Krenzlin, 'Vom Jugendkommunique zur Dichterschelte', in *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965*, ed. by Günter Agde (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), pp. 148–158.

<sup>105</sup> Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker*.

<sup>106</sup> The FDJ publication is considered to have had a fairly liberal position in comparison with the leadership of the organisation during Turba's tenure. As Turba himself summarises, the aim was 'sozialistisch frech zu sein'. See, Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker*, p. 145.

<sup>107</sup> See, Gunnar Decker, *1965: Der Kurze Sommer der DDR* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2015) pp. 76–77.

<sup>108</sup> The commission was tasked with drafting the *Jugendkommunique* and a more general overhaul of the FDJ and SED's youth policy and praxis.

even took the head of the Politbüro's personal reprimand of FDJ staff to ensure Turba was assigned an office.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps not coincidentally, Honecker was in the process of conducting a review of *FORUM* expected to be highly critical. Ulbricht's personal intervention into youth politics appeared to acknowledge that previous efforts – with which Honecker was closely associated – were considered problematic. Equally, it indicates that *FORUM* and Turba were now considered exemplary for the future direction of the SED's youth policy.<sup>110</sup> The fact that this was all timed to transpire while Honecker was on holiday suggests that Ulbricht was aware of the struggle to come. Initially Honecker and his allies – chiefly Paul Verner the former head of the *Jugendkommission* (replaced by Turba) and Inge Lange, member of the ZK – were essentially sidelined by Ulbricht and the supporters of reform in the SED.

However, Ulbricht did not have everything his own way, the initial plan to shut down the *Jugendkommission* – headed by Paul Verner and for which Honecker was the responsible ZK member – and replace it with an entirely new reformist organ was not entirely successful.<sup>111</sup> Ulbricht's failure to secure the relegation of Verner from his position as *1. Sekretär der SED-Bezirksleitung Berlin* and *Sekretär des ZK der SED* due to 'dogmatische Engsternigkeit' meant that a factual 'Doppelherrschaft' and ability to slow down reform processes occurred.<sup>112</sup> This would come to a head in 1965. While the socio-cultural reform processes associated with the *Jugendkommunique* were ongoing, Ulbricht was also simultaneously pursuing the aforementioned ambitious economic reform *NÖSPL*, led by Erich Apel.<sup>113</sup> This also led to friction between conservative Marxist-Leninists who

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>110</sup> See. Kaiser, p. 145.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>113</sup> Erich Apel (1917–1965). A former rocket engineer and economic specialist, Apel was named chairman of the State Planning Commission in 1963 and tasked with overseeing the *NÖSPL* reforms, of which he was largely the architect. See: Claus Krömke, *Das Neue ökonomische System der Planung und Leitung der Volkswirtschaft und die Wandlungen des Günter Mittag* (Berlin: Helle Panke, 2008).

perceived it as undermining the authority of the party and its ability to intervene politically in the economic sphere – often seen to be the crux of socialist economics – and the reform currents within the SED led by Ulbricht himself who wanted to see the GDR compete with the West in the *wissenschaftlich-technische* revolution of the time.

The bitter factional struggles over youth and economic policy had become entwined with largely the same personnel taking up either conservative or reformist positions. The fightback on the youth front had been gathering steam since the summer of 1965. Honecker and his faction of former FDJ functionaries waited until Ulbricht was on holiday and submitted a controversial report, *Bericht über das Auftreten von kriminellen und gefährdeten Gruppierungen Jugendlicher in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* for acceptance to an under-strength Central Committee Secretariat. Although, the meeting was attended by only two members entitled to vote and therefore did not technically have the power to do so, the report was nevertheless duly accepted.<sup>114</sup> The report sought to criminalise some of the results of the new youth policy, such as the new Beat movement in music and associated events. Its true purpose appears, however, to have been to create a stick with which to beat Turba and Ulbricht's reforms. The next development came in October 1965, with a meeting called to discuss 'einigen Fragen der Jugendarbeit und d[as] Auftreten von RowdyGruppen'.<sup>115</sup> At this meeting, Honecker and his allies blindsided Turba, who had no prior knowledge of the aforementioned report nor the agenda of the meeting, claiming that Turba aimed at disbanding the FDJ among other things. Records from this time indicate that the motivation for this conflict was largely personal as well as political. Honecker and his allies felt insulted and personally criticised by the notion that their *Aufbau* generation was now perceived as 'überflüssige Opas'.<sup>116</sup> There are several indications that a mere month

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<sup>114</sup> Kaiser, p. 170.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>116</sup> A direct quote brought into the discussion by Honecker emanating from the *Pionierzeitschrift Die Trommel*. See, Kaiser, pp. 172–173.

before the Plenum, Honecker intended to utilise the report of the Politbüro which he was tasked with writing to fundamentally interrogate the current youth policy of the SED, putting all of this previous groundwork to good use.<sup>117</sup> This appears to have been halted by the strenuous resistance of Ulbricht and other reformers.<sup>118</sup>

However, the Eleventh Plenum, initially intended as a predominantly economic-oriented affair to report on the *NÖSPL*, was looming.<sup>119</sup> A murky episode which remains unclear to this day then occurred, following the internal disputes and controversial trade negotiations with the USSR, Erich Apel – essentially the figurehead of the economic reformists – was found dead less than two weeks before the scheduled Plenum. It is often suspected that he committed suicide, however, one state-mandated biography speaks instead of an unnatural death, insinuating murder.<sup>120</sup> The outcome was that the intended economic Plenum now appeared inappropriate and that Honecker and his allies in the FDJ saw an opportunity to right what they perceived as the wrongs of the new youth policy. As Christa Wolf, one of the participants in the Eleventh Plenum and indeed few voices who sought to defend artists such as Biermann from over-zealous criticism, remembers: ‘Und dann natürlich die großen Schwierigkeiten bei der Verwirklichung des NÖSPL; Schwierigkeiten mit der Jugend – wir hatten ganz deutlich das Gefühl, daß die Kunst ‘Diskussion’ als Ersatz für die Auseinandersetzung mit den Problemen, die sich in der ökonomischen und gesellschaftlich-politischen Realität der DDR angehäuft hatten, dienen mußte, daß wir als Sündenböcke erhalten sollten.’<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 181; Krenzlin, p. 156.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>119</sup> See: Nikola Knoth, ‘Das 11. Plenum – Wirtschafts- oder Kulturplenum?’, in *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965*, ed. by Günter Agde (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), pp. 64–68; Krenzlin, pp. 148–158. Indeed, in the end the Plenum was still roughly 50% concerned with economic affairs.

<sup>120</sup> Nach internen Auseinandersetzungen über die weitere ökon. Pol. u. äußerst kontroversen Wirtschaftsverhandl. mit der UdSSR starb er unmittelbar vor der Unterzeichnung des langfristigen Wirtschaftsabkommens 1966 – 70 in Berlin eines unnatürlichen Todes. *Wer war wer in der DDR?*, ‘APEL, ERICH HANS’ <<https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363%3B-1424.html?ID=59>> [accessed 2 January 2019].

<sup>121</sup> Christa Wolf, ‘Erinnerungsbericht’, in *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965*, ed. by Günter Agde (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), pp. 263–274 (p. 265).

As Wolf points out the discussion was not openly against the reform course in youth policy, Ulbricht was at pains to avoid this both in the run-up to the Plenum and indeed stated repeatedly during proceedings that they were not having a ‘Jugenddiskussion’ but merely discussing specific developments within the literary and artistic sphere.<sup>122</sup> In the immediate run-up to the Plenum special dossiers were prepared which contained materials not originally announced as subjects for discussion. The dossiers contained reviews of the artists in question – besides Biermann, Stefan Heym and Werner Bräunig were personally named – and other materials such as reports on alleged youth criminality, this served to create the impression that connections between recent artistic currents and criminality existed and that a volatile situation in the GDR had arisen as a result.<sup>123</sup>

That Biermann’s publication of *Die Drahtarfe* in the proceeding month had garnered negative attention for the young dissident is clear. However, the question is whether it had been enough to cause the SED to conspire in order to target Biermann as the BStU’s aforementioned ‘Ouverture’ thesis implies. In contrast to Florath’s narrative, it appears that rather than Biermann simply being singled out due to his dissidence, he was caught up in an internecine struggle between pro- and anti-reform elements in the SED, becoming a pawn to hand at the right time for Honecker to illustrate what he perceived to be the negative effects of a liberalised youth and cultural policy. That Honecker would champion another such phase of liberalisation a mere six years later is indicative of how ephemeral political positions within the SED could be given material changes and developments. However, in the case of Biermann his apparent misfortune appears, without wishing to simplify too much, to centre around having been in the wrong place at the wrong time, or rather made too much noise at the wrong time.

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<sup>122</sup> Walter Ulbricht, ‘Zwischenrede’, in *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965*, ed. by Günter Agde (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), pp. 331–334.

<sup>123</sup> Krenzlin, p. 156.

## Die Ausbürgerung: Beginning of the End?

The *Ausbürgerung* of Wolf Biermann in November 1976 is perhaps one of the most famous *topoi* in discourse about the GDR. The event is frequently cited as an important event in the personal memory writing of both former GDR and FRG citizens.<sup>124</sup> It has been frequently cited and discussed in the media of the FRG since 1976, having been subject to almost countless documentaries, newspaper and journal articles and talk show discussions. It is therefore understandable that it has been the subject of a great deal of attention from the state-mandated guardians of memory in the FRG. It is selected – in spite of its ephemeral immaterial nature – as one of twenty-five *Orte* considered representative of the history of German division in a guide published by the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*. The state-mandated *Robert Havemann Gesellschaft* and BpB cite Biermann's *Ausbürgerung* as one of four major themes in their award-winning web project dedicated to *Jugendopposition* in the GDR. There are many more examples as will become clear in the ensuing discussion which reflect the specific significance of the *Ausbürgerung* within post-Wall political memory as well.<sup>125</sup>

The following section seeks to trace the events before, during and after the (in)famous *Ausbürgerung* of Wolf Biermann by paying close attention to the narratives prevalent within German state-mandated portrayals thereof. In particular, certain consequential tropes will be interrogated and their cultural and ideological significance to political memory of the GDR discussed and explored.

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<sup>124</sup> See for example: Gerulf Pannach, 'Aus einem Interview von 1992', in *Die Ausbürgerung. Anfang vom Ende der DDR*, ed. by Fritz Pleitgen (Munich: List, 2006), pp. 95–105; Hans Christoph Buch, 'Det is allet History', in *Die Ausbürgerung. Anfang vom Ende der DDR*, ed. by Fritz Pleitgen (Munich: List, 2006), pp. 162–167.

<sup>125</sup> For instance, Ingolf Kern and Stefan Locke, *Geteilte Geschichte: 25 deutsch-deutsche Orte und was aus ihnen wurde* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2015), pp. 77–85. Released as part of the BpB's *Schriftenreihe*.



## Totales Verbot: The ‘Dragonslayer’ in the Wilderness?

Perhaps the most dominant trope concerning the period *prior* to the *Ausbürgerung* in 1976 is that Wolf Biermann had been subject to a ban from performing following the events surrounding the Eleventh Plenum in 1965. While it is certainly true that Biermann found his opportunities to perform publicly limited to the point where the word ban is not entirely inappropriate – indeed, in the case of the FDJ there was actually an official ban, declared internally following the publication of his album in November 1965 – it is remarkably more complex and intriguing when one delves a little deeper.<sup>126</sup>

Biermann himself has always described his situation between 1965 and 1976 as a total ban, for instance in his most up-to-date account published recently in the *New York Times*: ‘In Ostberlin lebte ich 12 Jahre unter einem totalen Verbot. Das war – trotz alledem und alledem – eine gute Zeit, denn meine rebellischen Lieder und kritischen Gedichte verbreiteten sich illegal umso wirkungsvoller.’<sup>127</sup>

State-mandated accounts appear universal in their replication of the *total ban* narrative. In their collaborative exhibition dedicated to the *Ausbürgerung*, *Der Mut der Wenigen*, the *Robert Havemann Gesellschaft* and *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* state the following:

In seinen Texten macht Wolf Biermann zunehmend die Diskrepanz zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit im Sozialismus deutlich, fordert demokratische Rechte, vor allem die Freiheit der Meinung gegenüber dem Wahrheitsmonopol der Partei. Die SED duldet keine Kritik an ihre Herrschaft. 1965 bekommt er Berufsverbot.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Indeed, in the case of the FDJ this was actually an official ban, declared following the publication of his album in November, 1965.

<sup>127</sup> Wolf Biermann, ‘Wolf Biermann: Die Tragödie der Angela Merkel’, *New York Times*, 29 June 2018.

<sup>128</sup> Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, *Der Mut der Wenigen. Protest – Repression – Solidarität. Folgen einer Ausbürgerung* (2006) < <https://www.havemann-gesellschaft.de/ausstellungen/der-mut-der-wenigen-folgen-einer-ausbuergerung/> > [accessed 2 January 2019].

It should be pointed out that the German term *Berufsverbot* carries with it a fairly complex political collocation from the Cold War era when both West and East accused the other of denying certain citizens the right to pursue their chosen careers due to political censoring and indeed censoring.<sup>129</sup>

The RHG and BpB's collaborative internet project discusses this period as follows: 'Sein großes Thema sind die Widersprüche zwischen der sozialistischen Idee und ihrer Umsetzung im realen Sozialismus. Zunächst wird Wolf Biermann mit Auftrittsverboten belegt.'<sup>130</sup> In the BA's pamphlet *Wolf Biermann: Die Ausbürgerung und ihre Folgen* first published in 2006 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary and again in 2011 for the thirty-fifth, the author Robert Grünbaum speaks of an 'absolutes Auftritts- und Publikationsverbot.'<sup>131</sup>

These accounts are unified in an uncritical replication of the rhetoric of the total ban and accompanied by a judgmental narrative that presents Biermann as nothing more than a proponent of free speech in a totalitarian system which cannot tolerate such apparent virtues. Equally characteristic is the lack of detail on quite how this total ban came about or what it entailed in practice apart from oblique references to the Eleventh Plenum and the implication of a top-down ban. An interesting exception, in that it goes into more detail, is the BStU's previously discussed 'Ouverture' article which tells the reader a little more about the total ban:

Am 1. November 1965 schließlich erließ der Zentralrat der FDJ ein generelles Auftrittsverbot für Biermann und sein lang geplanter Auftritt auf der 1965er

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<sup>129</sup> Michale Townson, *Mother-tongue and Fatherland: Language and Politics in German* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). The Berufsverbot allegations in the West stem from the ban of the KPD between 1956–1968 and most famously with the *Radikalenerlass* which sought to exclude so-called enemies of the constitution from working in public service. See for instance: Dominik Rigoll, *Staatsschutz in Westdeutschland: Von der Entnazifizierung zur Extremistenabwehr* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013).

<sup>130</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 'Die Ausbürgerung', *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017), <<https://www.jugendopposition.de/145337>> [accessed 2 January 2019].

<sup>131</sup> Grünbaum, p. 13.

Veranstaltung “Jazz – Lyrik – Prosa” wurde per Hausverbot und vorläufiger Festnahme durch die Volkspolizei unterbunden. Die Solidarität der anderen teilnehmenden Künstler – Annekatriin Bürger, Manfred Krug, Josh Sellhorn, Eberhard Esche und der Jazz-Optimisten Berlin – erzwang Biermanns baldige Freilassung.<sup>132</sup>

The first interesting aspect of this is that the ban originates within the FDJ, and not the SED, over six weeks before the Eleventh Plenum actually occurs. Indeed, the decision of the *Zentralrat der FDJ* is the only documentary evidence of any sort of official or formal ban. In a letter circulated internally within the FDJ, the First Secretary Horst Schumann informs as follows: ‘Wolf Biermann wird es nicht gestattet in Zusammenkünften unserer Organisation sowie in den durch die FDJ für die Öffentlichkeit organisierten Veranstaltungen, gleich welcher Art, aufzutreten.’<sup>133</sup>

Schumann goes on to explain the decision as follows:

Obwohl Wolf Biermann seit längerer Zeit in mehreren Aussprachen und durch öffentliche Kritik, die sich von unserer Seite durch viel Geduld und Verständnis auszeichneten, auf seine, unseren kulturpolitischen Prinzipien widersprechenden Auffassungen, die er in seinen Gedichten und Liedern äußert, hingewiesen wurde, unterläßt er es nicht, in einigen seiner künstlerischen Machwerken die Ordnung in unserer Republik zu verleumden und zu beschimpfen. Dabei scheut er nicht zurück, diese künstlerischen Ergebnisse in westdeutschen Zeitschriften und Zeitungen zu veröffentlichen, denen er so die Möglichkeit bietet, mit ihren Kommentaren an diesen Arbeiten ihre Hetze gegen unsere Republik zu führen.<sup>134</sup>

Interestingly, Schumann’s letter from 1 November 1965 demonstrates that the decision of the FDJ to ban Biermann from their cultural events had nothing to do with the Eleventh Plenum

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<sup>132</sup> Florath, *Ouverture zum Kahlschlag*.

<sup>133</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 27/37/13. Horst Schumann, Letter to FDJ Functionaries. 1 November, 1965.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

which would not take place until the 15 December nor, as discussed above, would it even be conceived as a *cultural* plenum for another four weeks at this point. Equally, Schumann's argumentation confirms that Biermann's seemingly willing co-operation with elements in the FRG seeking to instrumentalise him was the primary reason for this measure and hints at previous attempts at rapprochement and efforts to work together. This aspect of the *total ban* or *Berufsverbot* does not come across in any of the state-mandated accounts mentioned above. There is no documentary evidence that the FDJ was influenced in its decision by organs within the SED. Indeed, as had happened previously, this indicates an example of lower level functionaries acting in accordance with their own views on Biermann. The member of the Politbüro responsible for cultural issues, Kurt Hager, had actually overruled 'untere Organe' in 1964 and arranged a residency for Biermann at the Distel Kabarett, which Biermann would describe as follows: 'So verdiente ich ein fettes Jahr lang jeden Monat mehr Geld, als ich brauchte.'<sup>135</sup> Intriguingly, this indicates a peculiarly GDR bottom-up moment of censorship – within events under the auspices of the FDJ – which nuances accounts of Biermann being victimised by the upper echelons of the SED and banned by decree from practising his profession.

Furthermore, the documentary evidence tells a slightly different story to Florath's concerning the arrest of Biermann at the Jazz event. Florath paints a picture of a staged preliminary arrest and a demonstration of solidarity by the other artists leading to his release.<sup>136</sup> However, according to the records of a discussion with the actual organisers of Biermann's ban on the ground – Walter Czollek head of the Volk und Welt publishing house – it was never intended that he be arrested.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, they discussed whether it would be wiser to communicate his ban to him at home or at the location of the event. In the end, it was

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<sup>135</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, pp. 128–129.

<sup>136</sup> Florath, *Ouvertüre zum Kahlschlag*.

<sup>137</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS, AOP, 11806/85, vol. 6, p. 91 'Vermerk. Biermann, Wolf – Sänger', 2 November 1965.

decided that Biermann would be guided to speak to the official in a back office by two colleagues positioned in the foyer so that he could officially inform Biermann of the ban. However, there appears to have been an altercation after Biermann attempted to enter the venue via the artists' entrance which culminated in Biermann being mistakenly whisked off to the local *Volkspolizei* station and placed under arrest.<sup>138</sup> Upon hearing this news, Czollek appears to have been surprised and Biermann was, indeed, fairly promptly returned to the venue after the *Volkspolizisten* at the station realised a mistake had been made whereupon he was informed of the ban, which he reportedly accepted in a passive and visibly melancholic manner.<sup>139</sup> His own account, immortalised both in biographical writings<sup>140</sup> and in song,<sup>141</sup> implies he heroically defended himself to the *Volkspolizisten* with Marx and Engels quotes and does not mention the misunderstanding or the reported passive acceptance of the ban. Indeed, Biermann implies he was released because he managed to convince the policemen of his cause. Furthermore, the report notes: 'Gen. Czollek behält sich vor, Biermann zu einer Aussprache in dem Verlag Volk und Welt einzuladen, da er sich durch die Veröffentlichungen Biermanns in der Westpresse in seiner Ehre als langjähriges Parteimitglied angegriffen fühlt.' This is of relevance as Florath chooses to highlight the petit-bourgeois background of Klaus Höpcke the son 'eines Cuxhavener Steuerinspektors' in order to delegitimise Höpcke's argument, published that same week, that Biermann was betraying his murdered father's legacy. Florath does not mention that the Jewish survivor of several fascist prisons and concentration camps including Dachau and Buchenwald,<sup>142</sup> Walter Czollek, found Biermann's views similarly distasteful and personally insulting. The highlighting of Czollek's anti-fascist credentials would not fit in with the narrative of

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<sup>138</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, pp. 162–163.

<sup>139</sup> Berlin, BStU, MfS, AOP, 11806/85, Band. 6, p. 93. 'Vermerk. Biermann, Wolf – Sänger', 2 November 1965.

<sup>140</sup> Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, pp. 162–163.

<sup>141</sup> See, Wolf Biermann, 'Das macht mich populär', *Ahh ja!* (CBS 80 188, 1974) [on vinyl].

<sup>142</sup> See: *Wer war wer in der DDR?*, 'CZOLLEK, WALTER' <<https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363;-1424.html?ID=514>> [accessed 2 January 2019].

Biermann, the Jewish-heritage ‘Kommunistenkind’, whose ban is presented as a breach of freedom of speech.<sup>143</sup>

The episode at the Jazz event appears to have been the starting point for the *total ban* or *Berufsverbot*; a concept which is popularised in many accounts of the Biermann saga, both by himself and by others. However, on reflection this narrative is lacking in nuance and is arguably only possible if one’s analysis is premised on a narrow view of the GDR as a hermetically sealed entity. In reality, Biermann published six LPs and several collections of poetry in the FRG between 1965 and 1976 (the year of the *Ausbürgerung*). He also appeared on western television and radio on a relatively frequent basis which could be, and was, received by many citizens of the GDR.<sup>144</sup> His songs were even translated and covered by an American artist for publication in the USA in 1968.<sup>145</sup> Between the years of 1965 and 1968 alone, Biermann earned some 48,727.49 Deutschmarks (FRG) from his records and television/radio appearances.<sup>146</sup> This represents a small fortune for the time, being over ten times the average salary of a contemporary skilled worker in the FRG and if converted to GDR Marks could be worth as much as three or four times as much.<sup>147</sup> His earnings were presumably equivalent or perhaps even more over the other nine years of his ‘total ban’ as his output did not diminish and his popularity with Western media and public only grew in the period up to the *Ausbürgerung*.

None of this of course inherently justifies banning Biermann from performing in public in the GDR, although one could perhaps argue that an organisation like the FDJ has

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<sup>143</sup> Florath, *Ouvertüre zum Kahlschlag*.

<sup>144</sup> See for example Gerulf Panach’s description of hearing Biermann for the first time on RIAS in 1968: Gerulf Panach, ‘Aus einem Interview von 1992’, in *Die Ausbürgerung. Anfang vom Ende der DDR*, ed. by Fritz Pleitgen, p. 95.

<sup>145</sup> Eric Bentley, *Bentley On Biermann* (BRS 432, 1968) [on vinyl].

<sup>146</sup> This is just from his AWA (Anstalt zur Wahrung öffentlicher Aufführungsrechte) royalties described in a report compiled by the MfS as follows: ‘Dabei handelt es sich um offiziell bekannte und überwiesene Honorare [...] Durch illegal transferierte finanzielle und materielle Zuwendungen erhöhten sich diese Beiträge wesentlich.’ See: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung und Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, ‘Von langer Hand vorbereitet: Schon 1971 plant die Staatssicherheit die Ausbürgerung Wolf Biermanns’, *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017) <<https://www.jugendopposition.de/node/150086?guid=3309>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>147</sup> Statistisches Bundesamt, *Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1965* (Stuttgart und Mainz: W. Kohlhammer, 1965), pp. 133–139.

the right to choose who performs at events organised by them as is the norm in the capitalist West, but it does nuance the portrayal of a victim suffering a ‘total ban’ and indeed raises the pertinent question as to what extent this ban actually benefited Biermann. Is it not possible to say that his popularity and commercial success lay to some extent at least in his dissident credentials, which were unequivocally confirmed by the public denouncing of Biermann in 1965? Did the SED, or more accurately the conservative faction within the SED, not unwittingly inflate Biermann’s fame and give him a far wider platform from which to propagate his anti-SED rhetoric? Equally, there is the question of how far Biermann was cognisant of this and whether he deliberately exploited the situation? His reported annoyance at Gisela Steineckert for having secured him the right to publish in the GDR when publishing critical material in the FRG appeared to be his priority would tend to indicate that this did not fit with his projected image.<sup>148</sup>

In any case, Biermann’s position as an undesired dissident artist within the cultural industry of the GDR made him all the more desirable in the FRG (and beyond). This peculiar situation is something of a general characteristic for the typology of the *dissident*. In an interview from 2011, Hermann Kant, the former *Präsident des Schriftstellerverbands der DDR*, highlights the reality of this Cold War duality with regards to another famous episode:<sup>149</sup>

Die Kameras der ARD standen an der Eingangstür zum Roten Rathaus. Blieben diese Autoren im Verband, würden sie als Sieger gefeiert, wenn nicht als Opfer – gefeiert würden sie auf jeden Fall. Sie würden mundtot gemacht, stand es im offenen Brief.

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<sup>148</sup> Steineckert, p. 37.

<sup>149</sup> The event discussed here is the decision to exclude the following nine authors from the *Schriftstellerverband*: Kurt Bartsch, Adolf Endler, Stefan Heym, Karl-Heinz Jakobs, Klaus Poche, Klaus Schlesinger, Rolf Schneider, Dieter Schubert und Joachim Seyppel. See, *Die Akte Kant. IM „Martin“, die Stasi und die Literatur in Ost und West*, ed. by Karl Corino (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), p. 47. The authors had been accused of publishing critical works ‘illegally’ in the FRG and collecting income from them. The implication being that critical thematics which could be utilised against the SED in the cultural battles of the Cold War were being paid for handsomely. For more on this subject: Sara Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism*, pp. 94–115.

Das war Quatsch! Jeden Abend war einer von diesen Kollegen im Westfernsehen zu hören, wie er den Mund aufmachte und etwas sagte, das die falschen Leute bediente.<sup>150</sup>

While Kant is discussing a specific event unrelated to Biermann, it holds a certain universality that is familiar to many episodes of dissidence in the GDR, not least Wolf Biermann's. During his *total ban*, Biermann had access to western journalists and film crews which meant he arguably had a greater reach, even within the GDR as *Westfernsehen* was very popular, than some senior SED functionaries. Perhaps most importantly, Biermann was already by 1965 incorporated into what can generously be referred to as the FRG's eastern information service as testified by the liner notes of his first publication which were written by none other than Gerhard Zwerenz, who had been involved in the Harich affair of 1956 and emigrated to the FRG in 1957.<sup>151</sup> He was almost immediately incorporated into the FRG's anti-communist cultural network, as the *Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen* (BMG) arranged a relationship for him with the Kiepenheuer & Witsch publishing house. Joseph Caspar Witsch himself would say that the Zwerenz case exemplifies the necessity of a financial fund to be collected from the BMG, the *Innenministerium* or even the 'Kulturkreis der deutschen Industrie'.<sup>152</sup> Zwerenz, whose primary work was literary or theatrical in its subject matter, may appear on the one hand to be an odd choice to produce the liner notes of the cover of an LP for a relatively unknown *Bänkelsänger*. However, on the other hand Zwerenz's liner notes fit in very well with the 'psychologische Kriegführung'<sup>153</sup> methodology of his sponsors in the BMG; for instance:

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<sup>150</sup> Hermann Kant in Gutschke, p. 129.

<sup>151</sup> Wolfgang Harich developed a counter-programme entitled the German Path to Socialism and sought to gain support for it and a leadership challenge within intellectual circles, among students and even took up contact with the SPD's *Ostbüro*. After Harich was arrested by the MfS, Zwerenz and several of Harich's allies in Leipzig were interrogated by the local MfS, although Zwerenz claims that – unlike Harich – he and his comrades had not broken any laws by collaborating with the *Klassenfeind* and so were not arrested. However, following his expulsion from the SED, Zwerenz decided to emigrate to the FRG. Gerhard Zwerenz, *Der Widerspruch Autobiographischer Bericht* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), pp. 218–221.

<sup>152</sup> Frank Möller, *Das Buch Witsch. Das schwindelerregende Leben des Verlegers Joseph Caspar Witsch. Eine Biografie* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2014).

<sup>153</sup> [n.a.], 'Historiker Psychologische Kriegführung', *Der Spiegel*, 6 October, 2008.



Biermann kann lachen, auch wenn es nichts zu lachen gibt. Er ist ein eminent politischer Kopf, dazu singt er zum Steinerweichen, zuhörende Funktionäre müssen herzkrank werden. Biermann ist Sänger und Kommunist dazu, ein aufmuckender Kommunist, nicht gegen den Kommunismus, sondern gegen die Mucker. Flog er deshalb aus der Partei?<sup>154</sup> Diesem Sänger folgt stets Getuschel. Parteiausschluß, Auftrittsverbot, Ausreiseverbot... Zeitweise wird es verdächtig still um ihn, so unüberprüfbar die wechselnden Nachrichten sind.<sup>155</sup>

The combination of praise for Biermann with a listing of *unüberprüfbare Nachrichten* is a clever tactic as it fosters the impression of a murky, opaque realm of totalitarianesque socialism. The fact that Biermann had not exactly been expelled from the party as he had never made it beyond the candidate period, nor that he was not at this point in time subject to an *Auftrittsverbot* or *Ausreiseverbot* having performed in both the GDR and FRG only recently before the launch of this record do not seem to matter. This sort of disinformation could arguably have made it easier for the SED's conservative faction to argue for suppression of Biermann, as it was already an established discursive trope in the West before the Eleventh Plenum. In any case, Zwerenz's involvement indicates the milieu of instrumentalised leftist anti-communism into which Biermann at this time was being initiated. More on this subject will follow in the rest of the chapter.

In conclusion, the trope of Biermann's *total ban* prior to his *Ausbürgerung* is well-established in state-mandated memory. These accounts do not appear to accurately reflect the reality of Biermann's dissident status and communicative situation within the faultlines of the Cold War. As these circumstances are arguably quite foreign to many recipients of state-mandated memory half a century later and indeed nearly thirty years after the events of 1989,

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<sup>154</sup> Biermann was not technically expelled from the party. His two-year candidate period did not end with two sponsors supporting his membership and so he never became an official member of the SED.

<sup>155</sup> Gerhard Zwerenz, 'Album Cover', Wolf Biermann, Wolfgang Neuss – *Wolf Biermann (Ost) Zu Gast Bei Wolfgang Neuss (West)*, (Phillips, 843 742 PY, 1965) [on vinyl].

this arguably does a disservice to the stated educational mission of these state-mandated institutions and raises questions surrounding a pro-Western bias or simplification in their approach to the Biermann affair.

### ‘Von langer Hand geplant und gut vorbereitet’?

One of the primary and most politically powerful tropes concerning the *Ausbürgerung* itself is that it was allegedly all part of a concerted plot conceived by the MfS and the SED or even Mielke and Honecker personally. This is strongly reflected in state-mandated discourse and this subsection will now analyse several of these accounts, interrogating their evidential basis and ideological connotations.

For instance, an article published by the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* as part of their educational dossier– *Stasi*.<sup>156</sup> The article’s engagé tone is clear from its title ‘Liquidierte Bücher’ and Biermann’s centrality is demonstrated by a large photo of him which frames the article.<sup>157</sup> Despite its having little to do directly with the system of literature and publishing in the GDR – the ostensible subject of the article – the *Ausbürgerung* receives prominent attention, discussed as follows:

Den Dichter und Musiker Wolf Biermann hatte die SED-Spitze im November 1976 nach einem Konzert in Köln aus der DDR ausgebürgert, SED und Stasi hatten ihr Vorgehen sorgsam geplant, die Stasi meldete allen Grenzübergangsstellen sogar einen Text, der Biermann beim Versuch einer möglichen Wiedereinreise vorzutragen sein. Biermann war einer der wenigen kritischen Autoren in der DDR gewesen, der schon

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<sup>156</sup> Joachim Walther, *Liquidierte Bücher* (2016) <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/stasi/224370/literatur>> [accessed 2 January 2018].

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

in der DDR auch das Thema Stasi offen benannt hatte. Bereits in den 60er Jahren hatte er in seiner Stasi-Ballade ironisch getextet: “Menschlich fühl' ich mich verbunden mit den armen Stasi-Hunden die bei Schnee und Regengüssen mühsam auf mich achten müssen”.<sup>158</sup>

The first interesting aspect of this account is the claim that the *Ausbürgerung* was ‘sorgsam geplant’. The second is the citing of the MfS providing border crossing points with a text to be read to Biermann in the event that he attempted to re-enter the GDR. However, this text was not actually issued by the MfS in advance, but rather was hastily composed by the Politbüro the day of the *Ausbürgerung* and issued thereafter.<sup>159</sup> If anything it would, therefore, appear to counter the concept of the *Ausbürgerung* being the culmination of a concerted plan put into action before the concert in Köln as claimed in Walther’s article. Notably, this is the only evidence discussed in the article with no primary or secondary sources cited.

A similar narrative surrounding the long held plan can be found in the BpB and *Robert Havemann Gesellschaft’s* educational platform *Jugendopposition* which introduces the concept as part of a condensed narrative which communicates the whole Biermann story in terse prose:

Wolf Biermanns Rausschmiss ist keine spontane Reaktion der DDR-Oberen: Er ist von langer Hand geplant und gut vorbereitet. Seit den 1960er Jahren spielt Biermann mit seinen Liedern und Texten eine wichtige Rolle im kleinen Kreis der kritischen DDR-Intelligenz. Sein großes Thema sind die Widersprüche zwischen der sozialistischen Idee und ihrer Umsetzung im realen Sozialismus. Zunächst wird Wolf Biermann mit Auftrittsverboten belegt. Schon 1971 entwirft die Stasi einen Plan, ihm

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/43619, vol 1, pp. 1–11. ‘Protokoll Nr. 25/76.- Sitzung des Politbüros am 16. November 1976’. The exact text is included as an appendix to the record of the meeting.

wegen ‘staatsgefährdender Hetze’ den Prozess zu machen – oder ihn in die Bundesrepublik abzuschieben.<sup>160</sup>

In contradistinction to Walther’s aforementioned article, this text is framed by an interactive display of apparent evidence – the ‘Plan’ from 1971 mentioned in the text. The actual title of said document is ‘Information über die Absicht des “freischaffenden Schriftstellers” Wolf BIERMANN einen Antrag auf eine Reise nach Schweden zu stellen.’ The information panel underneath the scrollable document claims: ‘Von langer Hand vorbereitet: Schon 1971 plant die Staatssicherheit die Ausbürgerung Wolf Biermanns. Stasi Minister Erich Mielke persönlich unterzeichnet die Anweisung, und Parteichef Honecker genehmigt den Plan auf der ersten Seite handschriftlich mit seinem Kürzel EH.’<sup>161</sup>

There are several aspects of this characterisation which are problematic: firstly, the document is difficult to describe as either a plan or an ‘Anweisung’, usually translated as instruction or order. The seven-page document is far more accurately described by its own title of ‘Information’. It informs about Biermann’s work, character (from the perspective of ‘progressive Literaturen’) and intention to travel to Gothenburg in Sweden. On the last page we find the first and only mention of a theoretical *Ausbürgerung*:

Im Zusammenhang mit dem Vorhaben des BIERMANN, anlässlich der Aufführung seines Stückes “Der Dra Dra” in Göteborg um Ausreise nach Schweden zu ersuchen, wird unter Berücksichtigung der bekannten und in dieser Information nochmals zusammenfassend genannten Faktoren gebeten zu entscheiden, ob dem Ausreiseantrag stattgegeben werden sollte mit dem Ziel, BIERMANN nach erfolgter

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<sup>160</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, ‘Die Ausbürgerung’.

<sup>161</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, ‘Die Ausbürgerung’.

Ausreise die Staatsbürgerschaft der DDR abzuerkennen und seine Rückkehr zu unterbinden. (Die rechtlichen Grundlagen und Beweise dafür sind vorhanden.)<sup>162</sup>

This subjunctive tone is hardly an *Anweisung* or even a request from Mielke to Honecker, but rather appears to be a suggestion for a potential course of action. Equally, it is in relation specifically to Biermann's trip to Sweden in 1971 over five years before his actual *Ausbürgerung*. In the intervening period there would be several invitations and opportunities to enact an *Ausbürgerung* scenario if this document represented an actual plan as claimed by the state-mandated accounts. These, however, go even further in their claim that Erich Honecker actually approved this plan 'mit seinem Kürzel'! On the contrary, this 'plan' was clearly not enacted and we must therefore presume that Honecker rejected the idea. Equally, as anyone who works with files from the office of Erich Honecker will know, his initials indicate he has received and read the document, not that he has approved its contents. This sloppy interpretation on the part of the BpB and RHG verges on an overt misrepresentation of the facts. The question of how the process developed from a suggested trip to Gothenburg in 1971 to the actual *Ausbürgerung* in 1976 is hardly answered or indeed evidenced by a theoretical request from Mielke to Honecker over five years previously. Certainly, this does not effectively demonstrate the characterisation of the 1976 *Ausbürgerung* being 'von langer Hand geplant'. Indeed, looked at from another perspective the fact that the concept had been mooted previously might help explain how the organs of the SED were able to decide relatively swiftly to expel Biermann following the concert in Köln. This could, therefore, be read as undermining the concerted plot thesis.

Grünbaum's pamphlet, published by the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* in honour of the thirty-fifth anniversary, similarly claims that: 'Früh schon verfolgte deshalb die Parteiführung

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<sup>162</sup> Erich Mielke, 'I N F O R M A T I O N über die Absicht des 'freischaffenden Schriftstellers' Wolf BIERMANN, einen Antrag auf eine Reise nach Schweden zu stellen', p.6. See: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 'Die Ausbürgerung'.

den Plan, das “Problem Biermann” endgültig zu lösen [...] Erstmals wurde 1971 von Mielkes Geheimdienst der konkrete Plan entwickelt.’<sup>163</sup> Although no citations for archival or secondary sources are provided, Grünbaum is presumably referring to Mielke’s question to Honecker discussed above as a *konkreter Plan*. This is clearly something of an exaggeration.

A more ambiguous interpretation of the 1971 document can be found in the Robert Havemann Gesellschaft’s *Der Mut der Wenigen* travelling exhibition. The document is pictured on the first panel with a selective quote from the sixth page superimposed on the first page, implying a characteristic importance for the document as a whole, reading:

‘BIERMANN nach erfolgter Ausreise die Staatsbürgerschaft der DDR abzuerkennen und seine Rückkehr in der DDR zu unterbinden.’ While this line is actually formulated as a question in context, the inquisitory character is lost through its selective quoting. The caption underneath the image, however, does somewhat more honestly reflect the contents of the document as a whole by stating: ‘Stasi-Dokument: Schon 1971 die Ausbürgerung in Erwägung gezogen.’<sup>164</sup>

The BStU’s *Dokumentenheft* entitled ‘*Staatsbürgerliche Pflichten grob verletzt*’ *Der Rauswurf des Liedermachers Wolf Biermann 1976 aus der DDR*<sup>165</sup> – published in honour of the much-publicised fortieth anniversary in 2016 – provides the most comprehensive attempts by a state-mandated body to evidence the concept of the *Ausbürgerung* being the result of a concerted and protracted planning process. Interestingly, the volume is prefaced with the following claim:

Die vorliegende Auswahl an Dokumenten aus dem Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv bildet ab, wie sich die Ereignisse in den Stasi-Akten widerspiegeln und nimmt keine weitere

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<sup>163</sup> Grünbaum, p. 18.

<sup>164</sup> See: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, *Der Mut der Wenigen. Protest – Repression – Solidarität. Folgen einer Ausbürgerung*.

<sup>165</sup> BStU, ‘*Staatsbürgerliche Pflichten grob verletzt*’ *Der Rauswurf des Liedermachers Wolf Biermann 1976 aus der DDR* (Berlin: BStU, 2016).

Deutung der Quellen vorweg. Die Leserschaft möge den Spielraum zur eigenen Interpretation und persönlichen Auseinandersetzung mit historischen Dokumenten nutzen. Der Verzicht auf eine quellenspezifische Interpretation der nachfolgenden Berichte und Bilder soll den Leserinnen und Lesern ermöglichen, sich selbst einen lebendigen Einblick zu verschaffen.<sup>166</sup>

Despite these claims to the contrary, the collection is subject to some rather extensive framing. The introduction sketches Biermann's biography with many of the tropes which have been discussed so far in this chapter, such as the emphasis on his anti-fascist credentials and the *total ban*; equally, the general idea of the *plan* finds mention. However, contrary to both the *Jugendopposition* and the Grünbaum pamphlet's interpretation, the BStU appears in this section of the publication to debunk the notion that the 1971 *Information* document constituted an actual plan, characterising the document as follows: 'Die SED entschied kurz und bündig: Biermann soll in der DDR verboten bleiben und und darüber hinaus auch nicht im Ausland auftreten können.'<sup>167</sup> Instead of 1971, the BStU's 2016 publication locates the *plan* in 1973: 'Deshalb entwickelte das MfS 1973 einen Plan, Biermann gegen seinen Willen auszubürgern'. However, in the later section dedicated to the protests following the *Ausbürgerung*, the following claim is found: 'SED-Chef Erich Honecker hatte die Ausbürgerung Biermanns am 16. November 1976 selbst auf die Tagesordnung gesetzt. Über die Planungen und Vorbereitungen seines Ministeriums hatte ihn Stasichef Mielke schon lange zuvor in Kenntnis gesetzt.' This must be in reference to the 1971 document as no other record of communication on the subject between the two exists and clearly implies that the MfS influenced Honecker's decision. This is interesting inasmuch as – despite the often definitive tone of these publications – it highlights that conflicting interpretations can exist in

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

state-mandated memory, particularly between state-mandated institutions and even in this particular case within the same publication.

Nevertheless, the first section of the document collection pursues the plan thesis from its very title: ‘Der Plan entsteht.’ Despite the claims of no predetermined interpretation of the sources, the section – consisting of seven seemingly disparate documents – is introduced with a fairly clear narrative:

Im April 1973 hatte das MfS einen Plan für den “Abschluss der operativen Bearbeitung Biermanns” entwickelt. [...] Die Stasioffiziere entwickelten die viel eleganter erscheinende Strategie, ihn in den Westen reisen zu lassen, um ihn dann, wenn er dort seine Lieder öffentlich singt, die Staatsbürgerschaft zu entziehen. [...] 1973 fuhr Biermann zu seiner Großmutter nach Westdeutschland. Dass er auf diese Reise eine Schallplatte aufnahm, bekam die Stasi nicht mit. Somit blieb ihr Plan vorerst in der Schreibtischschublade. Auf Abruf – im Oktober 1976 wurde er wieder vorgelegt und nach Biermanns Konzert in Köln umgesetzt.<sup>168</sup>

There are several quite glaring misrepresentations in this narrative. Firstly, this plan is actually entitled ‘Konzeption’ and is clearly a conceptual think piece as indicated by the request to commission ‘Gutachten’ from literary experts to ascertain whether Biermann’s texts from ‘Bestandteil der Gesamtkonzeption der politisch-ideologischen Diversion offen und teilweise verbrämt’ against the GDR as well as whether the ‘angewandten pseudorevolutionären und pseudorevolutionsozialistischen Darstellungsweise’ are suited to corrupting and inciting the young and politically insecure.<sup>169</sup> Equally, the use of the subjunctive ‘würden’ through out most of the document, clearly indicates that it is not a definitive plan of action to be carried. Perhaps, the clearest indication that it is merely a

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., pp. 17–22.



conceptual piece is that none of the proposed *Maßnahmen* were actually enacted. The *Konzeption* suggested that an *Ausbürgerung* could take place even if Biermann did not undertake any ‘feindliche Vorgehen’ on the trip by referring to his previous actions. Furthermore, there is a second ‘Version der Entlassung aus der Staatsbürgerschaft’ conception wherein Biermann does not travel to the FRG and instead is arrested for ‘Straftaten gemäß §§106 und 108 StGB’ and convinced by his interrogators that it would be better to emigrate to the FRG during the ‘gesetzlich zulässigen Frist von 24 Stunden zu führenden Vernehmung’. Neither of these versions were enacted, nor is there any evidence that the ‘Gutachten’ were actually sought or delivered. There is certainly no evidence that this *Konzeption* was seen or approved by anyone in the SED. Perhaps most importantly, there is no evidence that the document was presented again in October 1976 as claimed by the introduction to the ‘Der Plan entsteht’ section. If this was true, it could perhaps indicate that Biermann’s *Ausbürgerung* was the result of a Machiavellian stage-managed plot, which it would appear is precisely the impression aimed at by the BStU here. There is indeed an unrelated document from October in which a list of questions that would need to be answered centrally in the event of an *Ausbürgerung* is provided. However, this is again not evidence of a concerted plot put in action but rather theoretical planning for eventualities on the part of the MfS. Even Bernd Florath of the BStU admits in an MDR documentary dedicated to the *Ausbürgerung* that the MfS had plans in place for many eventualities but the decision was taken by Honecker and approved by the Politbüro after the concert in Köln.<sup>170</sup>

There is no need to exaggerate the malodorous planning of the MfS, the documents indicate clearly that their authors considered revoking Biermann’s citizenship and compelling him to stay in the FRG to be a legitimate if not even necessary measure. However, the evidence presented does not demonstrate that the *Ausbürgerung* in 1976 was a concerted

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<sup>170</sup> Bernd Florath in *Der Fall Biermann – Mit der Gitarre gegen die Staatsmacht* (MDR, 2017).

complot ‘von langer Hand geplant’ as claimed by essentially all published state-mandated media on the subject. Not to mention that there are several indications that Honecker and the rest of the Politbüro genuinely wanted the trip to be a success and for Biermann to ‘toe the line’.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, according to Kurt Hager’s memoirs, who was the most senior member of the party for all cultural matters at the time, he was taken aback and disappointed by the decision. He also alleges that Honecker gave the MfS ‘den Auftrag, gemeinsam mit dem Ministerium des Inneren diese Ausbürgerung vorzunehmen’.<sup>172</sup>

In any case, the interesting aspect of this trope is not to what extent is it accurate, although that is also important, but why state-mandated media highlights it so strongly. The effect is certainly to paint the GDR in a distinctly negative light as it adds malicious intent and dishonesty to the already damaging episode of Biermann’s *Ausbürgerung*. Arguably, the unchallenged presumption of foul play and malice aforethought points to a prejudiced anti-communist attitude towards the GDR and its organs within these state-mandated institutions. The suggestion of a concerted plot fits in well with the simplistic trope of grey Machiavellian bureaucrats determined to exert total control over heroic dissidents standing up for the ‘truth’. If one was inclined to be ungenerous to the BStU, it could be pointed out that their claim to not interpret the documents in its collection – which they nevertheless do – is precisely due to the impossibility of weaving a cohesive and convincing narrative from them. This then serves to disguise the fact that the evidence does not actually support the established narratives. Sometimes silence can be more revealing.

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<sup>171</sup> See for instance, Erich Honecker in Andert and Herzberg, pp. 314–316.

<sup>172</sup> Kurt Hager, *Erinnerungen* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 338.

## The Protest(s)

The *Ausbürgerung* of Wolf Biermann is synonymous with the protests against it. Equally, there is a tendency to see these protests as something of a turning point or even, somewhat sensationally, the beginning of the end of the GDR. Across many forms of media this trope has become well established. An article from 2016 in the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper promoting Biermann's autobiography gives an exemplary indication of how schematic and teleological this narrative often is:

Nach einem Konzert in Köln durfte er nicht mehr zurück. Aber es war dann die DDR, die sich von den Folgen der massenhaften Proteste gegen seine Ausbürgerung nicht mehr erholte. Man hat sich auf die Lesart geeinigt, dass mit ihr der Anfang vom Ende begann. Die Szene blutete aus. Ausreiseanträge wurden gestellt. 1989 war Schluss.<sup>173</sup>

The initial catalyst for the protests is a letter published by a group of twelve *Kulturschaffenden*<sup>174</sup> entitled 'Erklärung der Berliner Künstler vom 17.11.76'. The brainchild of Stephan Hermlin, he invited the artists to his home and composed the text for them to sign and is produced here in full:

Wolf Biermann war und ist ein unbequemer Dichter. Das hat er mit vielen Dichtern unserer Vergangenheit gemein. Unser sozialistischer Staat, eingedenk des Wortes aus Marxens "18. Brumair", demzufolge die proletarische Revolution sich unablässig selbst kritisiere, müßte im Gegensatz zu anachronistischen Gesellschaftsformen eine solche Unbequemlichkeit gelassen nachdenkend ertragen können.

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<sup>173</sup> Deike Dening, 'Autobiografie von Wolf Biermann – Ein Treffen Der Unvermeidliche', *Tagesspiegel* <<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/reportage/autobiografie-von-wolf-biermann-ein-treffen-wenn-man-sich-einen-wolf-laeuft-scheuert-immer-die-gleiche-stelle/14658712-2.html>> [accessed 2 January 2019].

<sup>174</sup> It was originally thirteen, but Fritz Cremer withdrew his signature. Discussed in more detail below.

Wir identifizieren uns nicht mit jedem Wort und jeder Handlung Wolf Biermanns und distanzieren uns von den Versuchen, die Vorgänge um Wolf Biermann gegen die DDR zu mißbrauchen. Biermann hat selbst nie, auch nicht in Köln, Zweifel darüber gelassen, für welchen der beiden deutschen Staaten er, bei aller Kritik, eintritt.

Wir protestieren gegen seine Ausbürgerung und bitten darum, die beschlossene Maßnahme zu überdenken.<sup>175</sup>

Notably, the letter seeks to distance the undersigned from the actual positions of Biermann, many, indeed, were not fans of Biermann's views, as Manfred Krug said in conversation with potential signatories, 'Zustimmung zu der Erklärung bedeutet keine Identifizierung mit Biermann'.<sup>176</sup> The point, however, does not seem to be the person Biermann, but rather to protest the concept of *Ausbürgerung* as a legitimate means of dealing with dissidents. This is further emphasised by the rarely noted fact that the the authors of the letter are unlikely to have known what Biermann actually said or did not say during the concert as it was only broadcast in the evening of the 17 November and then only in certain excerpts. The full concert would not be broadcast until the evening of 19 November.<sup>177</sup> It is evident from the many accounts of the authors that it was composed and signed during the day of 17 November and it had already been published in the West and many of the subsequent signatures – such as Manfred Krug or Klaus Schlesinger – had also signed before the evening of 19 November.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 'Offener Brief prominenter Künstlerinnen und Künstler', *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017) <<https://www.jugendopposition.de/themen/145376/offener-brief-prominenter-kuenstler>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>176</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO DY 30/69550, vol 1, 'Notiz 19.11.76'. Report on an interaction between Gisela Steineckert and Manfred Krug.

<sup>177</sup> See, Jean-Pierre Hammer, 'Robert Havemann aus der Sicht eines französischen Freundes', *Annäherungen an Robert Havemann: Biographische Studien und Dokumente*, ed. by Bernd Florath (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), pp. 129–159 (p. 154).

<sup>178</sup> See, for instance, Astrid Köhler, *Klaus Schlesinger: Die Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011), p. 207; Manfred Krug, *Abgehauen* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2003).

Arguably, this indicates that reactions to the *Ausbürgerung* were pre-programmed, with dissidents likely to protest it and more orthodox socialists likely to condone it which many of course did, as will be seen in the following discussion. Krug hints at this predisposition when he says: ‘Einige, die bereits zugestimmt haben, bedeuten für die Öffentlichkeit keine Überraschung.’<sup>179</sup> But before turning to the reactions of individual intellectuals, it is useful to look at how the protests have been presented in state-mandated memorial accounts.

The concept of the protests against the *Ausbürgerung* being a turning point in the GDR’s fortunes was first touched on within state-mandated memory as part of the 1994 official report of the first *Enquete-Kommission* dedicated to the GDR – ‘*Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur*’:

Die entscheidende Zäsur war die Ausbürgerung des oppositionellen Liedermachers Wolf Biermann, dem während eines Gastspiels in Köln am 16. November 1976 die DDR-Staatsbürgerschaft “aberkant” und das Recht zum Aufenthalt in der DDR “entzogen” wurde. Der Willkürakt löste eine Welle solidarischer Empörung aus.<sup>180</sup>

Erhebliche Folgen hatte die Biermann-Ausbürgerung. Dabei ging es nicht nur um den spektakulären Protest zahlreicher bekannter DDR-Schriftsteller und -Künstler, von denen in den Folgemonaten viele die DDR verließen. Diejenigen, die trotz der Niederschlagung des ‘Prager Frühlings’ im Jahre 1968 noch an die Reformfähigkeit des Systems geglaubt hatten, wurden desillusioniert. Zugleich schwächten die Verhaftungen und die erste große Ausreisewelle nach dem Bau der Mauer das

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<sup>179</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO DY 30/69550, vol 1, ‘Notiz 19.11.76’. Report on an interaction between Gisela Steineckert and Manfred Krug.

<sup>180</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Bericht der Enquete-Kommission ‘Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland’, p. 200.

kritische Potential; jedoch begann sich auch eine Gegenkultur mit neuen kritischen Strömungen zu entwickeln.<sup>181</sup>

It is clear from these excerpts that the *Ausbürgerung* and in particular the protests had great importance attached to them by the *Enquete-Kommission*. From an unprecedented wave of opposition to the beginning of a counter-culture, the protests are portrayed as being something of a watershed moment for the GDR's opposition. However, the overall emphasis is clearly on the celebrity protesters – the *Schriftsteller*.

In the BpB and RHG's *Jugendopposition* project, some 20 years later, the emphasis has shifted somewhat, now the narrative is 'Proteste im ganzen Land':

Die DDR-Bevölkerung nimmt die politische Ausschaltung und Ausbürgerung Wolf Biermanns 1976 nicht tatenlos hin. An dieses ungerechte Straf- und Druckmittel erinnern sich manche Menschen noch aus dem Dritten Reich. Viele empfinden die Reaktion des Staates als falsch und überzogen.<sup>182</sup>

In this more recent account, the generic concept of an unprecedented wave of opposition has been clarified and strengthened as country-wide protests which the 'DDR-Bevölkerung' per se is participating in. Also noteworthy is the comparison with historical German fascism which is further emphasised by an oversized line of text inserted – without any obvious purpose other than to highlight the comparison – stating 'Die Ausbürgerung Wolf Biermanns erinnert an Nazi-Methoden'. A similar narrative can be found in the BStU's 2016 anniversary document collection: 'Schon die Naziregierung hatte Kritiker und Juden aus der 'deutschen Volksgemeinschaft' ausgestoßen und ausgebürgert.'<sup>183</sup> The effect is to suggest an equation of GDR socialism with German fascism, a seemingly common though highly criticised practice

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>182</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 'Proteste im ganzen Land', *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017) <<https://www.jugendopposition.de/themen/145339/proteste-im-ganzen-land>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>183</sup> BStU, 'Staatsbürgerliche Pflichten grob verletzt' *Der Rauswurf des Liedermachers Wolf Biermann 1976 aus der DDR*, p. 76.

in state-mandated memory since 1990 as we have seen in the previous chapter dedicated to Paul Merker.<sup>184</sup>

A particularly noticeable aspect of the protest trope is the juxtaposition of the ‘Prominentenproteste’ to a seemingly separate ‘Proteste im ganzen Lande’ by *ordinary* citizens of the GDR. Indeed, both the *Jugendopposition* project and *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*’s anniversary pamphlet utilise these exact phrases and implicit division for two separate sections.<sup>185</sup>

The state-mandated *Jugendopposition* project cites Biermann’s own hyperbolic assessment to evidence this narrative: ‘Rückwirkend bestätigt Biermann die Folgen des schwerwiegenden Fehlers der DDR-Regierung: “Keine DDR konnte kippen, weil sie irgendeinen Mann mit Gitarre ins deutsche Exil jagt. Was Deutschland damals erschüttert hat, am meisten die DDR selbst, war der Protest gegen diese Ausbürgerung.”’<sup>186</sup>

Looking at the BA’s pamphlet, the *Ausbürgerung* is clearly portrayed as a moment of popular awakening:

Die Ausbürgerung zerschlug alle Hoffnungen darauf, dass die Toleranzgrenze des Honecker-Regimes in den Zeiten der internationalen Entspannungspolitik zu verschieben wäre. Doch sie weckte Potenziale in der DDR-Bevölkerung, mit denen die SED, die auf einschüchternde Wirkung der Ausbürgerung setzte, nicht gerechnet hatte. Staat und Partei hatten sich nicht nur mit anhaltendem Widerspruch aus dem Westen oder von den Künstlern im Land auseinanderzusetzen. Auch zahlreiche kritische Bürger der DDR wollten sich mit dem Ausbürgerungsbeschluss nicht

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<sup>184</sup> See, for instance, Wippermann, *Dämonisierung durch Vergleich: DDR und Drittes Reich*, p. 8.

<sup>185</sup> See: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, ‘Proteste der DDR-Prominenz’, *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017) <<https://www.jugendopposition.de/themen/145338/proteste-der-ddr-prominenz>> [accessed 3 January 2019]; Grünbaum, pp. 31, 47.

<sup>186</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, ‘Biermann – die Biografie’, *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017) <<https://www.jugendopposition.de/themen/145406/biermann-die-biografie>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

abfinden. Der Protest, der weit über den Kreis der Intellektuellen Prominenz hinausreichte, sollte der größte sein, den die DDR seit dem 17. Juni 1953 erlebt hatte.

Interestingly, the events of 1976 are linked rhetorically to those of 1953 reflecting an apparent concern within state-mandated memorial institutions to plot a narrative path of popular rejection of the GDR. Also noteworthy is the seeming desire to emphasise that the protests went beyond the canonical prominent protesters. This is also reflected in Hubertus Knabe's speech at the state-mandated *Gedenkstätte-Hohenschönhausen* during an event in 2016 dedicated to the fortieth anniversary of the *Ausbürgerung* and simultaneously the launching of the BStU's document collection:<sup>187</sup>

Was bei der Erinnerung an diese Ereignisse oft vergessen wird, ist der Protest der kleinen Leute, der weniger bekannten, weniger prominenten von denen viele kamen ins Gefängnis hier nach Hohenschönhausen.<sup>188</sup>

His claim is somewhat nuanced by the fact that he then later reads out the names of those who were interrogated at Hohenschönhausen due to Biermann protests, naming four non-prominent and three prominent protesters: Gerulf Panach, Christian Kunert and Jürgen Fuchs, for a total of seven.<sup>189</sup> The combative anti-GDR approach characteristic of Hubertus Knabe also came to the fore when he reiterated claims that the MfS were responsible for the death of Jürgen Fuchs in 1999 due to having allegedly targeted him with radiation despite the fact that the BStU has long since shown that there is no evidence for this theory and indeed evidence against it.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> BStU, 'Staatsbürgerliche Pflichten grob verletzt' *Der Rauswurf des Liedermachers Wolf Biermann 1976 aus der DDR*.

<sup>188</sup> Hubertus Knabe, Speech during commemorative event *Wegen Biermann ins Gefängnis*, 23 September 2016. Author's notes.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> See for instance, [n.a.], *Der Spiegel*, 'Gauck Stasi setzte radioaktive Stecknadeln ein', 17 March 2000. 'Die Gauck-Behörde konnte nach umfangreichen Recherchen aber nicht feststellen, dass radioaktive Substanzen und Röntgenstrahlen gezielt zur Schädigung von Oppositionellen eingesetzt wurden. Die Art der in Stasi-Gefängnissen gefundenen Röntgengeräte und die Ergebnisse von Akten-Auswertungen sprechen gegen diese Annahme, erklärte Gauck.'



In any case, it can be argued that there has been a development within state-mandated memorial narratives which has shifted focus away from the *Prominentenprotest* to a more general moment of popular rejection of GDR socialism brought about by the *Ausbürgerung*. The concept of the popular rejection of GDR socialism appears prevalent within these institutions and could be reflective of a wider ideological concern to thematise the same.

Looking at how these state-mandated accounts deal with the counter-protests is also quite revealing. In reaction to the open letter of the twelve Berlin artists, many artists, SED functionaries and members and indeed some ordinary citizens of the GDR began to write letters of their own; some expressing their support for the protest, some ambivalent and others wishing to express solidarity with the decision. The files held by the Federal Archive from Werner Lamberz's office contain hundreds of such letters. Lamberz, a member of the Politbüro, was given the thankless task of dealing with the fall out of the *Ausbürgerung*. Famously, Manfred Krug recorded Lamberz during a meeting with the signatories of the original protest letter and the transcript shows how conflicted both Krug and Lamberz as well as many others felt on the subject.<sup>191</sup>

The *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*'s anniversary pamphlet speaks of the counter-protest or rather demonstrations of solidarity with the SED in the following manner:

Es mangelte nicht an Opportunisten oder ideologischen Parteigängern, die das Vorgehen der Parteiführung öffentlich lobten. Sie meldeten sich aus allen Sparten der Kultur zu Wort, unter ihnen auch die Schriftsteller Hermann Kant, Bernhard Seeger, Erik Neutsch, Paul Wiens, Dieter Noll, Peter Hacks und Otto Gotsche. Sie äußerten sich zumeist auf Wunsch der Kulturgewaltigen.<sup>192</sup>

The disparaging tone and pejorative language leave little doubt that these people's views are not considered worthy of respect or even honest. The implication is that one could only

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<sup>191</sup> Krug, p. 250.

<sup>192</sup> Grünbaum, pp. 36–37.

demonstrate solidarity with the SED due to pressure from the state or self-interested opportunism. While it is certainly true that Lamberz and his colleagues such as Ursula Ragwitz, as well as several others from the Ministry of Culture did seek out many artists and encourage support, it is also evident from the letters and phone calls they received that many expressed their solidarity out of conviction. It is precisely this socialist conviction that appears to confound the state-mandated author, it does not appear to him to be possible. This potentially indicates an anti-communist bias or at least proclivity not to take the views of communists seriously.

A similar approach is taken in the *Jugendopposition* project which states the following:

Es gibt aber auch Prominente, die die Entscheidung der DDR-Führung unterstützen – wie die Schriftstellerin Anna Seghers. Oder solche, die unter dem Druck der SED-Führung ihre Unterschriften unter den Bittbrief zurückziehen – wie der Bildhauer Fritz Cremer. Im Partei-Verlautbarungsblatt Neues Deutschland vom 22. November 1976 wird deren Zustimmung zur Ausbürgerung veröffentlicht. Es wird jedoch keine einzige kritische Meinung abgedruckt – auch nicht der Protest der prominentesten Künstler des Staates.

Der Offene Brief der Prominenten wird aber auch ohne die DDR-Presse im ganzen Land bekannt: durch die Westmedien.<sup>193</sup>

The first interesting aspect of this account is the claim that Fritz Cremer withdrew his signature due to pressure from the SED leadership. The genesis of this story appears to actually be Biermann himself who makes the claim in an interview in 1996 that Cremer withdrew in order for his son-in-law to be released from police custody.<sup>194</sup> He had been

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<sup>193</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 'Offener Brief prominenter Künstlerinnen und Künstler', *Jugendopposition in der DDR*.

<sup>194</sup> See, Wolf Biermann, *Wolf Biermann Ausgebürgert*, ed. by Oliver Schwarzkopf (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1999), p. 190

arrested for posting a *Wandzeitung* protesting the *Ausbürgerung* and criticising the SED, he was released after two days. However, Cremer actually withdrew his signature overnight on the 17 November before his son-in-law was arrested. His daughter, Katrine Cremer, writes: ‘Doch eines sei festgestellt: Cremer zog seine Unterschrift nicht zurück, weil ihn irgend jemand dazu gedrängt, erpreßt oder ähnliches hatte. Auch nicht, wie behauptet wurde, weil mein Schwager Peter inhaftiert wurde. [...] Die Zurücknahme war Cremers ganz persönliche Entscheidung.’<sup>195</sup> This is a clear example of a negative portrayal being believed and disseminated uncritically because it chimes with the received wisdom of anti-communist stereotypes.

The second interesting aspect is the seemingly accusatory statement that no protest letters were printed by *Neues Deutschland* followed immediately by acknowledgement that: ‘Der Offene Brief der Prominenten wird aber auch ohne die DDR-Presse im ganzen Land bekannt: durch die Westmedien.’ While this tacitly highlights the crux of the problem, it does not openly acknowledge that this is central to understanding the context of the Cold War and the perspective of many within the SED and wider GDR. The hostile media of the FRG and Biermann’s seeming willingness to be utilised within it is at the core of the entire Biermann saga since the 1960s.

The unity of these accounts of the counter-protests appears to be the underlying attitude that only pressure or opportunism are conceivable reasons for demonstrating solidarity with the SED. While this may be true in individual cases, it certainly is not true in numerous others. The entire logic, rationale and even existence of a Marxist *klassenkämpferische* perspective on Biermann and his *Ausbürgerung* is erased or rather

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<sup>195</sup> Katrine Cremer, ‘Ein Held war er nicht, aber wer braucht Helden?’, in *Die Ausbürgerung. Anfang vom Ende der DDR*, ed. by Fritz Pleitgen (Berlin: List, 2001), pp. 176–180 (p. 178). Interestingly, Katrine also casts doubt on Biermann’s repeated claims that he and Cremer remained friends, she sees the friendship as over by 1968! p. 176.

omitted through absence and, despite this, discredited in absentio by the idea that only fear could motivate such a viewpoint.

In reading the letters of support, there is a constant reference to class struggle.

Exemplary of this is Paul Dessau's<sup>196</sup> poem:

Auf antikommunistischer Bühne,  
vor den Kameras und Mikrofonen ständiger Feindseligkeit  
gegen unsere Arbeiter- und Bauernmacht,  
laut und aggressiv,  
vier Stunden lang  
hat Wolf Biermann, mißbrauchend seine Bürgerrechte, mißachtend  
seine Bürgerpflichten  
gesungen und gesprochen und Schmutz geschleudert  
gegen unsere Deutsche Demokratische Republik.  
Jeder hört, liest und sieht – das ist gefundene Munition  
für wilde antisozialistische Hetze der Reaktion.  
Entsprechend feiert sie ihn als ihren Helden.  
Dies bedeutet: Biermann hat sich selbst aus unseren Reihen  
ausgebürgert und unser Staat besiegelte was der Mann  
selbst vollzog.

Wir sind schon wieder bei der Arbeit für unsere gute sozialistische Sache.<sup>197</sup>

Dessau's rejection of Biermann is particularly noteworthy as Biermann consistently claimed legitimacy as a disciple of Brecht. Dessau was one of Brecht's closest collaborators and friends and would certainly have rejected such claims. Indeed, another of Brecht's closest

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<sup>196</sup> Paul Dessau (1894–1979): Celebrated German Jewish composer, close collaboration with Bertolt Brecht from 1942 until the latter's death in 1956.

<sup>197</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/69552 Paul Dessau, 'Letter 19 November 1976'.

collaborators, the singer Ernst Busch, published the following declaration regarding Biermann's *Ausbürgerung*:

Jedermann mag sein eigenes Land kritisch betrachten. Aber wenn er sich mit Text und Stimme an den Klassenfeind verkauft, ist das eine ganz andere Sache. Es macht sein Verhalten fragwürdig und die Maßnahme unserer Regierung verständlich.

Aus 'Der Klassenfeind' von Bertolt Brecht:

'und was immer ich auch noch lerne

Das bleibt das Einmaleins.

Nichts habe ich jemals gemeinsam

Mit der Sache des Klassenfeinds

Das Wort wird nicht gefunden

Das uns beide jemals vereint:

Der Regen fließt von oben nach unten

und Du bist mein Klassenfeind!<sup>198</sup>

As previously mentioned, the fact that *Ausbürgerung* had been a method utilised by the German fascists is often raised in discussion of Biermann, additionally his father's Jewish heritage is also thematised.<sup>199</sup> This serves to undermine the GDR's antifascist credentials and emphasise totalitarian models of interpretation. This was the case in the initial furore in 1976 as well. Peter Edel, a former Auschwitz inmate and celebrated author,<sup>200</sup> felt compelled to answer this instrumentalisation of Biermann's father's Jewish heritage in his declaration of

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<sup>198</sup> Ernst Busch in 'Stellungnahmen und Erklärungen von Künstlern und Kulturschaffenden unserer Republik zur Aberkennung der DDR-Staatsbürgerschaft Biermanns', *Neues Deutschland*, 20 November 1976.

<sup>199</sup> For example: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 'Biermann – die Biografie', *Jugendopposition in der DDR*.

<sup>200</sup> Edel's autobiographical novel, filmed for GDR television in 1974, is a powerful portrait of a Jewish family in Berlin during the Third Reich. See: Peter Edel, *Die Bilder des Zeugen Schattmann* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1969).

support for the *Ausbürgerung*, signing it poignantly with his own Auschwitz prisoner number.<sup>201</sup>

The erasure of such seemingly earnest and often powerful criticism of Biermann – of which there are many more examples<sup>202</sup> – within state-mandated memory serves to undermine the concept that it was possible to be a socialist and to support the SED’s assessment of Biermann’s positions and actions. This is particularly striking, given the list of towering cultural figures of the twentieth century such as Dessau and Busch. The logical corollary is that only dissident socialism in opposition to actually existing examples is implicitly genuine or understandable within the discursive framework of state-mandated portrayals. Equally, that *real* intellectuals – read liberal intellectuals – would not support the SED’s action and would leap to Biermann’s defence as a matter of course. Furthermore, the omission of such questioning of Biermann’s communist credentials is pertinent as it helps to maintain the narrative of a ‘true’ communist persecuted by the socialist state. This aspect has particularly potent de-legitimatory connotations as it paints the GDR and the SED as false and duplicitous, undermining the avowed progressive ideals of the state. In such portrayals even a left-leaning audience is left to conclude that the GDR could not tolerate actual communists. The one-sided nature of representations of the protests as detailed above therefore takes on a critical role in state-mandated memory as an established trope of the GDR’s anti-

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<sup>201</sup> Peter Edel, ‘Peter Edel: Cui bono?’, *Neues Deutschland*, 22 September 1976. ‘Die Westpresse legt unter anderem besonderen Wert auf die Feststellung, Biermanns Vater ist in Auschwitz umgebracht worden. Der meinige und viele meiner Angehörigen auch. Ich war Häftling in diesem Lager. Ich nehme mir das Recht, der Relationen halber im Namen meiner ermordeten Kameraden, und Genossen zu fragen: In welchem deutschen Staat sind Rassismus und Faschismus in ihren Machtgrundlagen endgültig beseitigt worden? In welchem deutschen Staat sind die Mörder von Auschwitz freigesprochen worden, wo laufen sie in Rudeln herum? In welchem deutschen Staat kann Biermann wagen, vor einem Riesenaufgebot von Massenmedien sogar den Namen Brechts und dessen Gedicht ‘Lob eines Revolutionärs’ zu mißbrauchen und auf sich selbst zu beziehen? Wem zu nutzen tritt er so und nicht anders auf? Dieser sonderbare ‘Widerstandskämpfer’, ‘Bürgerrechtler’, ‘Regimekritiker’ oder wie immer er genannt wird? Dieser Liedermacher, der so lange für gewisse Leute interessant war, als er noch in der Chausseestraße im Zimmer sang und schmähte — wie lange wird er noch für seine heutigen Bewunderer in Köln und anderswo so interessant sein? In wessen Namen handelt er? Im Namen etwa derer, die in Not und unter schwersten Opfern diese unsere DDR mit aufgebaut haben? Im Namen derer, die uns befreiten, im Namen der Arbeiterklasse der DDR — wenn er durch die Lautsprecher des Klassegegners seine Gitarre und Stimme ertönen läßt? Für wen? Für wen? Mit wem?’

Die Fragen stellen, heißt sie beantworten.

Peter Edel, Auschwitz-Gefangenen-Nummer 164 145.’

<sup>202</sup> Other notables include Wieland Herzfelde, one of the instigators of the avante garde dada movement; Ruth Bergman, the director of Brecht’s *Berliner Ensemble* and the West-German *Liedermacher* Franz Josef Degenhardt.

intellectualism and cultural totalitarianism which allegedly saw the beginning of the end of state socialism on German soil.

### From 'True' Communist to Celebrity Drachentöter

As we have seen, the importance of Biermann to memory of the GDR hinges to a large extent on his credentials as a 'true' communist turned on by implicitly 'false' communists. Equally, Biermann's subsequent anti-communist conversion is well-known; although, this about-turn is seldom overtly thematised in state-mandated representations of the Biermann affair. This is despite the fact that it could well be argued that Biermann's subsequent biography is relevant to how one interprets his claimed allegiance and approach to socialism in general. Was the change in political camps less of a conversion and perhaps more the logical conclusion of his 'true' communist beliefs? Certainly, this is how some have interpreted it.

Intriguingly this includes many of Biermann's supporters from the *Ausbürgerung* period, a fact which is treated with silence in state-mandated media. For example, Robert Allertz, then a young journalist in the GDR, writes that he and many in his critical milieu were inspired by and supported Biermann precisely because of his socialist credentials, but following his subsequent and seemingly total conversion to anti-communism felt betrayed and used.<sup>203</sup> Perhaps most striking is the volte face of Jakob Moneta who was responsible for inviting Biermann to Köln in the first place and at whose house Biermann stayed during the entire *Ausbürgerung* episode. Moneta, a lifelong socialist trade unionist, was motivated to invite Biermann due to his belief in the importance of supporting 'oppositionelle Kommunisten in ihrem Kampf für die Demokratisierung von Partei und DDR', which begs

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<sup>203</sup> Robert Allertz, 'Sänger und Souffleur', in *Sänger und Souffleur Biermann, Havemann und die DDR*, ed. by Robert Allertz (Berlin: edition ost, 2006), pp. 9–39 (pp. 9–13).

the question as to why he would turn on Biermann to the point where he would write in 2001: ‘Zum Schluss kann ich es mir nicht verkneifen, Wolf Biermann einen Spruch aus meiner jiddischen Muttersprache auf den Weg zu geben: ‘Nicht gedacht soll seiner werden’.’<sup>204</sup> The answer appears to lie in what Moneta terms as Biermann’s transformation into a ‘Schoßhündchen der deutschen Rechten’.<sup>205</sup> Moneta refers here to Biermann’s remarkable volte face from self-avowed ‘true’ communist to a renegade who espouses a great many classically anti-communist views.

While it is not possible to reconstruct exactly or entirely how and why this turn occurred, there are some intriguing indications contained in an article penned in 1981 by Biermann’s then friend and erstwhile collaborator, the celebrated feuilletonist, Fritz J. Raddatz. During a private evening at Biermann’s home in Hamburg he is quoted as saying:

Es stimmt schon nachdenklich: Als ich über ein anderes Land schrieb, in dem ich lebte, stürzten sie sich wie die Aasgeier auf mich. Seit ich über dieses Land schreibe, in dem ich lebe, interessiert es die Medienfürsten nicht. In fünf Jahren kein einziger Fernsehauftritt.<sup>206</sup>

The contrast with the frequency with which Biermann was in the media of the FRG during his time in the GDR is striking. It highlights the role that the dissident socialist played in the cultural battles of the Cold War. There was little to be gained in Western media by promoting Biermann’s leftist brand of critique as applied to Western thematics and his distance to the GDR meant the mystique and martyr role he had enjoyed previously was no longer as immediately significant. That said, another of Biermann’s remarks recorded by Raddatz indicates how little criticism of the FRG’s political and economic system appears to have actually interested him:

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<sup>204</sup> Jakob Moneta, ‘Die Falten von Margot Honecker’, *Sozialistische Zeitung*, 22 November 2001.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> Fritz. J. Raddatz, ‘Nächtlich bei Biermann Es ist still geworden um den Liedermacher – oder ist er still geworden?’, *Die Zeit*, 21 August 1981.



Was gehen mich letztlich die Probleme der Terroristen [*Rote Armee Fraktion A.B.*] an – ich war und bin kein Terrorist. Was geht mich die Staats-Scheiße an, die das produziert hat? Muß ich mich denn in jede Debatte mischen – diesen lächerlichen Pazifismusstreit jetzt: als wüßten meine lieben linken Freunde nicht, daß die größte, brennendste, ganz widerliche Kriegsgefahr von den Russen droht.<sup>207</sup>

The dissident communist par excellence found little to dissent to in capitalism and appeared to be chiming in gladly with the Cold War Russophobia of the day.

Admittedly, Biermann would seek to distance himself from these remarks in an article for *Spiegel* filled with indignant denial and ostentatious affirmation of his socialist and anti-war credentials.<sup>208</sup> However, these protestations are called into question by the fact that within months his conversion to anti-communism was complete. According to Biermann's own account, Manes Sperber, himself a famous communist renegade, pulled the rotten communist tooth by discrediting Biermann's philosophical paragon, as follows: 'Havemann? Das ist doch kein Philosoph! Gibt es etwa einen Havemannismus? Nein!'<sup>209</sup> His next album had no communist pretensions, be they dissident or otherwise.<sup>210</sup> Biermann now considered himself a 'Genosse Verräter'. Peter Thompson notes that Biermann travelled from 'revolutionary and critical communist to liberal pragmatist, accepting the world as it is rather than how it might be; accepting power relations at face value and giving up his former Marxist concern with structures of power.'<sup>211</sup> Thompson's description of Biermann's conversion is broadly accurate except for a few significant details: firstly, he places the turn from 'critical communist' to 'liberal pragmatist' in the 1990s, whereas as we have seen above

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> See Wolf Biermann, 'Tiefende Dichtung und banale Wahrheit', *Der Spiegel*, 28 September 1981.

<sup>209</sup> Wolf Biermann 'Ich bin ein Verräter', *Die Welt*, 27 August 2010.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., '1982 schrieb ich dann der kommunistischen Utopie das endgültige Abschiedslied, meine Ballade 'Die Mutter Erde geht schwanger' - wo ich das 'Riesenkadaverlein', den Kommunismus, ordentlich zu Grabe gesungen habe. Ich wollte nie mehr in irgendein soziales Narrenparadies aufbrechen und dann zwangsläufig in die totalitären Höllen geraten.'

<sup>211</sup> Peter Thompson, 'Wolf Biermann: Die Heimat ist weit', in *Protest Song in East and West Germany Since the 1960s*, ed. by David Robb (Rochester/New York: Camden House, 2007), pp. 199–225 (p. 218).

it was demonstrably over a decade before at the latest. Secondly, Thompson uncritically accepts, as do many commentators, that Biermann was indeed a *communist*, meaning here a Marxist concerned with power structures. This is an assertion that is worthy of some consideration.

In Biermann's own exegesis, published as part of a *Zeitzeugen* project by the state-mandated *Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik*, he clearly indicates his communist allegiance was something of a historical coincidence or accident of birth and circumstance:

Ich glaube, weil man aus den Höllen der Nazi-Zeit kam und da noch zufällig auf Seiten der Opfer und nicht auf Seite der Täter, sehnt man sich nach einer besseren Gesellschaft. Und sie hieß im damaligen Jargon eben Kommunismus. Und die ganzen Jahren als ich in der DDR lebte und meine Lieder schrieb und 'der' Biermann wurde, war ich immer noch einer der sich für den richtigen Kommunisten hielt und die Bonzen der Partei waren die falschen Kommunisten. So war mein Weltbild.<sup>212</sup>

According to Biermann's self-portrayal, communism was something he inherited not something he acquired through struggle or study like many Marxist intellectuals of the twentieth century. Intriguingly, his portrayal of his time in the GDR is one of a simple binary between himself and the 'Bonzen'. His dissident 'true' communism is presented pejoratively as the 'jargon' of the time. Communism becomes little more in this portrayal than the vague rebellious yearning to improve on the status quo, seemingly ever-present within the youth of any given society. Indeed, one is reminded of the apocryphal dictum variously ascribed to arch-conservatives such as Winston Churchill or Edmund Burke: 'If a man is not a socialist by the time he is 20, he has no heart. If he is not a conservative by the time he is 40, he has no brain.'<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Wolf Biermann, 'Abkehr vom Kommunismus', *Zeitzeugenportal* (2018) <[https://www.zeitzeugenportal.de/personen/zeitzeuge/wolf\\_biermann/videos/ujyaWIOA1t8](https://www.zeitzeugenportal.de/personen/zeitzeuge/wolf_biermann/videos/ujyaWIOA1t8)> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>213</sup> See the following for a discussion of its possible origins: Corey Robin, 'Who Really Said That?', *The Chronicle Review*, 16 September 2013, <<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Who-Really-Said-That-/141559>> [accessed 23 January 2019].

It is clear that Biermann's 'communism' is a form of idealism or utopianism, as Thompson also refers to it, albeit without delving into the implications thereof.<sup>214</sup> This is pertinent as it speaks to the character of Biermann and casts doubt on how seriously he actually engaged with the core philosophy and theory of Marxist communism, despite his frequent claims to this effect. While it would be too simplistic to say that utopia and ideals play no role in Marxist convictions or historical socialist praxis, it should also be pointed out that Marxism has consistently demarcated itself from idealistic and utopian approaches to creating a better society. Engels famously delineated the differences between a dialectical materialist approach which incorporates economic and sociological study into the process of creating socialism from idealistic socialist utopianism.<sup>215</sup> Marx famously eschewed predictions and one would be hard pressed to find any kind of ideal blueprint or hidden schematic which detail how 'true' socialism is to function in any of the classics of Marxist thought. And yet Biermann's entire dissident communism harked back to this concept of a 'true' path being betrayed by the SED. While I do not set out to claim authenticity or accuracy for any particular conceptualisation of socialism, it would appear that this context has been neglected in approaches to Biermann. Someone whose fame is premised on being a 'true' communist should surely be fully cognisant of the foundations of Marxist philosophy and analysis.

Biermann's misattribution during the famous concert in Köln, 1976, of the dictum of 'Barbarei oder Sozialismus' to Marx when it is in fact possibly Rosa Luxemburg's most famous<sup>216</sup> may seem trivial at first glance. But perhaps it is indicative of a wider superficiality

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<sup>214</sup> Thompson, 'Wolf Biermann: Die Heimat ist weit', in *Protest Song in East and West Germany Since the 1960s*, pp. 214–217.

<sup>215</sup> Friedrich Engels, 'Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft', *Marx Engels Werke*, 39 vols, (Berlin: Dietz, 1956–1968), ix (1962), pp. 177–228.

<sup>216</sup> 'Die bürgerliche Gesellschaft steht vor einem Dilemma: Entweder Übergang zum Sozialismus oder Rückfall in die Barbarei! Wir stehen vor der Wahl: entweder Triumph des Imperialismus und Untergang jeglicher Kultur wie im alten Rom, Entvölkerung, Verödung, Degeneration, ein großer Friedhof. Oder Sieg des Sozialismus, das heißt der bewussten Kampffraktion des internationalen Proletariats gegen den Imperialismus und seine Methode: den Krieg. Dies ist das Dilemma der Weltgeschichte, ein Entweder-Oder, dessen Waagschalen zitternd schwanken vor dem Entschluss des klassenbewussten Proletariats'. See: Rosa Luxemburg, 'Die Krise der Sozialdemokratie', *Gesammelte Werke*, iv (1975), p. 60. Although it

with which the famous dissident approached Marxist communism, the ‘Jargon’ of the time as he terms it. It is certainly not trivial, however, that Biermann has since openly claimed to have delivered this quote and accompanying song as a tactical manouver to please his red audience, implying he did not believe what he was saying even then.<sup>217</sup>

Returning to Biermann’s *Zeitzeugen* interview, one of the most conspicuous aspects to his interpretation of communism is the uncritical replication of anti-communist tropes and indeed anti-Enlightenment tropes:

Erst später im Westen dämmerte mir, dass ich ja eigentlich gar kein Kommunist sein kann. [...] Ich kann kein Kommunist mehr sein, weil die gesellschaftliche Praxis, die wir seit 150 Jahren so vor Augen haben, zeigt, dass der Weg in das Paradies einer klassenlosen Gesellschaft ohne Ausbeutung, ohne Unterdrückung, alle Menschen werden Brüder – Schiller – dass der Weg in dieses Narrenparadies, werde ich heute sagen, böse gesprochen ‘die Endlösung der sozialen Frage’, das es keine Unterdrückung und Ausbeutung mehr gibt, die Hoffnung auf dies Paradies führt nicht nur nicht ins Paradies – was gar nicht so schlimm ist, wir können es uns hier auf der Erde ganz gut aushalten –, sondern führt in die schlimmsten Höllen, wo mehr gemordet, mehr geheuchelt, mehr unterdrückt wird als sonst irgendwo auf der Welt. Keine Herrschaftsform begeht so viele systematische langandauernde Verbrechen wie eine die glaubt, sie müsste die Menschheit in dieses Paradies zwingen. Deswegen kann ich kein Kommunist mehr sein. Ich muss ohne dieses Kinderglauben an die Endlösung der sozialen Frage, Kommunismus das heißt das nämlich, muss ich mich in den Streit der Welt einmischen.<sup>218</sup>

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should be pointed out that Luxemburg herself misattributes her formulation to Friedrich Engels, despite it being unlikely Engels ever said it. See: Georg Fülberth, ‘Debatte. Die E-Frage. Sozialismus ist mehr als der Kampf gegen die Barbarei’, *junge Welt*, 13 January 2012.

<sup>217</sup> Wolf Biermann, ‘Interview’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 7 September 1996.

<sup>218</sup> Wolf Biermann, ‘Abkehr vom Kommunismus’, *Zeitzeugenportal*.

Biermann conflates Marxist-inspired communism with the idealistic philosophies of revolutionary France and bizarrely with Friedrich Schiller. This thought pattern is more characteristic of Burkean conservatism and German *Historikerstreit* participants<sup>219</sup> than a man who trades on his dissident communist identity. While this is in itself quite revealing to Biermann's approach to communism, more striking is the totalitarian theory-inspired comparison with fascism evident in his use of language such as *Endlösung* and insinuation that communism – and perhaps even the GDR given the context of the interview – is responsible for crimes not only equivalent to the German fascists (Auschwitz) but even systematically worse. As we have seen already in the previous chapter this totalitarian interpretation of the GDR and conflation of socialism and fascism appears to be an integral component of state-mandated memory and wider ideology in the FRG. There is a certain poignancy to Biermann's employment of such comparisons and rhetoric as in a newspaper interview in 1972 he referred to comparisons of communism and fascism as hypocritical 'erbärmliche Hetze' and that any dissident communist who did not refute such comparisons would demonstrate that their 'bisherige Position für den Sozialismus und die DDR zu einer reaktionären Pose verkommen [würde]'.<sup>220</sup>

Intriguingly, many commentators do not pick up on this intrinsic hypocrisy and its problematic implications for the Biermann legend. Bathrick for instance notes that Biermann will 'certainly [not] be remembered for his theoretical contributions'; however, he somewhat uncritically posits that Biermann is significant due to his 'symbolic "testimony"'.<sup>221</sup> As Biermann's authenticity and indeed efficacy as a dissident lies in his communist credentials, surely his questionable grasp of Marxism and his vehement anti-communist turn renders this

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<sup>219</sup> Domenico Losurdo, *Kampf um die Geschichte. Der historische Revisionismus und seine Mythen – Nolte, Furet und die anderen* (Cologne, Papyrossa, 2007); Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1987); Francois Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>220</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/51370 'Biermann "Aufbereitet"' Eigenbericht 'der Abend', 24 January 1972.

<sup>221</sup> Bathrick, pp. 83–84.

‘testimony’ somewhat dubious. At the very least, these phenomena provide nuance to the legend of the ‘true’ communist.

Given Biermann’s anti-communist turn, it is perhaps unsurprising that he has become a favoured figure of state-mandated memorial institutions since 1990. Several examples of celebrations of anniversaries, pedagogical efforts and more have been touched on in the previous sections of this chapter. Interestingly, however, this relationship between Biermann and state-mandated institutions appears dialectical, with his celebrity being used to promote certain state-mandated narratives. A notable example is contained in an essay Biermann penned in support of Werner Hecht’s *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* funded monograph on Brecht. As we have seen, Biermann cannot excise the label of communism from his biography due to his having traded on it and been so closely associated with it for two decades or so, therefore he is left little choice other than to play the role of disillusioned renegade. However, in his essay he claims that Brecht, from whom he prominently claims lineage,<sup>222</sup> was never actually a communist either in philosophy or conviction. This is particularly interesting as this narrative has been discernibly pursued in state-mandated memory and is part of a wider trend of seeking to re-claim celebrated intellectual figures who were communists in order to absorb them into a liberal canon.<sup>223</sup> Is this perhaps an example of a celebrated intellectual reflexively involved in this deeply ideological process? In any case, the intersections of Biermann and state-mandated memorial activity are far too numerous to be reviewed in full as a brief search of the online presences of the BpB, *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* or BStU reveal. But there is one event which stands out above all others.

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<sup>222</sup> For instance, in his song *Brecht, deine Nachgeborenen*, Biermann stylises himself as Brecht’s true spiritual son. His autobiography and essays are also filled with references to Brecht as his teacher, although contrary to urban legend he never actually met him, and as the ‘Drehpunkt meines Lebens’. See: Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten!*, p. 73

<sup>223</sup> See: Brown, *The Red Resistance? Communist Opposition in the Early GDR*.

In 2014, Biermann was invited to the Bundestag to play a song as part of the official twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the fall of the Berlin wall by the CDU President of the Bundestag, Norman Lammert. The symbolism of this invitation is perhaps obvious, and it clearly indicates the esteem with which Biermann is held within governmental and (right-wing) political circles. However, as the *phoenix* commentator von Fallois noted during the broadcast, the commemoration in the Bundestag was not an official *Feierstunde* with an official *Festredner*. This meant, as von Fallois explains, that Biermann legally did not have the right to speak, at least in a prolonged manner, as part of proceedings. In the run-up to the event there had been speculation as to whether Biermann would utilise the opportunity to attack the successors of the SED – die Linke – and indeed whether this is exactly what Lammert had hoped for.<sup>224</sup> Biermann did not disappoint. He opened by playing a melodic introduction to his song *Ermutigung* and it appeared as though he was going to simply play music as agreed before stopping and stating: ‘Und ich ahne schon, weil ich Sie als Ironiker kenne, dass Sie hoffen, dass ich den Linken ein paar Ohrfeigen verpasse. Aber das kann ich ja nicht liefern. Mein Beruf war doch Drachentöter.’<sup>225</sup> At this point Lammert half-heartedly, accompanied by laughter, predominantly from the CDU politicians, points out that the rules of the Bundestag actually forbid him to speak and that he would have to be elected to have the right to address the parliament. He does not attempt to intervene again, merely grinning as Biermann continues at length: ‘Ja aber natürlich habe ich mir in der DDR das Reden nicht abgewöhnt und das werde ich hier schon gar nicht tun. Ein Drachentöter kann nicht mit

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<sup>224</sup> Gerd-Joachim von Fallois (phoenix), *Debatte im Bundestag zu ‘Friedliche Revolution – 25 Jahre nach Mauerfall’ mit musikalischer Begleitung von Wolf Biermann*, online video recording, Youtube, 7 November 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUheTVZTPNI>> [accessed 3 January 2018]. All further references to proceedings are taken from this recording.

<sup>225</sup> Biermann’s self gifted appellation is in reference to his 1970 work *Der Dra-Dra: die Große Drachentöterschau in acht Akten mit Musik*, a fable published in the FRG which tells of the hero *Drachentöter*, Hans Folk, who must continuously slay the regenerating *Drachenbrut*. Biermann has never made a secret of the fact that he is Hans Folk and the dragon is the SED. See: Wolf Biermann, *Der Dra-Dra Die große Drachentöterschau in acht Akten mit Musik*. (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1970). Revealingly, *Die Zeit*’s review at the time states that the publication of this play in the FRG serves to support ‘antikommunistische Ausreden [...] und landläufige Ressentiments gegen die DDR’. Ernst Wendt, ‘Politik als Spiegelfechterei’, *Die Zeit*, 30 April 1971.

großer Gebärde die Reste der Drachenbrut tapfer niederschlagen. Die sind geschlagen.’ One *Linke* politician interjects to which Biermann responds brusquely ‘Ihr wollt? Ihr wollt immer aber ihr könnt mich’, which would be unparliamentary language at the best of times. When another *Linke* politician interjects that they are elected representatives, Biermann reacts with visible anger:

Gewählt!? Im deutschen Bundestag kann man doch nicht erzählen, dass die Wahl ein Gottesurteil ist, wenn man die deutsche Geschichte kennt. Sei nicht zu clever. Euere Sprüche habt ihr drauf, meine habe ich auch drauf, ihr müsst mich gar nichts erzählen. Ihr seid dazu verurteilt, das hier zu ertragen. Ich gönne es euch und ich weiß ja, dass die, die sich Linke nennen, nicht links sind, auch nicht rechts, sondern reaktionär, dass diejenigen die hier sitzen, der elende Rest dessen sind, was zum Glück überwunden ist.

We see here an implicit linking of *die Linke* and the German fascists, again indicating a totalitarian interpretation of state socialism, but in this instance applying it to the *Linke* of 2014. This is a rather questionable insinuation. The overt disrespect for the proclaimed sanctity of democratically elected representatives of the people, arguably, makes a mockery of the shibboleths of German liberal democracy. In other words, Biermann was enabled to insult with impunity the representatives of some eleven percent of German voters who at that point in time were also the main opposition. It is difficult to think of a more prolific intervention into memory of the GDR with contemporary political implications. This was a very public and theatrical attack against an established political party which, in however a moderate reformist manner, challenges some of the neoliberal hegemony prevalent in German politics. Had Biermann insulted the members of another political party would he have been allowed to continue, would he have been invited if this were even a remote possibility? Past examples of invited speakers suggest not.



In any case, the Bundestag *Eklat*, as it has gone down in history, demonstrates how *de rigueur* anti-communist narratives surrounding the GDR have become. Criticism focused almost entirely on whether or not Biermann had the right to speak,<sup>226</sup> not on the implied values and judgements he communicated, which undoubtedly betrayed an extreme anti-communist bias and anti-*Linke* agenda. This episode highlights that Biermann is indeed a state-mandated *Drachentöter* and that anti-communism is present within the very heart of the German political system.

### Conclusion: A State-mandated ‘Drachentöter’

This chapter set out to interrogate the legend of Wolf Biermann with particular reference to state-mandated representations since 1990. The fulcrum around which the legend of Biermann rests is the concept of the *dissident communist*. Throughout this discussion the details of Biermann’s biography, as represented by himself and by others, have been introduced and to a certain extent challenged by comparing and contrasting with other sources. In some cases, this has cast doubt on certain aspects of Biermann’s legend, notably his reaction to Khrushchev’s speech in the late 1950s and the details surrounding his total ban or *Berufsverbot*.

The central tropes of his legend such as the *Lyrikerabend* and Eleventh Plenum have been contextualised and the interpretations in state-mandated portrayals nuanced. The phenomenon of Biermann’s *Ausbürgerung* has been examined in detail and key narratives such as that it was a concerted Machiavellian plot have been questioned. Furthermore, omitted actors such as the many cultural figures who criticised Biermann and supported his *Ausbürgerung*

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<sup>226</sup> For example: [n.a.], ‘Biermann beschimpft Linke als Drachenbrut’, *Die Zeit*, 7 November 2014; [n.a.], ‘Furioser Auftritt im Bundestag’, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 7 November 2014.

have been re-introduced to the picture. This is significant as it goes to the heart of the discourse of *dissident* or ‘true’ communism which appears to be an important component of state-mandated representations. Biermann’s pronounced turn to anti-communism and espousal of totalitarian theory has also been thematised in order to draw out the ideological implications of this prominent incorporation of Biermann in state-mandated memory of the GDR. This fascinating story highlights the role which dissident communists played in the legitimacy battles of the Cold War and how this has fed into post-Cold War conflicts of legitimation. Past socialist conviction is conceptualised as not only acceptable within the ideological framework of the FRG but is seen as a potent source of credibility. Albeit strictly in the form of dissident opposition to attempts to actually practise socialism. The contemporary relevance of this is clear from Biermann’s post-1990 *Drachentöter* activities and willing instrumentalisation against a modern socialist political party, *die Linke*.

Biermann’s story highlights how the figure of the dissident is useful to state-mandated portrayals of communist-oriented opposition as it enables a simplistic juxtaposition of the ‘true’ communism of dissidents and the ‘faux’ communism of the SED. This juxtaposition and accompanying de-contextualisation foster representations which do not do justice to the complexities of the Cold War and its participants. Biermann and his *Ausbürgerung* are constructed as the evidence par excellence of the SED’s totalitarian cultural policy which could not even, according to the accounts discussed above, tolerate allegedly principled socialist criticism. This serves to undermine the progressive claims of GDR socialism, another strand of the state’s discourses of legitimation. However, though this communism of the dissident appears to almost be celebrated at times, it is ultimately instrumentalised to attack state socialism and thereby to diminish the discursive value of ‘communism’ or ‘socialism’ per se. The consequences of this is to turn the Biermann affair into another anti-communist shorthand trope with which to de-legitimise the wider phenomenon of socialism

within present day political discourse. Equally, this shorthand encodes the lacunar discourse of the FRG's own perceived (liberal) progressive values and as in the case of the Merker affair serves to reinforce the narratives of legitimation and national identity in the unified German state.

From the dissident communism of the 1960s and 1970s, the next chapter turns to the 1980s and the 'peaceful revolution', the period most prominently associated with the phenomenon of opposition in the GDR.



# Vorboten der friedlichen Revolution’?: ‘The’ Opposition of the late GDR in State-mandated Memory

## Introduction

This chapter looks at canonical representations of a range of key phenomena within discourse of the opposition in the 1980s as they relate to the wider subject of the thesis – communist-oriented opposition. The aim is to draw out how the political beliefs and motivations of the opposition in general have been presented in state-mandated memory, to interrogate these depictions and to assess the ideological implications of how this fascinatingly complex and momentous period is reconstructed.

The 1980s is a defining decade for popular representations of opposition, indicating its centrality to conceptualisations of GDR opposition. A myriad of groupings would be born in the 1980s. Some of the most famous events associated with the term opposition in the GDR would come to pass; not least of course, the demonstrations and protests of autumn 1989. Often conceived as a *friedliche Revolution*, these events were accompanied by global audiences thanks to the medium of television and have been the subject of countless documentaries, reports and commemorations ever since, not least emanating from the institutions of state-mandated memory. Equally, the surfeit of materials as well as the multifaceted nature of this period and its actors means that a singular representative case study would be awkwardly reductive; therefore, this chapter will take a slightly wider thematic approach looking at what I have broadly termed: ‘The’ GDR opposition. This multifaceted phenomenon is often treated as having a singular monolithic nature, which justifies this pluralistic case study approach. As we have seen previously, the Merker case is central to the thematic complex of antifascism and opposition, Biermann is central to that of

‘true’ communism and dissident opposition; however, representations of opposition in the 1980s are key to a discernible process of constructing meta-narratives not only about GDR opposition, but about the GDR per se which have political potential for future FRG conjunctures. The established schema of interpretation can broadly be summarised as a popular rejection of socialism by oppositional currents and a desire for national unification and Western liberal democracy.

The first section of this chapter brings together thematic subsections addressing various representations of the ecology, *Bürgerrechte* and *Frauengruppen* of the 1980s oppositional groups in state-mandated media and how this late GDR opposition related to questions of socialism and state. A range of sources from public educational projects to formal research works published by state-mandated institutions are subjected to a close textual analysis and compared with a range of contemporary documents and memory writing of actors involved in order to interrogate their political and ideological content.

A particular concern of this chapter is to look at how opposition in the GDR interacted with certain elements of the reformist-communist current within the SED. This phenomenon poses a particularly interesting challenge to state-mandated representations due to the blurring of lines between extra and intra-party opposition. This makes discourse surrounding it all the more worthy of consideration due to the illuminating and enriching context it lends to the ideological field within these institutions and how concepts such as socialism, the GDR, reform and opposition are approached. The second section of this chapter duly analyses this thematic complex through the examples of the SED-SPD Paper: ‘Der Streit der Ideologien und die gemeinsame Sicherheit’ and *das Projekt* ‘Moderner Sozialismus’ as they are presented in state-mandated memory.

## 'The' GDR Opposition since 1990: Constructing Opposition in State-mandated Memory

The often programmatic nature of state-mandated *Aufarbeitung* of the GDR is demonstrated in the report of the first Enquete Commission: 'Die Aufarbeitung der Geschichte der SED-Diktatur ist u. a. an den folgenden historischen Daten und Zeiträumen exemplarisch zu verdeutlichen'.<sup>227</sup> The subsequent short list highlights only one such important post-1971 period – the 'friedliche Revolution im Herbst 1989 und deutsche Vereinigung'. Furthermore, a direct connection between the *Wende* and opposition in the GDR is established in the naming of the following as one of six thematic complexes: 'Möglichkeiten und Formen abweichenden und widerständigen Verhaltens und oppositionellen Handelns, die friedliche Revolution im Herbst 1989 und die Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands'. In some respects this description reads like a suggested timeline of causality and indeed this narrative appears to be supported in the wider report, which discusses the opposition of the 1980s within the framework of 'Vorboten des Untergangs des SED-Regimes'. Is this really all that these multifarious groupings amount to? Was the fall of the SED and the corollary of unification their aim? The following discussions will analyse state-mandated representations and narratives pertaining to the various groups which make up the opposition and how they interact with the so-called national question.

Following on from the original Enquete Commission's report, which was largely historiographical in its tenor and stated objectives, the second Enquete's more pro-active approach is already visible in its title: 'Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit.' The Commission's fundamentally anti-communist position was reaffirmed clearly in its report:

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<sup>227</sup> See, Deutscher Bundestag, Bericht der Enquete-Kommission 'Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland', pp. 9–10.

Der SED-Staat war eine Diktatur. Er war dies nicht nur durch politische Fehlentwicklung und Machtmißbrauch, sondern schon von seinen historischen und ideologischen Grundlagen her. Die Verletzung individueller und politischer Menschenrechte war systembedingt und wurde durch individuelle Willkür nur noch verstärkt.<sup>228</sup>

The approach to opposition is immediately located within the framework of the national question, the previous Enquete is praised for its foundational work and the current report's priorities are expressed openly: 'Im folgenden soll noch einmal der Frage nachgegangen werden, ob und in welcher Weise die nationale Einheit für Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR von Bedeutung war bzw. von ihnen angestrebt wurde.'

This question is answered swiftly with a rejection of the 'pauschales Vorurteil' which claims that the opposition of the 1980s 'das nationale Ziel der Wiedervereinigung in einem demokratischen Deutschland nicht in den Vordergrund gestellt habe.'<sup>229</sup> The distinct lack of the national question within oppositional discourse of the 1980s is presented 'als Ausweis ihres nationalen Verantwortungsbewußtseins' rather than 'nationaler Indifferenz'.<sup>230</sup> This is reportedly due to the 'spezifische Lage der DDR im geteilten Deutschland' whereas the opposition in other socialist nations could articulate their national sentiment more openly.<sup>231</sup> Quite how national division is meant to deter nationalism, whereas the more or less ethnically homogenous and integral states such as Poland or Hungary would encourage it is not explained. The reverse of this has usually been the case in European history as examples such as Alsace-Lorraine or more recently the conflicts in the Ukraine demonstrate. The report continues with an intriguing formulation whereby the lack of significance given to the

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<sup>228</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Schlußbericht der Enquete-Kommission 'Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit'*, p. 10.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*



national question by the opposition of the 1980s is tactily acknowledged as ‘nicht das wesentliche und nicht das vorrangige Ziel.’<sup>232</sup> However, even this rather weak formulation is implicitly negated in the report’s conclusion, which lionises the opposition as a sort of vanguard for the revolution, stating: ‘Als kleine Minderheit war sie die Vorhut der demokratischen Revolution des Herbstes 1989 und setzte diese in Gang.’<sup>233</sup> The next and final statement of the report on the matter indicates the psychological importance of the opposition to memorial representations of the GDR and for modern day national *Sinnstiftung*:

Von bleibender historischer Bedeutung für die geeinte Nation ist der Umstand, daß die deutsche Einheit von 1990 aus einer erfolgreichen demokratischen Revolution hervorging. Dies ist eine Errungenschaft für Deutschland, denn die Verbindung von nationaler Einheit und Demokratie war in der Geschichte des deutschen Nationalstaates lange keine Selbstverständlichkeit.<sup>234</sup>

The concern to address and to undermine the perception of the 1980s opposition as not supporting national unification is clear.

This concern with writing the opposition’s history with a focus on the national question can be seen again clearly in an article penned by Ehrhart Neubert for a state-mandated publication in which he argues that since the 1970s, ‘Opposition und Widerstand, ebenso wie die politisch motivierte Repression, wurden zu einem ungeliebten Randthema der DDR-Forschung.’<sup>235</sup> He focuses on a few disparate incidents to claim that there was an ‘unbekannter Widerstand’ which had ‘Wiedervereinigung’ as its primary aim:

Unter den politischen Optionen und Zielen des isolierten Widerstandes von 1949 bis 1989 ragen explizit und implizit die Forderungen nach der Wiederherstellung der

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ehrhart Neubert, “‘Nieder mit der DDR’: Isolierter, unbekannter und verkannter Widerstand’, in *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung*, ed. by Ulrich Mählert et al. (Berlin: Aufbau, 2006), pp. 194–216 (p. 195).

Deutschen Einheit heraus. So sehr auch gegen einzelne Erscheinungen des repressiven und undemokratischen SED-Systems polemisiert wurde – die grundsätzliche Frage nach dem Existenzrecht der DDR stand fast immer im Hintergrund. Unzählige Aktionen richteten sich gegen die Grenze und die Mauer, protestierten gegen die Folgen der Teilung und forderten die Wiedervereinigung.<sup>236</sup>

The evidence provided for these claims is best described as scarce. A few disparate incidents are discussed and Neubert appears to have forgotten his own opening remarks that these incidents and groups are ‘ein Desiderat der Widerstands- und Oppositionsforschung’ as opposed to an established historiographical trope. Equally, his claim that this national sentiment applies from 1949 to 1989 is not backed up with any evidence, of the few groups discussed, none actually occurred in the 1980s. Neubert attempts to counter this problematic logic by stating that the events of autumn 1989 ‘nicht erst mit der von der Opposition initiierten gesellschaftlichen Emanzipation bzw. in der Entwicklung der Zivilgesellschaft 1989 begann, sondern eine lange Vorgeschichte hat’.<sup>237</sup>

There is a clear thread running through this exegesis which seeks to associate the national sentiment of earlier oppositional groups with the very different rhetoric and national positions of the opposition of the late 1980s, who have subsequently been canonised. The logic behind this narrative is that the GDR, and its socialism, was never truly accepted by its population and that the history of the GDR can be reduced to a constant struggle for Western liberal democracy and national unity. This clearly ostracises any communist-oriented opposition from the discourses of opposition and of German national becoming. This narrative concern appears to be a potent trope within the ideology of remembering the GDR in the FRG since 1990. So much so that it is a, sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit, omnipresent epiphenomenon which overdetermines other narratives. The following section

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

will explore this thesis while addressing the canonised opposition of the 1980s within state-mandated memorial representations.

### Bürgerrechte, Umwelt, Frieden, Frauen: The Concerns of the Opposition in State-mandated Representations

This section looks at narratives pertaining to the GDR opposition's approach to human/civil rights, ecological issues, peace/anti-war movements and women's rights as depicted in state-mandated representations of the opposition of the 1980s.

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 'friedliche Revolution', the BStU commissioned a large-scale commemorative project entitled *Demokratie statt Diktatur* which at the time of writing is still an ongoing concern with several events scheduled throughout 2018.<sup>238</sup> The project introduces opposition in the GDR via the thematic complex of 'Die Stasi und die Menschenrechte'. However, the concept of opposition is very clearly foregrounded as a sort of prelude to the 'friedliche Revolution von 1989/90' which 'in die Wiedervereinigung [mündete] und stellt damit einen Höhepunkt der jüngeren deutschen Geschichte dar. Aber die revolutionären Ereignisse hatten eine Vorgeschichte.'<sup>239</sup> The framing along the lines of the national question is clear.

This narrative of causality is accompanied by an emphasis which links the concept of democracy or liberal democratic rights as the defining features of the opposition:

Die Geschichte der Friedlichen Revolution in der DDR ist eine Geschichte vom unbedingten Wunsch nach grundlegenden Rechten: Reisefreiheit, Wahlrecht,

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<sup>238</sup> BStU, *Demokratie statt Diktatur* (2014) <<https://www.demokratie-statt-diktatur.de/>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>239</sup> BStU, 'Die Stasi und die Menschenrechte', *Demokratie statt Diktatur* (2014) <<https://www.demokratie-statt-diktatur.de/stasi-und-die-menschenrechte/>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

Meinungsfreiheit. Die Forderungen der Demonstranten im Herbst 1989 hatten ein gemeinsames Ziel: Menschenrechte statt Repressionen – ‘Demokratie statt Diktatur!’ Die universellen Rechte für jeden einzelnen Menschen hatte die DDR-Regierung über Jahrzehnte eingeschränkt oder komplett verweigert. In ihrem Auftrag setzte die Staatssicherheit Menschenrechte systematisch außer Kraft.<sup>240</sup>

This framing clearly interprets the opposition of the 1980s in accordance with the priorities of a Western liberal position, omitting or downplaying any mention of the convictions or stated aims of these groups which do not fit into such a mould. Take this quotation for instance: ‘In den 80er Jahren fanden oppositionelle Gruppen aus der Friedens-, Umwelt- und Menschenrechtsbewegung Schutz unter dem Dach der Gemeinden.’<sup>241</sup> Intriguingly, this is one of the very few mentions of the word *Frieden* within the scope of this rather expansive project. This is revealing as one survey of the oppositional scene conducted in 1988 indicates that there were some 160 peace groups.<sup>242</sup> Given that the peace movement and various peace groups were integral to the GDR’s oppositional scene and self-understanding one would perhaps expect to find this reflected in a project dedicated to celebrating the ‘Vorgeschichte’ of the *friedliche Revolution*. Notably, however, the project focuses exclusively on abstract citizen’s rights usually associated with Western liberalism. Indeed, some of the rights presented as if they were denied to the GDR’s population are rather abstruse. For instance, *Gewissensfreiheit* or freedom to confess one’s religious faith can hardly be said to have been denied per se to citizens of the GDR. The argument made by the BStU relies on the notion that falling rates of religious faith indicates repression; however, the continued fall after 1990 indicates that this process cannot be explained by legislation in the GDR alone. Although the atheism of east Germany can surely be said to be a result of the SED’s encouraging of

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> See Curt Stauss in Peter Maser, *Kirchen in der DDR* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2000), p.126.

humanist and materialist philosophy, within the *Demokratie statt Diktatur* narrative it is discussed as if the basic ability to practice one's religious faith was denied, which even during the *Junge Gemeinde* conflict of the 1950s was not the case.

Significantly, it is evident that peace and indeed ecological concerns are not counted as fundamental human rights in the BStU's schema.<sup>243</sup> Furthermore, the anti-emancipatory turn relating to women's rights, such as the sharpening of abortion laws to FRG standards, is entirely ignored, despite their presence within discourse surrounding *Bürgerrechte* in the late 1980s.<sup>244</sup> As the co-founder of the *Wende* period *Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung*<sup>245</sup>, Irene Dölling, summarises in 2003:

Nach der politischen Vereinigung kamen hinzu: der Wegfall bisheriger sozialpolitischer Maßnahmen zur Subventionierung z.B. von Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen, die Übernahme einer Rechtsprechung und eines sozialstaatlichen Regimes, denen das (modernisierte) Modell der Ernährer-Hausfrau-Familie zugrunde liegt, die zunächst aufgeschobene, aber absehbare Einschränkung des Rechts auf Abtreibung ohne Vorbedingungen, die Bezahlung von Kontrazeptiva u.a.. Je mehr die Frauenbewegung an politischem Einfluss verlor und der Enthusiasmus der ersten Phase verloren ging, je mehr sich die negativen Seiten des Übergangs in die Marktwirtschaft für die bisherigen Lebenszusammenhänge von Frauen zeigten, desto mehr rückte die Losung von den Frauen als den Verliererinnen der deutschen Einheit in den Vordergrund.<sup>246</sup>

There is a superficial incoherence here as all of the aforementioned currents are certainly celebrated elsewhere within state-mandated memory; however, on closer inspection there is a

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid. p. 126. Stauss records some eighty ecological groups, forty-six so-called *Zweidrittelwelt* groups.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. p. 126. There were some thirty *Frauengruppen* according to Stauss' study of the GDR opposition conducted in 1988 although the number may have been significantly higher.

<sup>245</sup> Founded during the *Wende* period of 1989 at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

<sup>246</sup> Irene Dölling, 'Geschlechtervertrag und Geschlechterarrangements in den neuen Bundesländern', *Kulturation*, 1, (2003) <[http://www.kulturation.de/ki\\_1\\_text.php?id=13](http://www.kulturation.de/ki_1_text.php?id=13)> [accessed 20 October 2018].

certain consistency running throughout state-manded representations of opposition leading up to 1989. Namely, that the opposition's primary significance is as an abstract anti-GDR phenomenon. The concrete motivations and goals of the different movements and whether they achieved them is not thematised. In particular, the overt socialist convictions of many of the participants is omitted. The following discussion will look at some of the canonised events and groups associated with *Bürgerrechte* and the peace, ecological and women's movements.

### Frauengruppen

Fascinatingly, the discourse surrounding the *Frauengruppen* in the opposition within state-mandated representations has almost entirely removed the radical socialist convictions of many of the participants. Take for example, the BpB's educational dossier on the *Frauenbewegung* in the GDR. The complex history of bodies such as the *Demokratische Frauenbund Deutschlands*<sup>247</sup> and the objectively better rights enjoyed by women in the GDR, as detailed by Dölling above, is dismissed as instrumentalisation and inauthentic "aufoktroyierte" Emanzipation'.<sup>248</sup> Emphasis is placed on the so-called oppositional women's movement: *Frauengruppen unter dem Dach der Kirche: Weibliche Opposition in der DDR*.<sup>249</sup> The *authentic Frauenbewegung* in the GDR it appears can only be conceived of in oppositional terms and what is more within the framework of church-related, i.e. subaltern

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<sup>247</sup> The DFD was a mass membership representative body for women in the GDR. It supported the SED although it took seats in the Volkskammer independently. The DFD was often responsible for drafting legislation regarding family and women's issues. See: Inge Lange, 'In der Frauenpolitik, so Ulbricht, dürfen nicht die Buchhalter reden', *Walter Ulbricht*, ed. by Egon Krenz (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2013), pp. 538–547.

<sup>248</sup> Corinne Bouillot, 'Auferstanden aus Ruinen Die Frauenbewegung in der DDR', *Frauenbewegung*, <<http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/gender/frauenbewegung/35279/neuanfang-im-osten?p=all#footnode3-3>> [accessed 22 October 2018].

<sup>249</sup> Eva Säger, *Frauengruppen unter dem Dach der Kirche Weibliche Opposition in der DDR* (2008) <<http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/gender/frauenbewegung/35293/80er-jahre-im-osten>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

groups. However, the article's title appears somewhat misleading in the first instance as it details events such as lesbian groups taking part in official radio broadcasts and authorised public readings, which are consequently difficult to describe as opposition to the SED, particularly as similar societal movements in the FRG are rarely conceptualised as political opposition but rather as protest or alternative lifestyles.<sup>250</sup> Nonetheless, towards the end of the article, emphasis is duly placed on 'Herbst 1989: friedliche Revolution in der DDR'.<sup>251</sup> The progression from women's interest groups to the *peaceful revolution* is not expressly explained, the reader is left to presume that these women were somehow naturally inclined to be anti-SED and pro-unification and the interpretative approach of the national question appears to frame a discussion allegedly centring on the women's movement.

In any case, one of the most significant aspects of this representation of *Frauengruppen* and opposition in the 1980s is centred on the the *Unabhängige Frauenverband* (UFV) which did indeed represent an alliance of various groups during the *Zentraler Runder Tisch*. The UFV is introduced as a 'basisdemokratische, weltanschaulich übergreifende, feministische Vereinigung. Er gründete sich bei einem euphorisch veranstalteten Fest in der Ostberliner Volksbühne am 3. Dezember 1989, an dem ca. 1.200 Frauen teilnahmen'.<sup>252</sup> The impression the reader receives is of an interdisciplinary, non-political (in the narrow sense of the word) grassroots conference of ecstatic women whose only concerns regarding any impending unification are the 'Ausschluss von Frauen und geschlechterrelevanten Themen' and 'Kritik am konservativen Frauen- und Familienleitbild der BRD'.<sup>253</sup> Quite what this critique or its object entails is not revealed in any detail.

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<sup>250</sup> See for example, Susanne Hertrampf, 'Ein Tomatenwurf und seine Folgen Eine neue Welle des Frauenprotestes in der BRD', *Frauenbewegung*, <<http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/gender/frauenbewegung/35287/neue-welle-im-westen>> [accessed 22 October 2018].

<sup>251</sup> Sanger, *Frauengruppen unter dem Dach der Kirche Weibliche Opposition in der DDR*.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

This approach to the *UFV*, pigeonholing them as a sort of one-dimensional women's rights group, is also discernible in the *Bundestiftung Aufarbeitung's* 2016 publication, *Frauen in der DDR*.<sup>254</sup> The group are again described tersely as pursuing 'die Interessen von Frauen in den Umbruchsprozessen' and concerned that women be involved in 'Macht- und Entscheidungsprozessen'. Kaminsky's concern with representational politics, characteristic of liberal feminism, is clear; the actual policy content of this union of women's groups is not discussed in the slightest beyond a non-sourced citation of a slogan playing on the 1982 Ina Deter hit single: 'Neue Frauen und Männer braucht das Land.'<sup>255</sup>

However, a cursory glance at the *UFV's Manifest für eine autonome Frauenbewegung*<sup>256</sup> reveals that this movement was far from non-ideological and not limited to a narrow focus on so-called women's issues. A potential unification of the two German states is clearly rejected as a desirable concept and an explicitly radical socialist alternative is called for:

Wir aber sollten uns an dieser Stelle fragen, ob wir zu solchen  
Wieder/Vereinigungskonzepten eine reale und lebenswerte, eine sozialistische  
Alternative entwickeln können.

[...]

Die Frauen haben kein Vaterland zu verlieren sondern eine Welt zu gewinnen. Wir  
sollten gerade jetzt die Chance ergreifen, in einem erneuerten Sozialismus die Vielfalt  
unserer Lebensformen, unsere individuelle Verschiedenartigkeit, unsere Bedürfnisse  
und Ansprüche zur Geltung zu bringen.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Anna Kaminsky, *Frauen in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2016).

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 247–248.

<sup>256</sup> Full title: Ina Merkel, *Ohne Frauen ist kein Staat zu machen. Einige Frauen-Fragen an ein alternatives Gesellschaftskonzept oder: Manifest für eine autonome Frauenbewegung*. (1990) <<http://www.ddr89.de/ufv/UFV16.html>> [accessed 23 October 2018].

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*



This was not merely a thought piece for discussion nor a document aimed at limiting the group's scope to women's issues. On the contrary, it sought to showcase how women's issues were intertwined with wider socio-economic frameworks and actually agreed a five-point consensus to take to the *Zentraler Runder Tisch*:

1. für einen modernen Sozialismus auf deutschem Boden in einem gemeinsamen europäischen Haus
2. für eine ökologische Reorganisation der Wirtschaft
3. für Demokratie, Selbstverwaltung und Öffentlichkeit
4. für eine multikulturelle Gesellschaft
5. für ein solidarisches Miteinander aller sozialen Gruppen<sup>258</sup>

Furthermore, the actual representative of the group during negotiations at the *Zentraler Runder Tisch*, Tatjana Böhm, had been a member of the SED until December 1989 and the constituent and largest group of the UFV which she led bore the name *Sozialistische Fraueninitiative* (SOFI). In February 1990, even before the *Volkskammer* elections in March, SOFI would prophetically predict the structural unemployment resulting from unification and call for a strong socialist response including alliances with Western trade unions, this at a time when mainstream political discourse was still speaking of *blühende Landschaften*.<sup>259</sup>

It appears that the socialist convictions and radical contributions of the oppositional *Frauengruppen* have been largely erased within the state-mandated representations discussed above. Equally their principled opposition to unification of the two German states is also downplayed or omitted. Instead, these women have been incorporated into a largely depoliticised (in terms of wider socio-economic political constellations) canon of anti-SED

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Sozialistische Fraueninitiative (SOFI), 'Positionspapier zur Vereinigung der beiden deutschen Staaten', *Feministische Studien*, 8.1 (1990), 143–147 (pp. 146–147).

oppositionals and implicitly and explicitly heroised as participants of the *friedliche Revolution*.<sup>260</sup>

## Frieden

The linking of the peace movement and the complex of opposition in the GDR is a well-established trope within many discourses relating to memory of the GDR and is certainly not limited to state-mandated representations.<sup>261</sup> The second Enquete Commission's report on the GDR states quite plainly: 'Das Thema "Frieden" wurde zum Katalysator für die Selbstfindung als politische Opposition.'<sup>262</sup> However, what sort of politicisation is the pertinent question. The implication of the Enquete's exegesis is that peace was a sort of camouflage for political opposition to the SED. The following discussion looks at some of the most important events associated with the oppositional peace movement within state-mandated representations.

## Berliner Appell

It is commonly accepted that the 1982 *Berliner Appell* composed by Robert Havemann and Rainer Eppelmann was a foundational milestone for the peace movement of the GDR and

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<sup>260</sup> For an intimate account of this process from some of its actors see: Bärbel Schäfer, Bärbel Klässner, Helga Adler and Astrid Landero, *Frauenaufbruch`89: Was wir wollten – was wir wurden* (Berlin: Dietz, 2011).

<sup>261</sup> See for example Thomas Klein, 'Frieden und Gerechtigkeit!' *Die Politisierung der unabhängigen Friedensbewegung in Ost-Berlin während der 80er Jahre* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007).

<sup>262</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Schlußbericht der Enquete-Kommission 'Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit', p. 291.

indeed for the development of the opposition of the 1980s, one BpB pamphlet even goes as far as to refer to it as the ‘Anfang der politischen Opposition in der DDR.’<sup>263</sup>

The appeal called for the removal of all nuclear weapons and withdrawal of all military personnel and materials, significantly, from both German states.<sup>264</sup> The second GDR-themed Enquete Commission discusses the *Appell* as intended to provoke, ‘indem er auf die Teilung Deutschlands als wesentliche Spannungsursache in Europa hinwies.’<sup>265</sup> The implication being that it questioned German *Zweistaatlichkeit*. Neubert’s *Geschichte der Opposition* remarks that the innovation of the *Berliner Appell* lies in its ‘Konkretisierung oppositioneller Friedenspolitik’ as it connects the resolution of the ‘Friedensfrage’ with the resolution of the German question.<sup>266</sup> The BpB’s aforementioned pamphlet refers to the *Appell* as follows: ‘Niemals zuvor und auch danach hat ein Oppositionstext aus der DDR die Verflechtung von Frieden, Deutschlandpolitik, Demokratie und Ökonomie in solcher Deutlichkeit beschrieben.’<sup>267</sup>

This is certainly an exaggeration as any mention of *Deutschlandpolitik* is at most implicit and only referred to with regards to withdrawing nuclear weapons from both states. Nevertheless, it establishes that the *Berliner Appell* is incorporated into a canon of important events linking opposition in the GDR with the national question. Indeed, in state-mandated representations (and beyond) there is a discernible trend to emphasise the *Berliner Appell* as being addressed specifically to Honecker and the GDR’s leadership.<sup>268</sup> However, the wider

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<sup>263</sup> Maser, p. 131. See also Günther Heydemann, ‘Entwicklung der DDR bis Ende der 80er Jahre’, *Information zur politischen Bildung*, 270 (2002), 25–31, (p. 30).

<sup>264</sup> Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte, *Der Berliner Appell* <<http://www.gesellschaft-zeitgeschichte.de/geschichte/der-berliner-appell-1982/>> [accessed 3 January 2018].

<sup>265</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, Schlußbericht der Enquete-Kommission ‘Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit’, p. 291.

<sup>266</sup> Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989*, p. 409.

<sup>267</sup> Maser, p. 133.

<sup>268</sup> For example, Manfred Görtemeier, ‘Veränderungen im Zeichen der Entspannung’, *Information zur politischen Bildung*, 250, (2015) <<http://www.bpb.de/izpb/214103/veraenderungen-im-zeichen-der-entspannung?p=all>> [accessed 3 January 2018]; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, ‘Bewegter Frieden - Die Friedensbewegung in der DDR’, *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017) <[www.jugendopposition.de/145332](http://www.jugendopposition.de/145332)> [accessed 3 January 2019].

appeal is actually expressly addressed to the wider public and both German states.<sup>269</sup> Only one of the five numbered pleas is addressed specifically to the government of the GDR and consists itself of a series of five rhetorical questions such as: ‘Sollten wir nicht auf Produktion, Verkauf und Einfuhr von sogenanntem Kriegsspielzeug verzichten?’

Interestingly, the BpB and RHG’s *Jugend Widerstand* project refers erroneously to this being merely four questions, omitting the following: ‘Sollten wir nicht auf alle Demonstrationen militärischer Machtmittel in der Öffentlichkeit verzichten und unsere staatlichen Feiern stattdessen dazu nutzen, den Friedenswillen des Volkes kundzutun?’ It seems unlikely that this is pure happenstance given its position in between the other questions. Is it perhaps omitted due to its implicit affirmation of GDR state celebrations and the corollary that the *Appell* does not question German *Zweistaatlichkeit*. Indeed, contrary to how the *Appell* has been represented in state-mandated memory, co-author Rainer Eppelmann would reminisce:

Würde Deutschland gespalten bleiben, wenn die sowjetischen Panzer abgezogen würden? Robert [Havemann] vertrat die Ansicht, dass in einem solchen Fall ganz Deutschland sozialistisch würde. Ich war mir nicht sicher, wie ich mir ein solches Zukunftsgemälde vorzustellen hatte. An eine deutsche Wiedervereinigung als praktische Aufgabe haben wir damals aber nicht zu denken gewagt.<sup>270</sup>

The only living composer of the *Appell* clearly undermines any attempt to interpret the event as one which questioned German *Zweistaatlichkeit* and what is more highlights the fact that one of the composers, Havemann, envisaged a socialist unification. The fact that Eppelmann has himself been directly involved in state-mandated memory of the GDR for decades and yet this salient information has not found its way into such accounts raises several questions. More importantly, however, it demonstrates that the national narrative has certainly taken on

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<sup>269</sup> Gesellschaft für Zeitgeschichte, *Der Berliner Appell*.

<sup>270</sup> Rainer Eppelmann, *Fremd im eigenen Haus. Mein Leben im anderen Deutschland* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1993), p. 186

more importance in retrospect indicating its importance within the ideological framework of these state-mandated institutions. There is also a discernible element of hypocrisy in the fact that the *Appell's* calls for disarmament of the West and specifically the end of 'Produktion, Verkauf und Einfuhr von sogenanntem Kriegsspielzeug' is not thematised. Indeed, the post-1990 FRG is often listed as one of the largest exporters of military equipment. The *Appell's* pacifism is celebrated but, in reality, can only be seen as having failed in its aims both in letter and in spirit.<sup>271</sup> This could perhaps be seen as evidence of avoiding critical tones in regards to the present German state.

### Bürgerrechtsbewegung

One BpB article, authored by Rebecca Plassa, indicates the incorporation of the oppositional *Bürgerrechtsbewegung* into the national narrative from its very title: *Der Beitrag der Bürger auf dem Weg zur Einheit*.<sup>272</sup> Intriguingly and contrary to some other state-mandated memorial representations, the opposition of the 1980s emerging from the peace and ecological movements are presented as differing from 'the' opposition which brought the GDR to collapse. This 'kleine politische Dissidentenbewegung' which called for a reformed socialism 'unter der Flagge des "großen Bruders"', that is, the Soviet Union and Gorbachov's *Perestroika*, is presented as being distinctly separate to the 'auslösenden Momenten' of the peaceful revolution.<sup>273</sup> These moments are presented as the Massenflucht und Botschaftsbesetzungen, the protests against the 'Fälschung der Kommunalwahlen vom Mai'

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<sup>271</sup> See for example, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2018: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, (2018) < [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/sipri\\_yb18\\_summary\\_de\\_0.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/sipri_yb18_summary_de_0.pdf) > [accessed 20 October 2018].

<sup>272</sup> Rebecca Plassa, *Der Beitrag der Bürger auf dem Weg zur Einheit* (2010) <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-einheit/lange-wege-der-deutschen-einheit/47066/beitrag-der-buerger>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

and, thirdly, the founding of *Neues Forum* the first ‘dezidiert politischen oppositionellen Gruppierung’.<sup>274</sup> This distinction is significant given its ideological implications. *Neues Forum* is seen as being materially different and not as part of the reformist socialist current but rather as aiming for a political ‘Umbruch’. The author goes into more detail; ‘Das Neue Forum erwies sich rasch als Sammelpunkt einer übergreifenden Demokratiebewegung [...] für welche die Bürger dann im Oktober massenhaft auf die Straßen gingen. In diesem Oktober beschleunigten sich die Ereignisse. Die verbreitete diffuse gesellschaftliche Unzufriedenheit schlug um in die Massenakte der friedlichen Revolution’.<sup>275</sup>

Here we find *Neues Forum* being described as a broadly non-ideological movement whose only aim is the laden term – democracy. What sort of democracy is left for the reader to work out for themselves. Within the discursive framework of the article, the presumption is most likely Western liberal democracy. *Neues Forum* was undoubtedly a vitally important aspect of the events of 1989; however, does this group fit neatly into a teleological narrative of national unification and popular rejection of socialism?

Ehrhart Neubert’s *Geschichte der Opposition* certainly sees it this way, in his view the declaration *Aufbruch ’89 – Neues Forum* ‘bekannte sich [...] prinzipiell zu den Grundlagen der bürgerlichen Demokratie’.<sup>276</sup> Socialist sentiment such as ‘Wir wollen Spielraum für die wirtschaftliche Initiative, aber keine Ellenbogengesellschaft’ is deliberately downplayed and countered with the alleged fact that people for whom ‘nichts am Sozialismus lag’ might have signed the declaration.<sup>277</sup> Neubert names one example for this. Furthermore, the fact that the initiators of the group in Berlin declared publicly that the ending of the *führende Rolle* of the SED was ‘illusorisch’ and ‘nicht angebracht’ is described as bringing forth severe irritation within the wider oppositional scene. Neubert provides no sources for this. The implication,

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989*, pp. 836–837.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., pp. 836–837.

however, is clear that any attempts by *Neues Forum* to maintain socialism is seen as aberrant and not as something reconcilable with their role as the vanguard of the

*Bürgerrechtsbewegung*. Neubert goes as far as to add: ‘Zeitweise gab es für die anderen Oppositionsgruppen deswegen keine Ansprechpartner im NF.’<sup>278</sup> His portrayal implies an initial non-combative socialist camouflage and a progressive acceptance that this is not what its supporters wanted as time went on.

Was socialism or co-operation with the SED really anathema to those who desired change in the GDR in 1989? A catalogue of letters published by the *Robert Havemann Gesellschaft* to demonstrate the voices of grassroots *Neues Forum* members poignantly ends with a declaration from Gerd Audrum which warns that the SED leadership ‘unser Land hinter dem Rücken des Volkes durch wirtschaftliche Manipulationen an das kapitalistische Ausland verkauft’ and refers to opening of the border as a ‘Kurzschlußreaktion’ which leaves the GDR’s citizens at the mercy of ‘Finanzkapital’. The socialist critique of the SED and lack of concern with, indeed open hostility towards, unification or *Reisefreiheit* is apparent, though not thematised by the RHG.<sup>279</sup>

There are many more examples of similar sentiment from ordinary GDR citizens who were involved in *Neues Forum* in a collection of such contemporary contributions entitled ‘Das System-Frage aus Sicht der Bevölkerung’, a Frau Lux writes ‘Als Opposition verstehen wir uns nicht, weil wir für den Sozialismus sind – und zwar für wesentlich mehr Sozialismus [...] Es geht nicht primär um Reisefreiheit. Es geht primär – und das möchte ich unterstreichen – um einen Übergang der formalen Vergesellschaftung in eine reale Vergesellschaftung’.<sup>280</sup> A Herr Kempe states plainly: ‘Der Sozialismus steht auch für mich

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p. 859.

<sup>279</sup> Gerd Audrum, ‘November Aufruf 1989’, in ‘*Sie haben so lange das Sagen, wie wir es dulden*’ *Briefe an das Neue Forum September 1989 bis März 1990*, ed. by Tina Krone (Berlin: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 2010), pp. 398–399 (p. 398).

<sup>280</sup> Frau Lux in Thomas Ahbe et al., eds, *Wir bleiben hier! Erinnerungen an den Leipziger Herbst ’89* (Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1999), pp. 63–64.

nicht zur Disposition'.<sup>281</sup> These few examples are characteristic of many others. Equally, the leading personnel of the *Bürgerrechtsbewegung* such as Katje Havemann, in whose flat the *Neues Forum* declaration was composed, have spelt out that they were not interested in national unification and Western style democracy and capitalism: 'Ich will auch keinen Kapitalismus'.<sup>282</sup> Looking back in 2009, Bärbel Bohley is quite clear what the people were demonstrating for in her view – democratic socialism. Her exegesis goes even further however and provides some interesting background to the concept of the *Bürgerrechtsbewegung* being incorporated into a canon which celebrates national unification and a popular rejection of socialism. She writes:

Der BND meldete am 25. April 1990 ans Kanzleramt, ans Auswärtige Amt und ans Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen:

Die Bürgerbewegungen streben eine Nivellierung der Gesellschaft an. Sie verfolgen den 'dritten Weg', den demokratischen Sozialismus, wie ihn etwa Bahro vorgezeichnet hat. Sie stehen einem Neubeginn im Wege. Zentrale Frage wird sein: Kann die Arbeit der Bürgerkomitees unterbunden werden?

Diese vier Sätze lassen ahnen, was zu dieser Zeit hinter den geschlossenen Türen abgelaufen ist, um den direkten Einfluss der Bürgerbewegung abzuwenden. Unsere Demokratiebewegung wurde nicht als Ferment im gesellschaftlichen Umbau gesehen, sondern als Störfaktor im vereinigten Deutschland begriffen.<sup>283</sup>

Bohley writes candidly how the *Bürgerrechtsbewegung* was perceived at the time by elements within the German state security apparatus. The comparison with Bahro is particularly interesting as he had been celebrated as being an honest dissident when

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<sup>281</sup> Herr Kempe in Thomas Ahbe et al., eds, *Wir bleiben hier! Erinnerungen an den Leipziger Herbst '89* (Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1999), p. 65.

<sup>282</sup> Katja Havemann in Hubertus Knabe, *Aufbruch in eine andere DDR* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989), p. 20

<sup>283</sup> Bärbel Bohley, *20 Jahre NEUES FORUM 'Eine Bewegung erweist sich als erfolgreich, wenn sie zerfällt'* (2009) <[https://baerbelbohley.de/meinungen/neues\\_forum.php](https://baerbelbohley.de/meinungen/neues_forum.php)> [accessed 24 October 2018].



criticising the GDR only a few years previously but was now clearly seen as a threat; indeed, as it seems the *Bürgerrechtsbewegung* was too. This raises some fascinating questions regarding the lionisation of the same within state-mandated memory today. In any case, it could help explain why the socialist content and conceptualisations of these groups is largely downplayed in these representations. This would tend to further indicate an anti-communist element to the ideological framework extant within state-mandated institutions.

## Umwelt

Of the multiple groups focussed on ecology in the GDR oppositional scene, one takes up a particularly important place in state-mandated representations– the *Umweltbibliothek*. Arising from the *Pfarr- und Glaubensgemeinde Berlin-Lichtenberg*, the environmental activists decided to found a library which would gather together pertinent literature on ecological and social-ethical subjects. In 1986, the Zionskirche in Prenzlauer Berg, whose pastor Hans Simon had been involved in the religious oppositional movement *Junge Gemeinde* in the 1950s, offered space in one of its auxiliary buildings.<sup>284</sup> More than just a library, the *Umweltbibliothek* housed a gallery, café and networking space for the alternative scene of Berlin (East). Perhaps its most significant achievement is the publishing of the semi-legal self-produced magazine – the *Umweltblätter*. Published in print runs of up to a thousand and sometimes more, this magazine became the best known example of *samizdat* in the GDR of the late 1980s. It was freely available for purchase by the public in the *Zionskirche* premises.

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<sup>284</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, ‘Friedens- und Umweltkreis der Pfarr- und Glaubenskirche’, *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017) <<https://www.jugendopposition.de/lexikon/personen/148182/hans-simon>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

Within state-mandated memory, the *Umweltbibliothek* is initially framed within the context of the infamous *Razzia* in 1987. The MfS entered the building and arrested several members while confiscating their printing press, library holdings, and so on. The response was an organised protest by several oppositional groupings including *Frauen für den Frieden*, *Kirche von Unten*, *Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte* and *Gruppe Gegenstimmen*. This protest involved a co-authored protest resolution and a so-called *Mahnwache* in the actual *Zionskirche* as well as elsewhere. The seven arrested were released after three days and neither the *Umweltbibliothek* nor *Umweltblätter* was subject to any further MfS actions.<sup>285</sup>

The Enquete Commission's report focuses on the Western media's role in this affair, celebrating the role they played in disseminating information about the 'Existenz oppositioneller Bestrebungen.'<sup>286</sup> A similar congratulatory tone can be detected in the second Enquete Commission's report along with an apologia for a perceived lack of support for the opposition:

Die DDR-Opposition ließ sich allerdings auch nur schwer medial in Szene setzen. Die harten Reaktionen der SED-Führung auf oppositionelle Kritik ließen sich leichter in Fernsehbilder umsetzen als diese Kritik selber. Erst mit den staatlichen Maßnahmen gegen die Umweltbibliothek in der Berliner Zionsgemeinde im November 1987 rückte die DDR-Opposition stärker in das Blickfeld der westdeutschen Öffentlichkeit. Nunmehr begannen nach harten internen Auseinandersetzungen auch die Oppositionellen in der DDR, die Möglichkeiten der westlichen Medien stärker für sich zu nutzen, um durch im Westen erzeugten Druck auf die DDR-Behörden die

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<sup>285</sup> Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung and Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, 'MfS-Aktion gegen die Umwelt-Bibliothek', *Jugendopposition in der DDR* (2017) <<https://www.jugendopposition.de/themen/145394/mfs-aktion-gegen-die-ub>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>286</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Bericht der Enquete-Kommission 'Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland'*, p. 209.

Freilassung Inhaftierter zu erwirken und sich selber abzusichern. Trotz aller berechtigten Kritik an der Berichterstattung der westdeutschen Medien waren diese für die DDR-Bürger stets die wichtigste Informationsquelle über Opposition und Widerstand im eigenen Umfeld und täglich erlebbare Beispiele einer pluralen Berichterstattung. Unvergessen bleibt, daß fast alle in der DDR akkreditierten westdeutschen Korrespondenten schließlich Kontakte zu oppositionellen Gruppen pflegten, deren Botschaften im Westen veröffentlichten, oft unter konspirativen Bedingungen Informationen über die Grenzen hinweg transportierten und Öffentlichkeit in einem Bereich herstellten, in dem die SED-Machthaber in besonderer Weise auf Abgrenzung aus waren. Damit wurden viele dieser Journalisten zu aktiven Unterstützern und Beratern der sich formierenden Opposition. Mit ihrer Berichterstattung in den Tagen des Sturzes der SED-Diktatur gewannen sie unmittelbaren persönlichen Einfluß auf den Gang der Ereignisse.<sup>287</sup>

It is worthwhile considering this passage in full as it is an excellent example of how working through the past, especially when reference to the opposition in the GDR takes on exculpatory overtones. Western journalists were, of course, often involved in reporting official GDR state events and other normalising everyday occurrences, however, by implication in this narrative this and the relative lack of focus on oppositional groups and narratives is something worthy of 'berechtigte Kritik'. Equally, anyone familiar with the manner of reporting during the Cold War era will be aware that Western journalists were not in fact afraid of criticising or offending the GDR, the SED or focusing on critical or oppositional content. For instance, the ARD's television magazine *Kontraste* which was dedicated to the thematic complex of GDR opposition had been a regular fixture since being founded in 1968 in order to focus on the events in Prague. In this sense, the presentation of

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<sup>287</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Schlußbericht der Enquete-Kommission 'Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit'*, pp. 181–182.

the *Umweltbibliothek* affair as a watershed moment for reporting of the opposition is somewhat hyperbolic.<sup>288</sup> Arguably, this is indicative of the search for milestones on the way to the *friedliche Revolution*. But certainly this passage is revealing of the discursive environment in which the first Enquete takes place. A binary schema in which the GDR, officialdom and so on is an entirely negative, whereas the opposition, particularly any prominent moments on the path to the events of autumn 1989, is valorised and association, even participation, therewith is sought.

### SED Reformers

The SED placed great importance on the concept of party discipline in order to achieve ‘das einheitliche Handeln aller ihrer Mitglieder’ in accordance with the Leninist system of democratic centralism, whereby any decision made by the superior organs of the party must be accepted and supported by those below once decided.<sup>289</sup> In practice, however, there were always dissenting voices within the SED throughout its existence. These individuals are often referred to as *SED reformers*. Whereas even the slightest dissent from outside the party is generally accepted as oppositional in one form or another within theoretical approaches to the subject,<sup>290</sup> opposition emanating from within has always been treated with more caution. Indeed, the SED Reformers pose an interesting challenge to historiography and of course state-mandated memory, on occasion they have been denied the epithet opposition.<sup>291</sup> Instead these groupings when discussed in terms of their actual aims and intentions are often

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<sup>288</sup> See for instance the BPB’s celebration of *Kontraste* which highlights several episodes before the *Umweltbibliothek Razzia*. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, *Aufbruch im Osten 1987-1989* <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-einheit/kontraste/42429/aufbruch-im-osten>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

<sup>289</sup> See *Kleines Politische Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), p. 179

<sup>290</sup> See Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989*, pp. 25–34.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.106–109.

interpreted along the lines of internal power struggles.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless, as has been seen in the previous two chapters, communist-oriented opposition has often been incorporated into the canon of state-mandated representations of GDR opposition, albeit with a certain political coding. It follows logically that members of the SED played a role within the multifaceted phenomenon of opposition in the GDR. This is no different for the period of the 1980s, during which SED reformers appear to have played significant roles in the wider conjuncture which culminated in the events of autumn 1989 and indeed appear to have had some intriguing interfaces with extra-party opposition. This section seeks therefore to highlight some of the events and personalities involved in this process and to analyse how they have been portrayed within state-mandated memory. As such, it accords with the overall aims of the thesis to critique the ideology of post-unification political memory.

The section is divided into two subsections. The first focuses on the so-called SPD-SED 'ideology discussions' and co-published paper in 1987, specifically as an event that introduced SED Reformers to a wider public and inspired sections of the opposition. The second focuses on the project *Moderner Sozialismus* at the Humboldt University and beyond. The two subsections as a whole seek to contextualise these two illuminating examples of inner-SED reformers which helps us to understand the intersections between inner-party communist-oriented opposition and external groupings in 1989 as well as to lend a fascinating insight into the political and ideological field of the post-1990 FRG through analysis of how they are portrayed in state-mandated memory. A range of state-mandated representations will be examined and compared with primary and secondary sources from participants and oppositional figures of the time, including original archival material as well as published accounts.

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<sup>292</sup> For example: Grieder, *The East German Leadership, 1946-1973: Conflict and Crisis*.

## The SED-SPD Paper: ‘Der Streit der Ideologien und die gemeinsame Sicherheit’ and the Opposition

This section deals with a fascinating, unique and arguably singular episode of German-German relations on the party political stage. In 1987, the SED and SPD would put their names to a co-authored *ideology paper*, which would come to be commonly known as the SPD-SED Paper.<sup>293</sup> In the context of the late Cold War this was nothing short of sensational and the fall out would impact political discourse within the GDR and beyond, but not least for the burgeoning groups of opposition, and go on to become something of a milestone within memory of the late GDR. This discussion begins by introducing the context and detail of the paper, before tracing its portrayal in state-mandated memory.

For many, the terms social democracy and communism are characterised by sharply defined differences. However, the history of social democracy and communism, though fraught with tensions and conflicts, is also one of agreement and fraternity. Indeed, the vast majority of Communist Parties in Europe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were born of their social-democratic forebears, which in turn were born of the communist movement of the mid-nineteenth century. Marx and Engels famously wrote the *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei* during the tumultuous 1840s. However, by the turn of the century the party associated with Marxist socialism was the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*.<sup>294</sup> Following what was seen as the betrayal of the principles of socialism incorporated in the Social Democratic parties’ support for the imperialist First World War, Lenin’s *April Theses* published in *Pravda*, 1917, urged: ‘Statt “Sozialdemokratie”, deren offizielle Führer in der ganzen Welt

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<sup>293</sup> Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim Zentralkomitee der SED and Grundwertekommission der SPD, ‘Der Streit der Ideologien und die gemeinsame Sicherheit’, *Neues Deutschland*, 28 August 1987.

<sup>294</sup> Although not founded by Marx and Engels per se, they did have a hand in guiding the political development of the SPD, and its immediate precursors, and by the turn of the century the party and terminology of social democracy were very much associated with Marxism and Engels had a direct influence on party policy up until his death. See for instance the series of letters between Engels and SPD heavyweights such as August Bebel, Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein: Friedrich Engels, ‘Briefe’, *Marx Engels Werke*, xxxix (Berlin: Dietz, 1968), pp. 259, 268, 316, 496.

den Sozialismus verraten haben, indem sie zur Bourgeoisie übergangen (die “Vaterlandsverteidiger” und die schwankenden “Kautskyaner”), müssen wir uns *Kommunistische Partei* nennen.<sup>295</sup> Over the next few years Communist Parties would be founded by former social democrats, in Germany this party would come to be known as the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD). The bitter internecine conflict between the former comrades is complex and marred by murky chapters on both sides from the murder of KPD leaders Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht<sup>296</sup> and the shooting of scores of communist demonstrators on 1 May 1929 all under SPD governance, to the labelling of the SPD leadership as social fascists<sup>297</sup> by the KPD and assassination of SPD police officers by a communist hit squad in 1931.<sup>298</sup> There is general agreement that the mutual enmity and failure to work together was ultimately an important factor in the rise of the German fascists and all the horrendous consequences that followed, not least for social democrats and communists.

In the GDR, this failure was seen as rectified by organising the (re-)union of the SPD and KPD to form the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* in 1946. However, it is often argued that this unification was little more than a *Zwangvereinigung* forced by the communists and not therefore democratic or legitimate.<sup>299</sup> Despite this, several notable SPD politicians did indeed participate, not least and perhaps most symbolically Friedrich Ebert Jr., the son of the first SPD *Reichspräsident*. However, this spirit of reconciliation was emphatically rejected in the West where the SPD under the leadership of emphatically anti-

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<sup>295</sup> Vladimir Ilich Lenin, ‘Aprilthesen’, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz, 1959–1964), xxiv (1959), pp. 3–8.

<sup>296</sup> Although the direct involvement of the SPD has long been contested, the executor of the action, Waldemar Pabst, stated in a letter in 1969 that the SPD’s Noske gave the order. See, Klaus Gietinger, *Der Konterrevolutionär. Waldemar Pabst. Eine deutsche Karriere* (Hamburg, Edition Nautilus, 2009), p. 394.

<sup>297</sup> See, Winkler, *Der Schein der Normalität*; Josef Schleifstein, *Die ‘Sozialfaschismus’-These: zu ihrem geschichtlichen Hintergrund* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Marxistische Blätter, 1980).

<sup>298</sup> See, Wilfriede Otto, *Erich Mielke – Biographie. Aufstieg und Fall eines Tschekisten* (Berlin: K. Dietz, 2000), p. 49.

<sup>299</sup> See, Beatrix Bouvier, *Ausgeschaltet! Sozialdemokraten in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR 1945–1953* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996); Bernd Faulenbach, ed., *Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten nach Nationalsozialismus und Krieg. Zur historischen Einordnung der Zwangvereinigung* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1998).

communist Kurt Schumacher remained independent and hostile to the KPD, which would ultimately be banned in 1956.<sup>300</sup>

From 1948 onwards, the initial welcoming of former SPD functionaries into the SED was rolled back to a certain extent as the party transformed from a system of KPD-SPD parity, one former SPD and one former KPD for most party roles, to a *Partei des neuen Typus* and a far stricter Leninist approach to inner party democracy and discipline. During this period *Sozialdemokratismus* became a watchword in the SED's campaign to purge the ranks of potentially disloyal members.<sup>301</sup> Meanwhile the SPD's *Ostbüro* became a key part of attempts to undermine and infiltrate the SED in the burgeoning Cold War. This mutual mistrust would remain broadly unchanged until the *Ostpolitik* of Willy Brandt in the late 1960s. However, even that cautious diplomatic step did not prepare the world for the announcement in 1986 that the SED and SPD were participating in an inter-party dialogue, nor the impact that the publication of a co-authored paper would have.

In the early 1980s, the SPD found themselves in opposition and the SED found themselves confronted with an increasingly hot Cold War with Reagan and the CDU in power. Both parties saw something to be gained from continuing the discussions that had begun under the Social-Liberal coalition (1969–1982) as part of their *Wandel durch Annäherung* approach to *Ostpolitik*. However, the dialogue which began in 1984 was different from the previous back channel discussions between the likes of Egon Bahr and Hermann Axen as it was not restricted to the by now routine questions of disarmament and security but actually sought to find common ground on what they termed an *ideological*

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<sup>300</sup> As early as 1930, Schumacher famously referred to the KPD as nothing more than 'rotlackierte Doppelausgaben der Nationalsozialisten'. See Heinrich Potthoff, 'Kurt Schumacher – Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten', in *Kurt Schumacher und der 'Neubau' der deutschen Sozialdemokratie nach 1945: Referate und Podiumsdiskussion eines Kolloquiums des Gesprächskreises Geschichte der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Bonn am 12./13. Oktober 1995*, ed. by Dieter Dowe (Bonn: Forschungsinstitut der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1996), pp. 133–148 (p. 137).

<sup>301</sup> Paul Merker, *Sozialdemokratismus Stampfer, Schumacher und andere Gestrige* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1948). Ironically, given Merker's representation as a victim of Stalinism as detailed in the first chapter of this thesis, he was one of the main spokesmen in the war of words surrounding *Sozialdemokratismus*.



level.<sup>302</sup> The question as to which side of the divide initiated these talks at a party level is a matter of some controversy,<sup>303</sup> but by 1984 the first discussion between the SPD's *Grundwertekommission* (GWK) and representatives of the SED would take place. The Chairman of the GWK, Erhard Eppler described this talk as follows: 'Dieses Gespräch verlief für unsere Begriffe in mehrfacher Hinsicht erstaunlich, einmal dadurch, daß wir spürten wieviel Bewegung in der SED sichtbar wurde, und zum andern, wieviel Differenzierung innerhalb der SED repräsentiert durch einzelne Gesprächspartner, erkennbar wurde.'<sup>304</sup> This is an interesting observation on the part of Eppler, as the SED is usually portrayed as being a relatively homogenous and conservative organisation at this time.

Following a series of discussions from 1984 to 1987 covering a wide range of political, philosophical, theoretical and practical topics, *Neues Deutschland*'s headline announced the publication of the paper 'Der Streit der Ideologien und die gemeinsame Sicherheit' in that day's newspaper. The front page was also adorned with a contribution from Erhard Eppler entitled 'Gemeinsame Grundeinsicht bei allen Gegensätzen', surely the first time that a senior SPD politician had ever graced the organ of the SED and in a positive light as well. To say that this was something of a sensation for the population of the GDR is an understatement, the *ND*, with a print run of over a million, was sold out by 9 a.m.<sup>305</sup> The contents of the document were, for the context of the time, electrifying. The possibility of an open public discourse was given the seal of approval in the official setting of the SED's own mass communication organ: 'Die offene Diskussion über den Wettbewerb der Systeme, ihre Erfolge und Mißerfolge, Vorzüge und Nachteile, muß innerhalb jedes Systems möglich sein.' The paper appeared to sanction the notion of freedom of information by calling for the

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<sup>302</sup> See: Rolf Reißig, *Dialog durch die Mauer: Die unstrittene Annäherung von SPD und SED* (Frankfurt / New York: Campus Verlag, 2002), p. 46; Erich Hahn, *SED und SPD Ein Dialog* (Berlin: edition ost, 2002), pp. 7–9.

<sup>303</sup> See: Reißig, pp. 28–29.

<sup>304</sup> See: Hahn, *SED und SPD Ein Dialog*, p. 15.

<sup>305</sup> Ulrike Poppe, 'Kontroverse Positionen der Bürgerbewegung II', in *Das SPD-SED-Dialogpapier: Ist mit der Ideologie auch der Streit erledigt?*, ed by. Karl Giebeler and Alfred Geisel (Bad Boll: edition akademie, 2003), pp. 141–150 (p. 143).

‘umfassende Informiertheit der Bürger in Ost und West’ and to promote ‘Dialog zwischen allen gesellschaftlichen Organisationen, Institutionen, Kräften und Personen’.<sup>306</sup>

Even more sensationally, the document appeared to encourage ‘eine Kultur des politischen Streits und schließlich des kontroversen Dialogs’ and explicitly to condone public criticism: ‘Kritik, auch in scharfer Form, darf nicht als eine ‘Einmischung in die inneren Angelegenheiten’ der anderen Seite zurückgewiesen werden’ while suggesting a mutually conciliatory approach to individual critics: ‘Niemand darf sich ein Recht der deutlichen Kritik und der polemischen Darstellung in Anspruch nehmen, ohne es dem Kritisierten in gleichem Maße zuzubilligen.’ While the SED had often claimed it was open to ‘Kritik und Selbstkritik’, this prominent public pronouncement was given credibility by the context of seeming co-operation with the Western SPD.

There appears to have been much to lend encouragement to opposition-minded individuals in the GDR. However, this is not how one seminal state-mandated account sees it. In his *Geschichte der Opposition*, Neubert describes the paper’s reception as ‘ein Hauch von Perestroika’, however, states categorically: ‘Die Opposition in der DDR stand dem Papier kritisch gegenüber.’<sup>307</sup> Meanwhile the SED is characterised entirely negatively as deceitfully utilising the paper as mere ‘Propagandamittel, um eine Öffnung vorzutäuschen, die es nicht gab.’<sup>308</sup> As a result, Neubert argues: ‘Bis zum Ende der DDR hat darum die Opposition gegen das Papier Stellung genommen und auch der SPD schwere Vorwürfe gemacht. Die führenden Samisdat-Zeitschriften setzten sich ausführlich mit dem Papier auseinander.’<sup>309</sup>

Neubert seeks to evidence his claims by listing some of these contemporary *Samisdat* articles. Firstly, the *Umweltblätter* of November 1987, which Neubert clearly insinuates is negative

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<sup>306</sup> Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim Zentralkomitee der SED/Grundwertekommission der SPD, ‘Der Streit der Ideologien und die gemeinsame Sicherheit’, *Neues Deutschland*, 28 August 1987.

<sup>307</sup> Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989*, p. 663.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

towards the SED-SPD Paper due to the account of Roland Jahn and Jürgen Fuchs' contributions at a public discussion of the paper in Freudenberg hosted by the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*. It seems that Jahn's calls for public dialogue with the opposition groups and Fuchs' suggestion that Wolf Biermann should be invited to play in Leipzig are supposed to represent the GDR opposition's rejection of the paper. Interestingly, it is precisely this article which Rolf Reißig selects to characterise the reverse within the GDR opposition, namely a positive and inspired reaction: 'Besonders Roland Jahn war es, der Ralf Hirsch, Wolfgang Templin und Ulrike Poppe aufforderte, die Chance des neuen Dialogversprechens der SED zu testen und mögliche neue Anknüpfungspunkte zu nutzen'.<sup>310</sup> Intriguingly, Neubert also states plainly that, 'in den Westen verdrängte Oppositionelle wie Templin, Klier oder Rosenthal äußerten sich ähnlich kritisch'.<sup>311</sup> However, Templin would not be compelled to emigrate to the West until several months later and indeed according to files held by the BStU, which document a telephone conversation between Roland Jahn and Templin, both saw encouragement as well as potential pitfalls in the paper. Notably and presciently, Templin reportedly claimed, 'dass ein großer Teil der DDR-Bürger das Dokument ernster nehmen würde als die hiesigen Verfasser. Die Formulierung "für eine Kultur des politischen Streits" würde daher schon sehr bald an ganz anderen Orten, zu anderen Gelegenheiten und von ganz anderen Leuten auf den Tisch gelegt werden'.<sup>312</sup>

Similarly, Neubert's further interpretations of *Samisdat* appear to be coloured by his own perspective. Take, for instance, Roolf's 1988 article 'Das SPD/SED-Papier. Eine "Fehlersuche" oder der Versuch, ein ungutes Gefühl zu rationalisieren'. Neubert claims that Roolf did not truly argue that the paper had sensitised 'das gesellschaftliche und politische

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<sup>310</sup> Reißig, pp. 240–241. It should also be pointed out that even Hubertus Knabe agrees with Reißig's characterisation of the *Umweltblätter* article and not Neubert's interpretation. See: Hubertus Knabe, 'Opposition im halben Land', in *Macht Ohnmacht Gegenmacht Grundfragen zur politischen Gegnerschaft in der DDR*, ed. by Ehrhart Neubert and Bernd Eisenfeld (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2001), pp. 143–168 (p.159).

<sup>311</sup> Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989*, p. 664.

<sup>312</sup> Rolf Reißig, *Dialog durch die Mauer*, p. 239.

Bewußtsein der DDR-Bürger’, despite quite literally saying so. Neubert offers a somewhat tortuous argument which gives precedence to any critical notes within the article and seeks to relativise any positive sentiment. Compare this with the *Gedenkstätte Museum in der ‘Runden Ecke’* Glossary entry for the author Benn Roolf:

Als Autor ist er auch für den bekannten Artikel “Das SPD/SED-Papier. Eine ‘Fehlersuche’ oder der Versuch, ein ungutes Gefühl zu rationalisieren” verantwortlich (aus Heft 4 des “Kontext” vom November 1988). Darin vertritt er die These, dass das Grundsatzpapier von 1987 zwischen deutschen Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten den Spielraum der Opposition für eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der gesellschaftlichen Realität vergrößerte und somit zu einer politischen Sensibilisierung der DDR-Bürger beitrug.<sup>313</sup>

It is clear that Neubert’s interpretations are somewhat idiosyncratic to say the least and that they are certainly not uncontested within wider memorial discourse. Furthermore, one could query the omission of other examples from arguably more prominent oppositional figures such as the co-founder of *Frauen für den Frieden*, Ulrike Poppe. In her article *Neue Wege?*, included in the underground magazine *Grenzfall*<sup>314</sup> published by the *Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte*, she cautiously welcomed the SPD-SED paper as having brought about a modest seachange: ‘Allen Skeptikern zum Trotz: Es ist Bewegung zu spüren.’<sup>315</sup> Utilising the paper as justification, Poppe goes on to argue for more attempts by oppositionals to interact and enter into dialogue ‘mit Menschen verschiedenster gesellschaftlicher Ebenen’ and concludes, ‘sowohl autonomes Handeln als auch ein Souveränes sich Einlassen auf

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<sup>313</sup> Gedenkstätte Museum in der ‘Runden Ecke’, *Benn Roolf* <[http://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/sammlung/pop\\_zusatz.php?w=w00184](http://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/sammlung/pop_zusatz.php?w=w00184)> [accessed 1 October 2018].

<sup>314</sup> *Grenzfall* is a prominent example of the various self-published magazines or *Samisdat* which circulated in the late 1980s among oppositional circles. They were marked with the strapline ‘Nur für den innerkirchlichen Dienstgebrauch’ which in accordance with the 1959 *Anordnung über das Genehmigungsverfahren* did not require a publication licence. See: Thomas Klein, ‘Heimliches Lesen und staatsfeindliches Schreiben’, in *Heimliche Leser in der DDR. Kontrolle und Verbreitung unerlaubter Literatur*, ed. by Siegfried Lokatis and Ingrid Sonntag, (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2008), pp. 57–65 (p. 63).

<sup>315</sup> Ulrike Poppe, ‘Neue Wege?’, p. 170.

Reibungen und Bündnisse mit Vertretern anderer Interessengruppen innerhalb der gesellschaftlichen Hierarchie sind beides notwendige Wege zur Demokratie'.<sup>316</sup> These formulations from an influential figure within oppositional currents demonstrate that the SPD-SED paper did indeed spark a sense of movement and that the opposition were clearly prepared to work with SED reformers.<sup>317</sup>

Similarly, the outspoken socialist pastor Friedrich Schorlemmer described the atmosphere brought about by the paper as follows: 'So offene Gespräche wie auf dem Kirchentag 1988 hatte ich noch nie erlebt. [...] Ein Durchbruch schien gelungen, der allerdings gedämpft wurde durch die merkwürdig gewunden wirkenden Absagen des Mitverfassers des SPD-SED-Dialogpapiers, Professor Rolf Reißig'.<sup>318</sup> In conversation with Reißig in 2001, Schorlemmer would praise the impact of the paper for the oppositional peace movement and particularly the symbolically important Olaf Palme Peace March in 1987, for which Schorlemmer declares the paper's concept of 'Gemeinsame Sicherheit' was the 'Zauberwort'.<sup>319</sup> The Peace March was of critical importance for the burgeoning opposition of the late 1980s as it was the first time that oppositional groupings could legally participate in a prominent public event with their own placards and slogans. The importance of the Olaf Palme Peace March to the opposition is even attested within state-mandated memory.<sup>320</sup> Interestingly, Schorlemmer appeared in a famous episode of the pre-Wende state-mandated television magazine in 1989 entitled *Nichts geht mehr – Wo sind die Reformer?* with the following assessment:

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>317</sup> See also: Poppe, 'Kontroverse Positionen der Bürgerbewegung II', p. 142.

<sup>318</sup> Friedrich Schorlemmer, *Worte öffnen Fäuste. Die Rückkehr in ein schwieriges Vaterland* (Munich: Kindler Verlag, 1992), pp. 48, 79.

<sup>319</sup> Friedrich Schorlemmer in Reißig, p. 231.

<sup>320</sup> For example: Sebastian Stude, *Frieden als Demokratieforderung. Evangelische Kirche in den 1980er Jahren in der DDR* (2015). <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/186931/frieden-als-demokratieforderung-evangelische-kirche-in-den-1980er-jahren-in-der-ddr> [accessed 8 October 2018].

Wo sind bei uns die Soziologen, die Philosophen, die Ökonomen, die Politologen, die Literaturwissenschaftler, die Historiker, die eine Oppositionsgruppe mit Kompetenz bilden könnten? Ich glaube, die gibt es, aber die sind alle in der Partei und es könnte sein, dass bei einer sozusagen demokratischen Erneuerung dieser zentralistisch geführten Partei all diese Kräfte stärker in die Öffentlichkeit treten.<sup>321</sup>

It is difficult to reconcile this perspective with the narrative of a teleological popular movement which created the *Peaceful Revolution*. In any case, it reiterates the potential importance of the SED reformers within the conjuncture of the late 1980s.

A particularly pertinent example for this thesis on communist-oriented opposition, which appears to contradict Neubert's thesis that the paper had little impact in oppositional circles is the group *Gegenstimme* led in this instance by Thomas Klein. This group identified as an explicitly left Marxist oppositional group and viewed the paper as an important aspect for the 'Mobilisierung der gesellschaftlichen Kräfte, auch der Reformkräfte in der SED, mit dem Ziel der Überwindung des bestehenden, politbürokratischen Herrschaftssystem und der Schaffung einer demokratischen Gesellschaft sozialistischen Typs'.<sup>322</sup> They would even go on to distribute a document entitled 'Offener Brief an die Mitglieder der SED und SPD' in February 1988, which sought to compare the aspirations of the paper with the reality of societal dialogue. This letter made specific reference to the police action against the *Umweltbibliothek* and the arrest and forced emigration of several oppositional figures due to their protest as part of the annual Luxemburg-Liebkecht demonstration:

Zu einer Zeit, in der die Hoffnung auf mehr Realismus im konstruktiven Bemühen um die Sicherung des äußeren Friedens durch grenzüberschreitenden Dialog zwischen

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<sup>321</sup> Friedrich Schorlemmer in *Kontraste Nichts geht mehr – Wo sind die Reformer?* (2005) <<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-einheit/kontraste/42451/wo-sind-die-reformer>> [accessed 3 January 2019]. The ARD *Kontraste* magazine was specifically set up to report on the events of Prague 1968 and specialised in reporting on German-German relations.

<sup>322</sup> Thomas Klein in Reißig, p. 245.

politischen Repräsentanten unterschiedlicher Systeme wächst und andererseits in einigen sozialistischen Ländern ermutigende Ansätze einer wachsenden Bereitschaft zur Erweiterung auch des innenpolitischen Dialogs sichtbar werden, kann eine solche Eskalation nur Schaden zeitigen.<sup>323</sup>

Interestingly, the *Gruppe Gegenstimme* appears to rank the SED-SPD Paper as part of the opening up associated with Perestroika and Glasnost in other socialist states of the time. Neubert's approach is to see such criticism of the state for not complying with the tenor of the paper as evidence of the opposition's rejection of the same; however, it is of course possible to view this differently. Namely, that the opposition sought to utilise the perceived promise of the paper in their public work and to create more publicity for themselves, in short the paper encouraged the opposition to be more open and had something of a catalysing effect on their activities. For instance, is it to be viewed as mere coincidence that the protesters at the Luxemburg-Liebkecht demonstration in January 1988 felt bold enough to raise a banner stating 'Freiheit ist immer Freiheit des Andersdenkenden' which in many respects repeated the core message of tolerance and dialogue at the heart of the paper? As we have seen the number of *Samisdat* articles during this period point to the contemporary conjuncture of such sentiment thanks to the paper, coupled with calls to strive for more publicity and openness. In any case, it is evident that the paper had a far larger impact on the discourse of the opposition and quite possibly can be said to have encouraged them, including in explicitly socialist objectives, than Neubert's state-mandated account would have us believe.

A further illuminating aspect of Neubert's analysis is the dismissive portrayal of Rolf Reißig as an 'SED-Chefideologe'.<sup>324</sup> While Reißig enjoyed a relatively high-ranking

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<sup>323</sup> Berlin, Matthias Domaschk Archive, GP 004, 'Offener Brief an die Mitglieder der SED und SPD von Thomas Klein, Herbert Mißlitz und Wolfgang Wolf' 2 February 1988.

<sup>324</sup> Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989*, p. 663.

academic position as *Leiter des Instituts für wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus* at the *Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften* from 1983 to 1989, his biography is hardly that of an immaculate party cadre. In 1976 while at the KMU in Leipzig, he had been subject to party disciplinary proceedings due to ‘anarcho-syndikalistische Positionen’. Pressured to move on, he ended up at the AfG and devoted his studies to the peace movement in the West. The resulting publication was pulped at the behest of Kurt Hager in 1982. A junior participant during the SPD-SED discussions, he came to prominence as the face of the SED at the western press conference announcing the paper in 1987,<sup>325</sup> but was subjected to ‘heftige Kritik’ by the Politbüro over the next few years, singled out for instance by Kurt Hager for making concessions to social democrats and lacking ideological clarity.<sup>326</sup> Furthermore, the staff of the AfG gave him their confidence as a reformer by making him the first elected head of the institution during the tumultuous *Wende* period of 1989-1990. Neubert’s misleading description of Reißig as a ‘Chefideologe’ indicates that he is either unaware of this context, which given the fastidious nature of his study seems unlikely, or he does not consider it constitutive of or relevant to the subject of opposition.

That this characterisation is located in one of the most authoritative state-mandated studies of opposition in the GDR is particularly interesting, as in the late 1980s Reißig was openly discussed as an SED reformer in the FRG’s state-mandated television magazine *Kontraste* which specialised in propaganda concerning the GDR opposition. One can perhaps point to shifting discursive priorities; whereas in the 1980s the SED reformers were necessary as part of a strategy to infiltrate and influence the political situation in the GDR, after unification the changed concerns of state-mandated memory have no such need for the concept of collaboration or links with the SED. Neubert clearly rises to the ideological

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<sup>325</sup> The paper was introduced by the senior figure of the corresponding country, in the GDR the head of the AfG, Otto Reinhold and a junior SPD figure, Thomas Meyer. In the West, Erhard Eppler, head of the SPD’s Grundwertekommission accompanied by Rolf Reißig.

<sup>326</sup> Berlin, Federal Archives, SAPMO, DY 30/IV 2/2.037/II ‘Letter from Kurt Hager to Erich Honecker’ 26 January 1988.



challenge presented by SED reformers for accounts of the GDR opposition in post-1990 state-mandated media by downplaying their contribution and disregarding links with the opposition.

Viewed in this context, Neubert's account highlights the difficulties that arise from taking engagé participants such as Neubert and presenting them as scholarly dispassionate evaluators. This raises the question as to why this highly influential tome has a pointedly one-sided approach to the paper and its impact on the opposition? Perhaps, the answer lies in the discernible split between interpreters of the paper along party political lines; those coming from the CDU, which Neubert joined in 1997, declare it to demonstrate little but betrayal by the SPD and collaboration with a totalitarian regime. The paper was characterised as recently as 2008 in the course of the CDU's party conference as follows: 'Zwei Jahre vor dem Mauerfall, am 27. August 1987 legten SPD und SED ein Grundwertepapier vor, in dem die Sozialdemokraten das Ziel der Wiedervereinigung praktisch aufgaben. Die SPD entwickelte mit einer Partei, die die Grundrechte der Menschen in der DDR missachtete, gemeinsame Wertvorstellungen. Hochrangige Repräsentanten der SPD haben den Wiedervereinigungsgedanken aktiv bekämpft'.<sup>327</sup> The SPD's experts meanwhile see it as being a key event in the development of the opposition's ability to create space for their activities and voices and ultimately as an important step in the direction of the *Wende*. This partisan schema of interpretation was prominent during the parliamentary Enquete Kommission 'Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland'. The Enquete's *Schlussbericht* describes this controversy as follows:

Die Einschätzung des SPD/SED-Papiers zum Streit der Ideologien bleibt in der politischen Diskussion bis heute umstritten. Auch in der Enquete-Kommission sahen es die einen als ein Dokument der Anerkennung einer Diktatur, als die Zuspreehung

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<sup>327</sup> Parteitag der CDU 30 November – 2 Dezember 2008, *Beschluss des 22. Parteitags der CDU Deutschlands. Geteilt. Vereint. Gemeinsam. Perspektiven für den Osten Deutschlands* (Stuttgart: CDU, 2008), pp. 1–22.

der Existenzberechtigung und Legitimität für das SED - Regime und als Verrat an den demokratischen Werten an, andere halten es für einen Schritt auf dem Weg zur Erosion der Herrschaft der SED. Diese “Kultur des Streits” sei die offensivste Form der Ostpolitik gewesen, denn sie habe den Dialog mit Meinungspluralismus, Grundwerten und kritischer Systemauseinandersetzung verknüpft.<sup>328</sup>

Indeed, the SPD’s chosen expert for the Enquete Commission, Hermann Weber, is said to have even taken a stack of copies for distribution in East Berlin during the autumn of 1989, so important did he see the paper’s reformist potential for oppositionals in the GDR.<sup>329</sup>

Interestingly, neither side of this equation takes the SED’s involvement as being legitimate, with one side casting them in the role of totalitarian puppet masters duping the SPD, the other casting the SED as the duped party outsmarted by the SPD’s insincere efforts designed to undermine them.

The primary issue which arises out of all this, however, is the national question. Looking at the wider field of state-mandated memory, the significance of the paper for the opposition is not denied, as it is to all intents and purposes in Neubert’s account, but there is a clear incorporation of this event and its impact into a nationalist narrative. Take, for instance, the BStU’s educational project which lists the paper as one of the events *Am Vorabend der Revolution*. The project takes a teleological approach interpreting events as being little more than stepping stones along a natural progression towards the *Wende* and national unification:

Die friedliche Revolution von 1989/90 mündete in die Wiedervereinigung und stellt damit einen Höhepunkt der jüngeren deutschen Geschichte dar. Aber die revolutionären Ereignisse hatten eine Vorgeschichte.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Deutscher Bundestag, *Bericht der Enquete-Kommission ‘Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland’*, p. 143.

<sup>329</sup> See Reißig, p. 238.

<sup>330</sup> BStU, ‘Am Vorabend der Revolution’, *Demokratie statt Diktatur* (2014) <[https://www.demokratie-statt-diktatur.de/DE/Wissen/DDRGeschichte/Vorabend-der-Revolution/\\_node.html?jsessionid=9C091C8268C29477A319103417A68B13.1\\_cid354](https://www.demokratie-statt-diktatur.de/DE/Wissen/DDRGeschichte/Vorabend-der-Revolution/_node.html?jsessionid=9C091C8268C29477A319103417A68B13.1_cid354)> [accessed 3 January 2019].

With regard to the paper specifically, the BStU does not shy away from highlighting its importance for the opposition:

Im deutsch-deutschen Verhältnis sollte [...] das Grundlagenpapier von SED und SPD das internationale Ansehen des SED-Staates heben. Tatsächlich aber [...] [stärkte] das Grundlagenpapier die reformorientierten Kräfte in der DDR.<sup>331</sup>

An den Hochschulen, bei Künstlern und Intellektuellen wurde das SED-SPD-Papier als Instrument für gesellschaftliche Veränderungen betrachtet. Die evangelische Kirche begrüßte das Papier ebenso wie große Teile der oppositionellen Bürgerbewegung.<sup>332</sup>

A similar acceptance of its significance for the opposition but integration of the paper into a wider narrative concerning the national question can be seen in Hubertus Knabe's essay on *Opposition in einem halben Land*.<sup>333</sup> Knabe contradicts Neubert's interpretation of the *Umweltblätter's* reception of the paper and points to its encouraging acceptance by church groups, but quickly turns his discussion into an apologia for these oppositional groupings' apparent lack of national sentiment, which he sees as being ultimately determined by the normalisation of *Zweistaatlichkeit* and diplomacy which recognised sovereignty. Knabe sees the SPD-SED paper as an example of just this: 'Vor allem aber kam die Perspektive abhandeln für politische Handlungen, die das Herrschaftssystem der SED rundherum ablehnten und nach wie vor auf eine Wiedervereinigung mit dem demokratischen und wirtschaftlich erfolgreicherem Teil Deutschlands hofften. Übrig blieb bei einer nüchternen Betrachtung der Rahmenbedingungen allein die Hoffnung auf eine reformierte DDR'.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> BStU, 'SED-SPD Papier', *Demokratie statt Diktatur* (2014) <[https://www.demokratie-statt-diktatur.de/DE/Wissen/DDRGeschichte/Vorabend-der-Revolution/1987\\_SED-SPD-Papier/\\_node.html](https://www.demokratie-statt-diktatur.de/DE/Wissen/DDRGeschichte/Vorabend-der-Revolution/1987_SED-SPD-Papier/_node.html)> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>333</sup> Knabe, 'Opposition in einem halben Land', pp. 143–168. Knabe's account was published as part of the BStU's *Wissenschaftliche Reihe* by the *Abteilung Bildung und Forschung*.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid. p.159

Knabe goes on to argue that this apparent current of reform inspired by Neo-Marxism and Eurocommunism was essentially a smokescreen, a third prong to accompany *Fundamentalopposition* and *Entspannungspolitik*. The implication of this is that these socialists were not in fact earnest in their rejection of the West, capitalism and bourgeois liberal democracy. That their vision of a democratically renewed reformed socialist GDR was something of a guise to enable them to achieve their true goals of national unification, which they would of course have stated plainly if conditions had allowed.

There is a common thread running through all of the state-mandated accounts discussed above – an exculpatory narrative. Neubert seeks to absolve the opposition of its association with the concept of a reformed socialism by denying the importance of the paper in this respect. The BStU’s project incorporates the paper and its reception into a teleological development towards national unification, while Knabe’s exegesis amounts to an apologia for the lack of national sentiment implicit in the opposition’s reformist socialist stance. The concern with the national question is not unique to accounts of the paper, but it is particularly interesting as it strips the event of context and detail, reducing it merely to a milestone on the march towards a seemingly natural and inevitable national unification with accompanying liberal democracy. Equally, it ignores the specifically socialist positioning and argumentation of many of the oppositionals with regard to this episode and most importantly the distinct lack of nationalist rhetoric or stated aims either in the paper or in its reception among the opposition.<sup>335</sup> In short, it decontextualises history to the point of distortion in order to make it fit into a narrative of national identity building. Whereas we have seen through the discussion above that it could in many respects even be seen as evidence of a contrary interpretation which acknowledges the lack of nationalism or western liberal orientation of oppositionals at this time. It is certainly possible to tentatively conclude from this example that the post-1990

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<sup>335</sup> A survey of any of the cited accounts by prominent oppositionals such as Ulrike Poppe, Friedrich Schorlemmer, Gruppe Gegenstimme reveals that the national question is notable for its absence.

ideological field prevalent within state-mandated institutions excludes positive discussions of socialism and gives preference to neutered – in terms of the content and detail of actors’ convictions – narratives with an emphasis on nationalism.

### Das Projekt ‘Moderner Sozialismus’ in State-mandated Memory

This second sub-section looks at another episode of SED reformers in terms of their impact on the opposition of the late 1980s and how they have been approached in state-mandated representations.

In the late 1980s a group of SED members centred around the Humboldt University in Berlin began to discuss and debate the possibilities with regard to critical reform of the GDR’s socialist system of politics and governance. These critical SED socialists came together through their academic research. Projects such as ‘Philosophische Probleme der Politischen Ökonomie’ or the text book ‘Politische Ökonomie des Kapitalismus’ brought together a network which in some cases went as far back as the 1970s in its reform aspirations (Peter Ruben, Camilla Warnke) and had links to the universities of Jena, Leipzig and Dresden among others.<sup>336</sup> The core group consisted of some fifteen to twenty academics, but the main names associated with it are: Michael Brie, Rainer Land, Dieter Segert, Rosemarie Will, Andre Brie, Hannelore Petsch, Wilfried Ettl and Wolfram Wallraf. In the tumultuous year of 1989, encouraged by the *Prorektor* of *Gesellschaftswissenschaften* at the Humboldt, Dieter Klein, the aforementioned group would begin writing a paper in June initially intended to form part of the discussion sessions that were held during initiation week in the forthcoming academic year and with the preliminary title of ‘Antwort auf die Fragen

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<sup>336</sup> Rainer Land, ‘Eine demokratische DDR? Das Projekt “Moderner Sozialismus”’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (2010) <<http://www.bpb.de/apuz/32885/eine-demokratische-ddr-das-projekt-moderner-sozialismus>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

der Studierenden'. The background to this was the already emerging crisis of legitimation for the SED. The paper was rejected at a meeting of academics led by the SED *Bezirkssekretär*. Following the events of 9 October, when Honecker was replaced by Krenz, ushering in the initial *Wende*,<sup>337</sup> the changed situation meant the paper and the group could now operate in public. The paper was swiftly spread from pigeonhole to pigeonhole among the academics of the GDR under the title of 'Überlegungen zu Problemen und Perspektiven des gesellschaftlichen und wirtschaftlichen Wandels des Sozialismus und der Weiterentwicklung gesellschaftsstrategischer Konzeptionen in der DDR und anderen Staaten des RGW'. The paper represents a range of proposals for a relatively radical reform of the GDR's political and economic systems. In some respects there is a great deal of crossover between the ideas contained in the paper and the platforms of the GDR's oppositional groupings, as far as the latter were systematically worked out. Other than the distributing of copies of the paper by hand within the universities, the *Projekt Moderner Sozialismus* published three collections comprising variously the initial paper and additional documents and drafts starting in October 1989 to just before the early *Volkskammer* elections in February.<sup>338</sup> Indeed, it was once claimed that the *Projekt Moderner Sozialismus* was the 'ausführlichster Diskussionsbeitrag zur Selbstbestimmung des Volks der DDR'.<sup>339</sup> A core and programmatically representative tenet running through the papers is that the GDR represents 'der andere deutsche Staat' which must formulate a renewed 'Massen ergreifende sozialistische Entwicklungsweise' but also plainly states: 'Es bedarf souveräner praktizierter Offenheit, die in der Souveränität der Bürger gegenüber ihrem Staat ihre Grundlagen hat.'<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Krenz is often cited as the first person to use the term *Wende* to indicate a turning point in the SED's direction.

<sup>338</sup> See: Michael Brie et al., *Sozialismus in der Diskussion 1: Studie zur Gesellschaftsstrategie* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1989); Harald Bluhm et al., *Sozialismus in der Diskussion 2: Texte zu Politik, Staat, Recht* (Berlin: Dietz, 1990); Rainer Land, ed., *Das Umbaupapier: Argumente gegen die Wiedervereinigung* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1990).

<sup>339</sup> Rotbuch Verlag, 'Vorbemerkung des Verlags', in *Das Umbaupapier: Argumente gegen die Wiedervereinigung*, ed. by Rainer Land (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1990), p. 8.

<sup>340</sup> Bluhm et al., *Sozialismus in der Diskussion 2: Texte zu Politik, Staat, Recht*, pp. 82–83.

The *Projekt Moderner Sozialismus* first finds mention within state-mandated discourse as part of the first GDR Enquete Commission's work dedicated to the topic of 'Widerstand, Opposition, Revolution'. Rainer Eckert, the future director of the *Zeitgeschichtliches Forum* in Leipzig,<sup>341</sup> was commissioned to compile a report that characterised all of the primary oppositional groups in the late 1980s as well as exploring theoretical aspects of their opposition, in particular their relationship to the 'Revolution'.<sup>342</sup> In between excursions on inter-regional groups and the IFM, the *Projekt Moderner Sozialismus* sits somewhat awkwardly: the author indicates his approach by referring to them disdainfully as 'Die Gruppierungen der vorsichtigen Reformer' and noting 'auch eine Autorin wie Wilfriede Otto läßt in einer PDS-Veröffentlichung ihre Darstellung von "Widerstand" innerhalb der SED vorerst mit den fünfziger Jahren enden'.<sup>343</sup> This serves to cement the impression that the author does not take the grouping seriously as opposition from the beginning. And yet Eckert's assertion concerning Otto is misleading and betrays an apparent lack of familiarity with her work which specialises in the early period of the GDR; indeed, in her and Thomas Klein's magnum opus this division of labour is clear with Otto's contribution obviously weighted towards the earlier period, while Klein focuses more on the later period, including a contribution on the *Projekt* as will be discussed further below.<sup>344</sup>

Following this disdainful opening, Eckert continues by immediately disassociating the *Projekt* from the wider opposition: 'Zusammenarbeit bzw. Kontaktaufnahme zur Opposition vermieden die SED-internen Kritiker dagegen ängstlich und sorgfältig, wenn sich auch zum Beispiel Friedrich Schorlemmer Anfang 1989 dieser Illusion hingab.'<sup>345</sup> Note the swipe at

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<sup>341</sup> Eckert has also been a member of the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung's* *Stiftungsrat* since its founding in 1998 among other state-mandated research and curatorial positions.

<sup>342</sup> Rainer Eckert, 'Die revolutionäre Krise am Ende der achtziger Jahre und die Formierung der Opposition', in *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission 'Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland'* (1992–1994), ed. by Deutscher Bundestag, vii/1 (Baden-Baden: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 667–757. (pp. 667–670).

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 719.

<sup>344</sup> Otto, 'Visionen zwischen Hoffnung und Täuschung'; Thomas Klein, 'Parteisäuberungen und Widerstand in der SED. Die innerbürokratische Logik von Repression und Disziplinierung, in *Visionen. Repression und Opposition in der SED 1949–1989*, ed. by Thomas Klein, Wilfriede Otto and Peter Grieder, pp.9–121.

<sup>345</sup> Eckert, 'Die revolutionäre Krise am Ende der achtziger Jahre und die Formierung der Opposition', pp. 719–720.

Schorlemmer, one of the most prominent oppositionals in both Christian and socialist currents. Schorlemmer refused to revise his openly socialist orientation following unification and has been an outspoken critic of those that have.<sup>346</sup>

Having implied that the SED Reformers are not to be taken too seriously and did not really have anything to do with the *real* opposition, Eckert moves on to raise the spectre of a possible instrumentalisation of the reformers by the *Staatssicherheit* or even *Politbüro*. Although he offers no concrete evidence, some four years after the opening of the files, the question of whether the group was the brainchild of a faction within the MfS is described as ‘[b]isher völlig ungeklärt’.<sup>347</sup> The indices for such a thesis are taken from some de-contextualised snippets from Günter Schabowski and Markus Wolf’s early nineties memoirs. When Schabowski, who was essentially powerless<sup>348</sup> from 9 November 1989, writes in retrospect that after the opening of the border he found the *Projekt* to be ‘ein bislang ungenützter Quell frischer Ideen. Er könnte uns helfen, die Scholastik hinter uns zu lassen’, Eckert interprets this as ‘jetzt schien die Stunde der SED-Reformer gekommen zu sein – die Beziehung zum Politbüro war hergestellt’.<sup>349</sup> There is no mention in Schabowski’s autobiography about personal contact with the reformers or any official or even semi-official contacts between the *Politbüro* and the *Projekt*. On the contrary, Schabowski’s quote above does not actually reference the *Projekt* at all but refers to a ‘Parteiversammlung in der Humboldt-Universität’. The rest of Schabowski’s account bemoans the fact that the *Politbüro* did not utilise the ideas of such professors, which is in complete contrast to Eckert’s assertion of some sort of link to the SED’s upper echelon.

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<sup>346</sup> See for instance: the 1997 *Erfurter Erklärung: Bis hierher und nicht weiter. Verantwortung für die soziale Demokratie* which Schorlemmer co-organised and signed. *Erfurter Erklärung Bis hierher und nicht weiter. Verantwortung für die soziale Demokratie* (1997) <<http://www.glasnost.de/db/DokZeit/9702erfurt.html>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

<sup>347</sup> Eckert, ‘Die revolutionäre Krise am Ende der achtziger Jahre und die Formierung der Opposition’, p. 720.

<sup>348</sup> Schabowski by this time found himself to be persona non grata among fellow members of the *Politbüro* after his unauthorised proclamation regarding intersectoral and cross-border travel led to the unplanned opening of the Berlin sectoral border.

<sup>349</sup> Eckert, ‘Die revolutionäre Krise am Ende der achtziger Jahre und die Formierung der Opposition’, p. 720.



Having insinuated a link between a faction within the MfS based around Markus Wolf, the former head of the *Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung* (HVA),<sup>350</sup> and the *Projekt*, Eckert however has to concede that any links between Wolf and the *Projekt* appear only to have come about during the *Wende* period, contradicting his own insinuation somewhat.<sup>351</sup> The reformers themselves have never sought to hide the fact that they gave a copy of the paper to Wolf on 8 October at the same time as they first began to circulate the paper to people beyond their circle and with whom they hoped it would resonate. Wolf's approval of Gorbachev's *Perestroika* was no secret in the late 1980s. However, to propose a faction of MfS plotters who sought either to co-opt the *Projekt* or even that they potentially created it in order to secure their own power is hardly demonstrated or even a reasonable assumption based on this fact.

The next indice proffered by Eckert as part of his unclarified contention is the highlighting of the IM background of the brothers Michael and Andre Brie,<sup>352</sup> adding 'Ungeklärt ist auch weiterhin, wer alles aus der Gruppierung der SED-Reformer mit dem MfS zusammenarbeitete.'<sup>353</sup> Eckert does not seem to be aware of the fact that Andre Brie was actually de-commissioned as an IM shortly after the paper was published due to a lack of 'politischer Zuverlässigkeit' and 'Perspektivlosigkeit'.<sup>354</sup>

Finally, Eckert finds that the *Projekt* was endogenously doomed to failure because 'sie es nicht vermochten, die Diktatur als solche in Frage zu stellen'.<sup>355</sup> The implicit message is again that the reformers were only interested in saving the SED's dictatorship. It is telling that Eckert does not interact with the actual work of the *Projekt* or he might realise that the various positional papers were consistently arguing for democratic renewal and specifically

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<sup>350</sup> The HVA was the main foreign intelligence agency of the MfS, broadly equivalent to Britain's MI6 or the USA's CIA.

<sup>351</sup> Eckert, 'Die revolutionäre Krise am Ende der achtziger Jahre und die Formierung der Opposition', p. 720.

<sup>352</sup> It should be noted that Eckert provides no citation at all for this information and it can therefore safely be assumed that he was repeating hearsay.

<sup>353</sup> Eckert, 'Die revolutionäre Krise am Ende der achtziger Jahre und die Formierung der Opposition', p. 720.

<sup>354</sup> Berlin, BStU, ASt. Potsdam, 2219/89, vol 3, p. 113. 'Abschlußbericht'. Report on Andre Brie's activity as an IM.

<sup>355</sup> Eckert, 'Die revolutionäre Krise am Ende der achtziger Jahre und die Formierung der Opposition', p. 721.

recognised the role of the *Bürgerbewegungen* and organisations such as *Neues Forum* in such an endeavour.<sup>356</sup> In any case, the main pillars of discourse surrounding the *Projekt Moderner Sozialismus* appear to have been laid down in Eckert's contribution to the Enquete Commission. A similarity in approach is discernible from this point on.

In Neubert's take in his *Geschichte der Opposition*, he acknowledges the *Projekt's* damning critique of the socio-economic system of the GDR in the late 1980s; however, finds the platform of the 'aufgetauchten Reformer', as he derisively refers to them, to be disappointing on the whole as the opposition has already criticised the same things for years.<sup>357</sup> Furthermore, Neubert cites the original *Projekt* paper penned in June 1989 and distributed by hand on 8 October to hopefully sympathetic reform-oriented cadre and academics. He uses this paper's formulations to exclude the reformers from the wider oppositional current by quoting formulations such as, 'die Funktion der sog. "oppositionellen" Gruppen ist auf das Gebiet der öffentlichen Diskussion einzuschränken, damit organisiertes Handeln gegen den Sozialismus ausgeschlossen wird'. Neubert neglects to consider that this formulation was written on 8 October and that it was not actually included in the first published version.<sup>358</sup> Furthermore, the sentiment is entirely reversed with acknowledgement that the paper's language and some of its suggestions have been superseded by subsequent events: 'Er geht davon aus, daß der Reformprozeß durch die SED insgesamt eingeleitet würde. Inzwischen ist er durch Massenaktionen der Bürger und durch den Druck der Parteibasis gegen den anfänglichen Widerstand der Parteiführung erzwungen worden.' Furthermore, 'neue politische Bewegungen' and 'Neues Forum' are listed as being on the agenda of the day and the paper as a whole is described as 'ein Beitrag zur Diskussion,

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<sup>356</sup> Michael Brie and others, *Sozialismus in der Diskussion 1: Studie zur Gesellschaftsstrategie*, pp. 5–7.

<sup>357</sup> Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989*, p. 871.

<sup>358</sup> Compare the first publication from the *Projekt*: Michael Brie and others, *Sozialismus in der Diskussion 1: Studie zur Gesellschaftsstrategie* with the second: Bluhm et al., *Sozialismus in der Diskussion 2: Texte zu Politik, Staat, Recht*, pp. 79–101. The essay in which Neubert's selected formulation appears is tacked on at the very end of the collection which understands itself as a sort of retrospective compendium of past position papers during the *Wende* period up to that point. See: pp.5–8.

kein fertiges Rezept'.<sup>359</sup> Neubert seems to ignore the detail of the paper's suggestions which ultimately aim at a more democratic form of socialism and to instead focus on certain formulations to delegitimise its authors. This is perhaps indicative of Neubert's approach to socialism per se<sup>360</sup> and his negative attitude towards the concept of a 'Fortbestehen einer sozialistischen DDR' which is presented as being the aim of the reformers in contradistinction to *the* opposition and the reason why they could not find common cause.<sup>361</sup> In contrast to Eckert's categorical denial, however, Neubert does acknowledge the attempts of the reformers to establish links with oppositionals, albeit with derisive characterisation: 'Sowohl die Reformiergruppe als auch andere nachklappende SED-Gesellschaftswissenschaftler suchten seit Ende Oktober Kontakte zu Oppositionsgruppen'.<sup>362</sup> Similar to Eckert, Neubert also insinuates a link with the MfS, although his formulation is somewhat weaker, stating only that the authors 'hatten sich teilweise auch beim MfS abgesichert und waren, im Gegensatz zur Opposition keine Risiken eingegangen'.<sup>363</sup> Again there is no evidence of this in the BStU's holdings, unless the delivery of a copy of the initial paper to the retired Markus Wolf counts as receiving assurances from the MfS. On the whole, Neubert's account serves to replicate Eckert's suspicion towards the notion of SED reformers as opposition and serves to distance *the* opposition from them and to highlight the latter's alleged antipathy towards a socialist GDR as opposed to unification and western liberal democracy.

In 1999, two state-mandated publications deal with the *Projekt*. Firstly, in the BpB's version of Stefan Wolle's *Die Heile Welt der Diktatur*, we find the by now familiar combination of uncited accusations of MfS involvement and derisive language:

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<sup>359</sup> Michael Brie et al., *Sozialismus in der Diskussion 1: Studie zur Gesellschaftsstrategie*, pp. 5–7.

<sup>360</sup> See for instance Neubert's contribution to *Das Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus* in which he argues socialism is the antithesis of all European culture. Joachim Gauck and Ehrhart Neubert, 'Die Aufarbeitung des Sozialismus in der DDR' in *Das Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus*, ed. by Stephan Courtois et al. (Munich und Zürich: Piper, 1998), pp. 829–896.

<sup>361</sup> Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989*, p. 872.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*

Als die sozialistischen Reformideen endgültig auf dem Müllhaufen der gescheiterten Ideologien gelandet waren, erblickte ein klägliches, halbherziges “Sozialismuspapier” das Licht der Welt, das Vertrauensleute der Stasi an der Humboldt-Universität ausgearbeitet hatten. Die Gebrüder Brie qualifizierten sich dadurch zwar für manche Westlinken zum Gesprächspartner, aber die Häresien von vorgestern lockten innerhalb der DDR keinen Hund mehr hinten dem Ofen vor.<sup>364</sup>

In the same year, the BStU’s Walter Süß presents a somewhat more nuanced account of the *Projekt*, perhaps due to the fact that it attempts to get to grips with the sources available unlike the aforementioned accounts.<sup>365</sup> While Süß is also concerned with similar lines of questioning, such as MfS or SED involvement, indicating a certain replication of the discursive approach to the *Projekt*, he criticises the tendency of previous authors to go beyond the sources: Eckert’s account is described as being ‘zu stark verkürzt’; Wolle’s allegations of ‘Vertrauensleute der Stasi’ picked up for being ‘ohne nähere Begründung’ and his dismissal of the paper as anachronistic.<sup>366</sup> Süß ultimately dismisses the notion of the *Projekt* being linked to the MfS, although this is ascribed to “marxistisch-leninistisch” durchtränkte sicherheitsbürokratische Stupidität’, which allegedly did not allow for such a tactical approach.

However, despite this difference with his fellow state-mandated commentators, Süß returns to familiar lines of interpretation. Although the concept of an MfS ruse is dismissed, he alleges a similar ‘politische Verbindung’ as Eckert to the SED’s Politbüro relating to Schabowski, the difference being that Schabowski is presented as a middle man who advised

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<sup>364</sup> Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur. Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999), p. 340. Wolle also refers to the members of the *Projekt* as ‘die neunmalklugen Pseudo-Reformer aus der SED-Instituten’, p. 342.

<sup>365</sup> Walter Süß, *Staatsicherheit am Ende: Warum es den Mächtigen nicht gelang, 1989 eine Revolution zu verhindern* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1999). Published by the *Abteilung Bildung und Forschung* of the BstU as part of their *wissenschaftliche Reihe*.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 478–479. ‘Dabei verwechselt er sein eigenes, damals gewiß schon weiter fortgeschrittenes Bewußtsein mit dem vieler SED-Mitglieder.’

Modrow to contact the *Projekt* members. Incredibly, both of these interpretations are based on the same decontextualised passage<sup>367</sup> which does not mention the *Projekt* at all. Equally, Süß replicates Neubert's flawed representation of the *Projekt's* early October calls for groups such as Neues Forum to be restricted to 'das Gebiet der öffentlichen Diskussion' as though this was a consistent position.<sup>368</sup>

Contrary to previous interpreters, Süß acknowledges certain parallels between the GDR opposition and the SED Reformers; namely, "'Sozialismus" als Bezugsrahmen'.<sup>369</sup> Although, this is weakened by phrases such as describing the group as 'der Bürgerrechtsbewegung hintergehinkt' and ultimately Süß poses the question as to whether the group should be seen as a 'theoretisch besonders versierten Propagandisten des Status Quo' or 'Vordenker, die zwar auf seiten der Macht gestartet waren, sich aber der Bürgerbewegung annäherten'.<sup>370</sup> The framing of the question already excludes the concept of the *Projekt* being classified as a form of opposition, they are implicitly at best latecomers jumping on the bandwagon of the *Bürgerrechtler*. However, even this status is rejected by Süß in the end, the *Projekt* is deemed to have supported the SED's 'führende Rolle' by suggesting that formal organisations seeking access to the political decision making process should only be permissible if they do not pursue 'antisozialistischen, nationalistischen, rassistischen oder militaristischen Ziele'.<sup>371</sup> Intriguingly, due to its pro-socialist stance this is described as an 'undemokratische Kautel', perhaps indicating the author's own anti-communist bias. In any case, it is difficult to see how provisos such as this, which were predominantly composed in October 1989 and published in either December 1989, or early February 1990 – expressly as non-programmatic and often outdated thought pieces – can be

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<sup>367</sup> See: Eckert, 'Die revolutionäre Krise am Ende der achtziger Jahre und die Formierung der Opposition', p. 720.

<sup>368</sup> See: Süß, pp. 478, 480, 483.

<sup>369</sup> Süß, p. 486.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., p. 484.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., p. 485

read as supporting the ‘führende Rolle der SED’. Consequently, despite its more scholarly approach, Süß’ account suffers ultimately as it reduces the complex phenomenon of opposition in the GDR to a binary relationship instead of recognising the often fluid boundaries of developments in the late 1980s. Furthermore, although Süß offers modest criticism of previous state-mandated representations, he echoes their sentiment and approach and reaches broadly the same conclusion. This is interesting as it reflects the professionalisation process within state-mandated memory discernible from the later 1990s as representations of the past became more formally academic in style and less influenced by personalised memory writing, but there appears to be evidence of a common ideological sphere due to the discursive continuity.

Kowalczuk’s 2001 account,<sup>372</sup> published as part of the BStU’s *Wissenschaftliche Reihe*, is also characterised by this discursive continuity. Kowalczuk replicates Süß’ more nuanced and scholarly approach to some extent; however, Kowalczuk’s formulations are significantly stronger. Although Kowalczuk acknowledges that ‘reformsozialistische Opposition war eine Form der Gesellschaftskritik’ within the GDR opposition, he also affirms the binary of opposition versus SED reformers categorically: ‘Zur reformsozialistischen Opposition zählt in diesem Verständnis ausdrücklich die Mehrzahl der innerparteilichen Reformgruppen oder -personen nicht.’<sup>373</sup> Kowalczuk centres his argument around the previously discussed erroneous positions that the *Projekt* did not question the ‘Machtmonopol’ of the SED and intimations of having been instrumentalised by the SED leadership.<sup>374</sup> Polemically, Kowalczuk claims that the *Projekt* members believed themselves to be an ‘Elite, die sich der Parteiführung als Politikberater andiente bzw. in deren direktem

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<sup>372</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, ‘Verschiedene Welten. Zum Verhältnis von Opposition und “SED-Reformern” in den achtziger Jahren’, in *Macht Ohnmacht Gegenmacht: Grundfragen zur politischen Gegnerschaft in der DDR*, ed. by Ehrhart Neubert & Bernd Eisenfeld (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2001), pp. 49–76.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

Auftrag tätig geworden war. Sie arbeiteten an keinem Sozialismusmodell, in dem *die* [Kowalczuk's emphasis] Partei nicht die führende Rolle innehaben sollte'.<sup>375</sup>

He seeks to evidence this claim with a quote from a member of the group, Rosemarie Will, published in September 1989, in which she suggests that the GDR was an imperfect *Rechtsstaat*. Kowalczuk appears incredulous about her formulation 'die DDR konsequent als einen sozialistischen Rechtsstaat *weiter* [Kowalczuk's emphasis] auszubauen', which is presented as prime evidence that the reformers did not question the aforementioned 'Machtmonopol'. It is perhaps worthwhile pointing out that this places her in the company of CDU politician and last Minister President of the GDR, Lothar De Maizière.<sup>376</sup> In any case, Will's call for improvements in the judicial system in September 1989 before the crises of later autumn hardly seems to exemplify that the *Projekt* was somehow wedded to the notion of the *führende Rolle*.

What makes Kowalczuk's approach original in comparison with the others is that he cites post-1990 accounts by some of the actors, several of whom continued as academics and have addressed the subject in multiple venues.<sup>377</sup> However, this is only to dismiss their claims of 'taktische Raffinessen' and to accuse them of denying their undemocratic 'konzeptionell umrissene Ausgrenzung außerpolitischer Opposition' adding that in this regard he supports the same interpretation as Rainer Eckert and Ehrhart Neubert.<sup>378</sup> As with his state-mandated predecessors he omits to mention that the singular formulation this interpretation is based on was published as an outdated thought piece prefaced with explicit calls: 'die neuen politischen Kräfte einzubeziehen– mit dem Ziel freier Wahlen nach dem Verhältniswahlrecht

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>376</sup> [n.a.], 'De Maizière entfacht neue 'Unrechtsstaat'-Debatte' *Focus* (2010) <[https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/ddr-de-maiziere-entfacht-neue-unrechtsstaat-debatte\\_aid\\_544187.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/ddr-de-maiziere-entfacht-neue-unrechtsstaat-debatte_aid_544187.html)> [accessed 4 January 2019].

<sup>377</sup> See for instance, Rainer Land and Ralf Possekel, *Namenlose Stimmen waren uns voraus: Politische Diskurse von Intellektuellen aus der DDR* (Bochum: Dieter Winkler, 1993); Dieter Segert, *Das 41. Jahr: Eine andere Geschichte der DDR* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2008).

<sup>378</sup> Kowalczuk, 'Verschiedene Welten. Zum Verhältnis von Opposition und 'SED-Reformern' in den achtziger Jahren', p. 61.

auf der Voraussetzung eines schnellen und vollständigen Abbaus des Machtmonopols der SED.<sup>379</sup>

In 2010 a unique development followed: one of the *Projekt's* members, Rainer Land, was allowed to publish a guest article in the BpB's *APuZ* journal.<sup>380</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a marked difference in rhetoric. Rather than seeing the *Projekt* as aiming to keep the SED's monopoly on power alive, Land argues that their aim was to influence discourse: 'für die eine oder andere Gestaltungsidee öffentliche Zustimmung und Mehrheiten zu finden'. These ideas included 'eine verfassunggebende Versammlung zu wählen und einzuberufen.' In contrast to the representations discussed above, which paint the reformers as different to the opposition due to their orthodox socialist understanding of the Marxist-Leninist party, Land repeatedly references the West and liberal democracy as being key influences in his view: 'Insgesamt liefen die Vorschläge auf eine politische Demokratie westlichen Typs und eine kapitalistische Marktwirtschaft mit selbstständigen Unternehmen hinaus.'<sup>381</sup> Furthermore, he points out the number of West German left-wing intellectuals who criticised them for 'Anti-Etatismus' and promoting 'Kapitalismus' and the 'Parteiherrschaft' of Western democratic models. This clear attempt to position the *Projekt* as a sort of third way social-democratic grouping is intriguing. Although understandable given the ultimate outcome of the *Wende* period – who does not, after all, want to be on the side of the victors – it is also indicative of the ideological framework of the FRG post-1990. Had he written a piece which stressed the socialist credentials of *Projekt* and argued the SED should have maintained power – which would agree with his characterisation within previous state-mandated representations – it is exceedingly unlikely it would have been published by the BpB.

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<sup>379</sup> Bluhm et al., *Sozialismus in der Diskussion 2: Texte zu Politik, Staat, Recht*, p. 6.

<sup>380</sup> Land, 'Eine demokratische DDR? Das Projekt "Moderner Sozialismus"'.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.



Ironically, this is precisely what one prominent oppositional figure of the late 1980s criticises in the *Projekt*. Thomas Klein sees the *Projekt* as being *less* socialist than the GDR opposition at this time as the latter also criticised the ‘Herrschaftscharakter bürgerlich-parlamentarischer Institutionen’ whereas, according to Klein’s contention, the *Projekt* did not but amounted to breaking down the ‘politbürokratische Herrschaft [...] in den Formen der Bürgerlichkeit.’<sup>382</sup> Indeed, in 1993 Rainer Land would ask the question of whether the *Projekt* had been the work of frustrated social-democrats concluding: ‘die ganz versteckte Radikalität bestand darin, die Institutionen der Moderne sukzessive wieder einzuführen, zum Kapitalismus, zur parlamentarischen Demokratie, zum Verfassungs- und Rechtsstaat, zur Gewaltenteilung, diese zum Angelpunkt einer Reform des Real-Sozialismus zu machen.’<sup>383</sup> Intriguingly, both Land and Klein contradict the tenor of previous state-mandated representations. However, despite the differences Land’s contribution demonstrates in comparison with the aforementioned commentators, it does not contradict the ideological thread common to them all; namely, the anti-communist representation of the SED and the valorization of Western liberal democracy and capitalism. This points to the intriguing nature of how ideology can condition representations of the past, whereby a plurality of voices and approaches appear at least superficially to disagree but an underlying common thread is discernible.

The representations of the SPD-SED Paper and the *Projekt* ‘*Moderner Sozialismus*’ discussed above indicate that the SED Reformers represent a particularly tricky problem for state-mandated memory and the post-1990 climate imbued with anti-communism. They do not fit readily, especially when discussed in detail, into the narratives of opposition and revolution. Blurring the lines between the perceived heroes of the opposition and villains of

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<sup>382</sup> Klein, ‘Parteisäuberungen und Widerstand in der SED. Die innerbürokratische Logik von Repression und Disziplinierung’, p. 105.

<sup>383</sup> Rainer Land in Klein, ‘Parteisäuberungen und Widerstand in der SED. Die innerbürokratische Logik von Repression und Disziplinierung’, p. 104. Rainer Land officially joined the SPD in 2018.

the SED undermines the discourse of a ‘peaceful revolution’ and natural ‘re-unification’. Furthermore, it raises issues to do with the post-1990 descendants of the SED reformers, the PDS and *die Linke*. There is a host of anti-Linke sentiment within state-mandated memory as we have seen in previous chapters of this thesis, but some prominent examples include the work of Eckhard Jesse<sup>384</sup> and state funding to offer seminars on *Linksextremismus* to school children at the *Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen*.<sup>385</sup> This all points to an ideological field in which association with socialism has become a deontic negative, whereas in other eras, the socialist credentials of oppositionals are highlighted in order to demonstrate their credibility and to de-legitimise the GDR’s own socialism in comparison to the ‘true socialism’ of their opponents’ ideals.

### Conclusion: A GDR Opposition for the FRG

This chapter has demonstrated that the concept of socialism has been downplayed or omitted within state-mandated memory of the late GDR opposition. A focus on broad concepts such as *Bürgerrechte*, the environment, peace or even more frequently on a *striving for democracy and national unification* has seen these multifarious groupings and individuals subsumed into a canon of preludes to the so-called peaceful revolution, which serves as a sort of overdetermining instance. This means that the socialist alternatives proposed by these groups have been largely forgotten within these state-mandated institutions of remembering.

Particularly those from within the SED. This is interesting as, contrastingly, in previous

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<sup>384</sup> Eckhard Jesse, ‘Die Linke’, *Linksextremismus*, (2013)

<<http://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/linksextremismus/158721/die-linke-meinungsbeitrag-von-eckhard-jesse>> [accessed 25 October 2018].

<sup>385</sup> Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen, *Alles Geschichte? Linksextremismus in Deutschland heute* (2015)

<[http://www.stiftung-hsh.de/downloads/CAT\\_212/2015\\_03\\_03\\_LEX\\_Flyer\\_web.pdf](http://www.stiftung-hsh.de/downloads/CAT_212/2015_03_03_LEX_Flyer_web.pdf)> [accessed 24 October 2018].

episodes such as the Biermann affair socialist credentials had been presented as being integral to their identity as an oppositional figure. This indicates that socialist credentials since 1990 no longer possess the legitimatory potential they once enjoyed during the Cold War within discursive conjunctures surrounding criticism of the GDR. This hints again at the often instrumentalised nature of leftist anti-communism.

Despite this, given the apparent interaction of 1980s oppositionals with the concept of socialism in the 1980s and the lionisation of these groupings and events in state-mandated portrayals, one might have expected to find socialism as a key *topos* within memorial portrayals. However, this is not the case, the term socialism, when present, has most often been watered down since 1990. It is usually presented as tactical nous on the part of liberal democrats or as the misguided notion of idealists now recognised as false or omitted entirely. In addition, socialism is sometimes pitted as the opposite of the GDR's socio-political system and therefore as a desirable goal, in which case it is usually ill-defined and reduced to vague notions such as 'freedom, equality, fraternity', but there is also a strong undercurrent of socialism versus democracy (i.e. liberal capitalism). These two narratives can thus be viewed as a deligitimatory with regard to the GDR and a normative with regards to the lack of alternative to liberal capitalism, that is, the FRG. Both clearly serve a legitimatory function within post-unification political memory in the FRG. It is therefore possible to conclude that state-mandated representations have constructed a GDR opposition useful in the validation of the FRG.



## Conclusion: Representing (Anti-)Communism: State-mandated Memory and Ideology

This thesis examines the phenomenon of communist-oriented opposition in the GDR within state-mandated memorial representations. The opening theoretical discussion considers and answers the main criticisms laid against Marxist ideology theory, seeks to draw out the potential blindspots of memory studies, and calls for a re-communication of the same with the overt political concerns of ideology theory. Inspired by these political concerns, three thematic chapters develop a panoramic snapshot of the multi-faceted phenomenon of GDR opposition and its treatments within the institutions mandated to preserve, interpret and disseminate representations of the GDR's past.

The first thematic chapter looks at the figure of Paul Merker, tracing the genealogy of historiographical narratives surrounding his fall from grace and subsequent trial in the 1950s. This case study found that there are two primary interpretive models: firstly, the Merker as 'Noel Field' model, that is along the lines of a 'Stalinist' show trial primarily motivated by the wish to avoid national communist paths leading away from total control by the Soviet Union. My review of the seminal literature on this subject questioned many of the details of this narrative and pointed to the paucity in the evidentiary base, indicating a certain element of received narratives being accepted uncritically. The second primary interpretative model is Merker as 'Slansky', that is as part of an anti-Zionist – and often allegedly antisemitic – 'Stalinist' show trial. In this model, Merker is painted as a lonely pro-Zionist figure who is martyred due to his opposition to the SED on issues such as *Wiedergutmachung* for Jewish victims of fascism. A review of state-mandated and related sources demonstrated that this has become an established topos within representations of the GDR. However, an interrogation of

a range of primary and secondary sources found that this interpretation is far from clear cut with other interpretations certainly possible, though ignored in state-mandated memory. Of particular relevance is the philosemitic tendencies prevalent throughout the majority of accounts pursuing this second model and omission of non-Zionist Jews from state-mandated, and indeed wider, discourse. The related instrumentalisation of allegations of antisemitism against the SED have very clear de-legitimatory implications for the GDR and by association for the national legitimation or *Sinnstiftung* of the FRG.

The second thematic chapter moves the discussion forward to the mid-period of the GDR and looks at the concept of the *dissident* or ‘true’ communist through the aperture of the celebrity *Liedermacher* Wolf Biermann. This case study introduced the development of the Biermann legend, contextualising certain complex episodes such as the so-called *Kahlschag* Eleventh Plenum and its relation to Biermann. Primarily, the postulation that Biermann was consistently targeted due to his ‘true’ communist convictions was called into question by this context which indicates that the Cold War culture wars played a much larger role than acknowledged in state-mandated representations. Furthermore, certain elements of the Biermann story such as the theoretical implications of his anti-communist turn and his collaboration with state-mandated institutions in the battles to write the history of the GDR were highlighted. This study found that there is an emphasis on Biermann’s communist credentials on the one hand while uncritically accepting his anti-communist turn on the other. The figure of the dissident appears to fit well into state-mandated approaches to communist-oriented opposition, enabling the construction of a simplistic binary between the ‘true’ communism of dissidents and the ‘faux’ communism of SED apparatchiks. This demonstrates the intriguing ideological potency of the phenomenon of ‘true’ communism versus the falsity of ‘Stalinism’ as it undermines the progressive claims of GDR socialism. Due to its establishment as a stultifying shorthand, this binary enables representations which do not do

justice to the complexity of Cold War events and the opinions of their participants. Although the communism of the dissident appears to almost be celebrated, it is ultimately instrumentalised to attack really existing socialism and thereby to diminish the discursive value of ‘communism’ per se. It is important to note that this seemed obvious to some of the actors at the time – such as Biermann’s Brechtian adversaries Dessau and Busch – yet appears to elude the compilers involved in state-mandated memory of the subject.

The third thematic chapter focuses on the opposition of the 1980s and the manner in which it has been canonised as ‘the’ GDR opposition since the dismantling of the German-German border. An investigation of some of the most famous oppositional groupings dedicated to *Bürgerrechte*, ecological issues, peace and women’s emancipation demonstrated that there is a focus on these generic headline concepts and frequently on a *striving for democracy and national unification* which has seen these groups subsumed into a canon of preludes and precursors to the ‘Friedliche Revolution’. The socialist convictions and rhetoric of these oppositional actors has been largely omitted from state-mandated representations. This is intriguing given the centrality of the socialist identity in the case of the dissident Biermann. The phenomenon of SED reformers formed the second section of the chapter. Two prominent cases of inner-SED reform projects which influenced the extra-party opposition and most importantly shared many of the socialist tenets of the wider communist-oriented opposition were examined. The results indicate that this phenomenon presents an intriguing challenge to state-mandated narratives due to these overlaps and interfaces between the discourse of inner-SED and external opposition and the acknowledged importance of the latter. These reformers blur the lines between the binary of heroic opposition and dictatorial SED. However, the representations discussed again emphasise that association with socialism has become a deontic negative within discourse dedicated to the 1980s. This is in spite of the fact that one may have expected socialism to be a core *topos* within treatments of

the 1980s opposition given its strong presence within the self-understanding, convictions and aspirations of much of the oppositional and reformist currents. In contrast, when state-mandated portrayals present socialism it is either as the opposite of the GDR's socio-political system, in which case it is usually vaguely defined and reduced to the romantic concepts of 'freedom, equality, fraternity' or it is presented in a dichotomous relationship to democracy, that is, liberal capitalism. There is therefore a combination of a delegitimatory discourse with regards to the GDR and a normative one with regards to the lack of alternative to the liberal capitalist socio-economic system that is the FRG. The legitimatory function of these narratives within post-unification political memory is clear.

Some researchers have identified different interpretative models within state-mandated memory of the GDR's past, notably Andrew Beattie's study into the Bundestag's Enquete Commissions which identifies an anti-totalitarian consensus within state-mandated memory but also a critical questioning of the same.<sup>386</sup> However, the findings of this study indicate that this critical questioning is marginal at best. On the contrary, the totalitarian model appears to be alive and well, if not advanced to the point of being a unifying cultural logic which informs most of if not all accounts considered in this thesis. Although the manner in which communism is thematised in all three chapters has different nuances, there is, nevertheless, a striking unity perhaps best captured by the term anti-communism which is a cornerstone of totalitarian theory.<sup>387</sup> The classical equation of communism with fascism via comparisons, implicit and explicit, between the GDR and historical German fascism were identified in both the cases of Paul Merker and Wolf Biermann. The Merker case particularly demonstrates the capital attached to linking the de-legitimisation of GDR antifascism is an ongoing concern within the ideological framework of the FRG.

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<sup>386</sup> Beattie, *Playing Politics with History*, p. 240.

<sup>387</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1958); Wolfgang Wippermann, *Totalitarismustheorien: Die Entwicklung der Diskussion von den Anfängen bis heute* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997); Wolfgang Wippermann, *Dämonisierung durch Vergleich. DDR und Drittes Reich*.



An aspect of ideology theory important for this research is the Althusserian concept of the ‘lacunar discourse’,<sup>388</sup> which posits that if certain propositions are established as never being untrue, other propositions are subtly established as being always true. In this way, the essence of the lacunar discourse is not what is overtly discussed but is suggested in absentia. It is important to note that this by no means rules out more overt forms of discourse and indeed both open and lacunar aspects are often intertwined. However, the concept of the lacunar discourse helps to explain why the de-legitimisation of the GDR takes on such importance within the politics of memory in the contemporary FRG. When the GDR is labelled with the deontic negative of ‘totalitarian’ or ‘repressive’, the lacunar corollary that the FRG is ‘democratic’ and ‘freedom loving’ are also encoded into the memorial discourse. In this manner it is possible to encourage positive attitudes about the political and economic system of the unified FRG without necessitating self-congratulatory propaganda that runs the risk of being received negatively. Although as the Biermann episode in the Bundestag demonstrates, self-congratulatory propaganda is not entirely absent.

The three case studies of this thesis all demonstrated intriguing lacunar discourses in this vein. In the Merker affair, the GDR’s antifascism is undermined and the state is implicated as being antisemitic, the corollary that the FRG is the more genuinely antifascist and philosemitic state is an everpresent subtext which is also on occasion overtly emphasised. Wolf Biermann serves as a symbol of oppressed ‘freedom of expression’ in the GDR, his subsequent ‘freedom’ in the FRG in contrast emphasises the positive conceptualisation of the FRG as a non-interventionist, culturally permissive land. The irony that Biermann’s entire political belief system appears to have adapted itself to one more suited to the cultural norms and frameworks of the FRG and the questions this raises about intellectual conditioning, self-censorship and indeed the complex processes of ideology do not appear to have registered

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<sup>388</sup> Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 95.

with proponents of such interpretations. The role of the GDR in representations of the canonised opposition of the 1980s is as an object of their antipathy, the target of democratic, emancipatory and national aspirations. The FRG is encoded here as the promised land of democracy, emancipation and of course the true embodiment of the German nation. Once prophesied to become little more than a footnote in German history, this concept of the lacunar discourse helps us perhaps to understand the enduring importance of the ‘Other’ Germany. The seemingly ever growing mountain of literature on the GDR is not, when viewed from this perspective at least, primarily due to interest in the GDR per se, but rather with the immediate concerns of identity, legitimation and consequently political authority and power in the Federal Republic. As one critic has formulated the question: ‘Wem nützt die Aufarbeitung?’<sup>389</sup>

Tentatively, one might point to the economic system of capitalism and the political tradition of Western liberalism. Although the banking crisis of 2008 and ensuing austerity policies across much of the developed world called many of the shibboleths of neoliberalism into question – particularly the socialisation of losses and privatisation of profit undermined the romanticised image of the free market – it also emphasised the seeming omnipotence of the capitalist model. The lack of alternative has been only too pronounced, with a slide into a spiralling dialectic of right-wing populist anger at the apparent failures of the socio-economic system and liberal elitist scoffing in reaction to these concerns. A socialist alternative is notable only in its absence, at least as a serious one.<sup>390</sup>

This phenomenon has been ably described by Mark Fisher as ‘capitalist realism’: ‘a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation

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<sup>389</sup> Matthias Krauß, *Wem nützt die Aufarbeitung? Die institutionalisierte Abrechnung* (Berlin: edition ost, 2016).

<sup>390</sup> Even the much maligned programme of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK amounts to little more than a return to reformist social-democratic capitalism. The frequent attacks on Corbyn and his supporters have made use of many anti-communist stereotypes. See: Labour Party, *For the Many Not the Few: The Labour Party Manifesto 2017* (2017) <<https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/labour-manifesto-2017.pdf>> [accessed 11 December 2018]; Kate Ferguson, ‘Jeremy Corbyn drafts in Stalin apologist and lifelong Communist to work in his office as senior aide’, *Daily Mail*, 26 February 2018.

of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action.<sup>391</sup> As an apocryphal quip associated with both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek contends: ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.’<sup>392</sup>

Instead, the notion of a socialist programme of social and importantly economic restructuring is treated dismissively much as it was in the early stages of the Cold War as the God that failed.<sup>393</sup> In 1949, the trope was of the *Kronstadt* moment,<sup>394</sup> marking the caesura from which it can allegedly be said that communism’s failure is proven. In 2018 there is a plethora of ‘moments’, from Hungary 1956, Prague 1968 (particularly in vogue at the time of writing due to its fiftieth anniversary) and of course the biggest of all ‘1989’, the end of ideology. This form of black and white emplotment is characterised above all else by a lack of historicisation. These events become understood as largely self-evident. Established tropes in the firmament of Western capitalist realist discourse which serve to substantiate and interpellate the unconscious logic that there is no alternative to the socio-economic system we inhabit.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of this stultifying anticommunist shorthand lies in the uncritical reception of the ‘100 million victims of communism’ thesis. Originating from *The Black Book of Communism* this figure has become commonplace in Western discourse and has also played a role in remembrance of the GDR.<sup>395</sup> Its general acceptance is

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<sup>391</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), p. 16. See also Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, (London: Verso, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>392</sup> See: Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology*, (London: Verso, 2012), p. 1; Fredric Jameson, ‘Future City’, *New Left Review*, 21 (2013) <<https://newleftreview.org/II/21/fredric-jameson-future-city>> [accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>393</sup> Richard Crossman, ed., *The GOD that Failed* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1949). This was one of the most prominent salvos in the burgeoning Cold War, bringing together essays from famous communist renegades such as Arthur Koestler, André Gide and Stephen Spender.

<sup>394</sup> The violent suppression of the armed uprising of previously Bolshevik aligned sailors in 1921 was seen as a watershed moment that unmasked the hollowness of communism’s progressive promise. Perhaps unsurprisingly the specific context of Kronstadt was not explored in any of the contributions and therefore not historicised. Kronstadt had long been a symbolic moment on the so-called anti-authoritarian left, particularly in the ‘anarchist’ tradition. See: Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt, 1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>395</sup> Stephan Courtois et al., eds., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

amply demonstrated by its use to justify the Council of Europe's resolution 1481/2006 'Need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes',<sup>396</sup> which in turn was used as the justification for the European Union's 'Resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism' which called for recognition of the 'shared legacy' of 'Communism, Nazism and fascism' and proclaimed the 23 August as a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, to be commemorated with dignity and impartiality'.<sup>397</sup> The totalitarian theory-inspired equation of fascism and communism was hereby very publicly affirmed and with the seeming legal authority of supranational governmental bodies.

However, this figure of 100 million victims of communism has been decisively discredited as a spurious and malicious misrepresentation. The editor of the *Black Book*, Stephan Courtois rounded up estimates – which in themselves exhibited dubious methodology and a distinct lack of historicisation – of some 65 million to 100 million as he felt this figure sounded better!<sup>398</sup> Even three of the volume's contributors felt compelled to distance themselves from this clearly prejudicial and unscholarly approach.<sup>399</sup> Yet the figure has become ensconced in common parlance, repeated by word of mouth and media alike.<sup>400</sup> The further ideological significance of this is demonstrated by one notable critic of the volume, Noam Chomsky:

[S]uppose we now apply the methodology of the *Black Book* and its reviewers to the full story, not just the doctrinally acceptable half. We therefore conclude that in India

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<sup>396</sup> Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, *Resolution 1481 (2006) Need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes*, (2006) <<http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17403&lang=>> [accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>397</sup> European Parliament, *Resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism* (2009) <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0213+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>> [accessed 10 December 2018].

<sup>398</sup> Ariane Chemin, 'Les divisions d'une équipe d'historiens du communisme', *Le Monde*, 31 October 1997; John Torpey, 'What Future for the Future? Reflections on The Black Book of Communism', *Human Rights Review*, 2.2 (2001), 135–143.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>400</sup> For example: Daniel Hannan, '100 years and 100 million deaths later, Communism still has its converts. Why?', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 2017; David Satter, '100 Years of Communism — and 100 Million Dead', *Wall Street Journal*, 6 November 2017.

the democratic capitalist ‘experiment’ since 1947 has caused more deaths than in the entire history of the ‘colossal, wholly failed...experiment’ of Communism everywhere since 1917: over 100 million deaths by 1979, tens of millions more since, in India alone.<sup>401</sup>

However, such criticism – regardless of its accuracy – is very far from being acceptable within the framework of capitalist realism which informs our image of the socio-economic system of much of the developed world. Attempts to count the bodies of capitalism remain on the fringes of academic discourse and rarely enter into mainstream debates indicating that the same methodology applied to working through the past of communism remains taboo when applied to our own capitalist past. The point here is not to make judgements regarding body counts or the relevance of such methodologies, but instead to highlight a certain hypocrisy in how the darker side of our present socio-economic system is generally approached, which indicates an ideological bias.<sup>402</sup>

It is important to note that the then head of the BStU, Joachim Gauck, and central figure within the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*, Ehrhart Neubert, both readily agreed to endorse the *Black Book of Communism*, in spite of the criticism of its methodology and misrepresentation of results, and to pen a chapter dedicated to the GDR.<sup>403</sup> This indicates that the personnel of state-mandated institutions are less concerned with researching and better understanding the communist past but rather in engagé discrediting of the same. However, it should also be noted that not all contributors to state-mandated media pursue such an agenda. Indeed, one can speak of a plurality of voices. Academics who primarily research outside of state-mandated institutional arenas are often invited to compose

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<sup>401</sup> Noam Chomsky, ‘Counting the Bodies’, *Spectre* (2009) <<https://web.archive.org/web/20160921084037/http://www.spectrezine.org/global/chomsky.htm>> [accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>402</sup> See for example, Robert Kurz, *Schwarzbuch Kapitalismus: Ein Abgesang auf die Marktwirtschaft* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2001); John Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire* (London: Turnaround, 2000).

<sup>403</sup> See: Joachim Gauck and Ehrhart Neubert, ‘Die Aufarbeitung des Sozialismus in der DDR’, pp. 829–896. The book proved so popular in the FRG that it underwent ten printings in its first seven months. See Torpey, p. 136.

contributions. However, this pluralism can also be seen as an important aspect of the liberalism and euphemistic anti-totalitarianism key to the ideological framework within state-mandated media. How could the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung* chastise the SED for monopolies of interpretation and discourses of self-legitimation if they too were ostentatiously guilty of the same? A veneer at least of plurality is therefore an integral ingredient to the work of state-mandated bodies. However, the question is whether the impact of this seeming plurality is actually to widen the scope of debate and allow challenging viewpoints to be communicated and if so to what degree. Martin Sabrow, who famously chaired the *Expertenkommission*<sup>404</sup> is often seen as a sort of figurehead for attempts to make state-mandated memory more plural and inclusive. However, though he is correct in acknowledging that *Aufarbeitung* has ‘nach zwei Diktaturen den alten Systemeliten die Deutungshoheit zu entwinden geholfen’, he ignores the question of whether there is a new (or indeed continued Western) *Deutungshoheit*. Instead, he argues that institutional *Zeitgeschichte* is merely one component of societal remembering of the past and that this indicates a culture based on ‘kritische Befragung der Vergangenheit statt auf Affirmation von Traditionen’.<sup>405</sup> However, he does not consider where the narratives, interpretive models and values of this seemingly desirable pluralistic discourse come from. In other words, the power relations and imbalances in influence between discursive participants are not thematised. Who or what is being critically questioned and by whom, how are these debates approached and where did these frameworks come from? The calls of the *Expertenkommission* to incorporate the *Alltag* of the GDR into state-mandated *Aufarbeitung*<sup>406</sup> has largely resulted in exploring the established approaches of repression and dictatorship in their interactions with

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<sup>404</sup> Martin Sabrow et al, eds., *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

<sup>405</sup> Martin Sabrow, ‘Das Unbehagen an der Aufarbeitung’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 January 2009.

<sup>406</sup> Sabrow, *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte*.

everyday life.<sup>407</sup> In other words, the range of topics has grown, but the narratives communicated remain predominantly unchanged and arguably more effective, given their more varied and disarming communication.<sup>408</sup>

Tantalisingly, Sabrow appears to point unintentionally to the missing ingredient in his schema when he acknowledges that ‘[i]n gewisser Weise hat das Gedächtnis dem Fortschritt als kulturelle Orientierungsnorm in der westlichen Welt den Rang abgelaufen’.<sup>409</sup> The rejection or neglecting of progress has long been posited as a core ideological component of late capitalism<sup>410</sup> and Sabrow here, presumably unintentionally, seems to be recognising the limitations capitalist realism place on us. Too much reflection on how to progress from the current political or socio-economic status quo unavoidably leads to the inclusion of the socialist alternative given there are, speaking schematically, only two fundamental organisational principles for society: the private of capitalism and the social of socialism. The much vaunted ‘end of ideology’ embodied in the supposedly final triumph of liberal capitalism leads therefore to a sort of self-censorship in which a focus on the past and in particular on learning the anti-communist lessons thereof serves a vital ideological function in our society.

The pre-conditioned limits to the permissible pluralism involved in remembering the GDR are clearly indicated in the subjects explored in this thesis; those of a communist-oriented persuasion have not been allowed to have their voices heard. Merker’s Jewish adversaries are not acknowledged and implicitly dismissed as antisemites. Biermann’s fans in the GDR who took his professed brand of ‘true communism’ at face value and feel betrayed

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<sup>407</sup> See: Sara Jones, ‘(Extra)ordinary Life: The Rhetoric of Representing the Socialist Everyday After Unification’, *German Politics and Society*, 33 (2015), 119–134.

<sup>408</sup> Notable examples include the permanent and free *Alltag in der DDR* exhibition in the *Kulturbrauerei* in Berlin and the *Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung*’s *Die heile Welt der Diktatur? Herrschaft und Alltag in der DDR* (2010) <[https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/ausstellungen/shortguide\\_hwdd\\_a4\\_final.pdf](https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/uploads/ausstellungen/shortguide_hwdd_a4_final.pdf)> [accessed 11 December 2018].

<sup>409</sup> Sabrow, ‘Das Unbehagen an der Aufarbeitung’.

<sup>410</sup> See: Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*; Manfred Buhr, *Moderne – Nietzsche – Postmoderne* (Berlin: Akademie, 1990); Andras Gedo, ‘Rationalität – Geschichte – Philosophie’, in *Enzyklopädie zur bürgerlichen Philosophie im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Manfred Buhr (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1988), pp. 334–340.

by his anti-communist turn and instrumentalisation do not speak in state-mandated discourse. The socialist aspirations and anti-nationalist sentiment of the *Vorkämpfer* of the ‘peaceful revolution’ do not come to the fore despite such positions arguably being in the majority.<sup>411</sup> It would appear that this pluralism does not go as far as to include the communist left, even when they are the apparent subject of discussion. The truism that the interests and frameworks of the present influence our reconstruction of the past is confirmed repeatedly. The simplifications and de-contextualisations are too frequent and the conclusions drawn too consistently one-sided to dismiss this as coincidence or perhaps even as some sort of empirically derived common sense. These state-mandated representations can certainly be challenged by detailed primary source work and probing critique of the ideological implications of their constructed narratives. This points to the importance of the re-linking of academic communities with the overt political concerns of ideology theory. This thesis, therefore, understands itself as a modest contribution to a growing critique of the received wisdom of anti-communism and an encouraging call for further work in this area which examines the primary source base for commonly held beliefs and interrogates the ideological frameworks of political memory and historiography.

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<sup>411</sup> See for instance: Geisel, pp. 55–107.





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