

HALF OF THE PICTURE:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF EAST GERMANY IN *GDR REVIEW*, 1958-1989

Lorn Edward Hillaker

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Chapel Hill  
2014

Approved by:

Konrad H. Jarausch

Karen Hagemann

Chad Bryant

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## **ABSTRACT**

Lorn Edward Hillaker: Half of the Picture: Representations of East Germany in *GDR Review*,  
1958-1989

(Under the direction of Konrad Jarausch)

This thesis seeks to use external self-representation of East German identity in official propaganda to examine how images of an idealized East Germany were instrumentalized to establish GDR (German Democratic Republic) legitimacy abroad. These representations shall be examined through the lens of the magazine *GDR Review* from 1958-1989. It argues that despite the current impression of a relatively static, hyper-politicized, communist society, a changing and externally-presented aspirational identity was developed in the GDR through a mutually-reinforcing dual-process of “defensive” counter-narrative construction and an “offensive” narrative of internal socialist development, both of which interacted to attempt to establish GDR legitimacy abroad. These changes are best understood through a four-stage process of legitimation, recognition, stabilization, and crisis that reveals an externalized GDR identity capable of responding to changing political climates, the goals of the SED (Socialist Unity Party) regime, and emerging social issues in the quest for legitimacy.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Writing this thesis has been an exciting challenge representative of the beginning of my academic career. In the process of completing it I have become greatly indebted, both personally and privately, to many individuals. Most importantly, I give thanks to my advisor, Konrad Jarausch, for his encouragement, knowledge, and support. His guidance and calming perspective has been invaluable in the completion of my work. I am also grateful to Karen Hagemann and Chad Bryant whose insight and recommendations helped me to look at my own work differently.

This project began with an initial interest in German propaganda and later East German identity that has its roots in my senior undergraduate thesis completed with Geoffrey Giles in 2011. I am deeply grateful both for his wisdom and his encouragement to not only explore these ideas, but also to pursue them further in a graduate program in history. Though this project and my interests have evolved considerably, I will always remember my first steps in this process fondly.

I also want to thank my family for their patience and support through writing this thesis and my work in graduate school. My mother Brenda and father Clark have always been willing to talk over my thoughts and give me a boost along the way. My sister, Elizabeth, deserves a special mention here as she has been my confidant for all my life and continues to be my rock in times both good and bad.

Most importantly, I thank my loving wife Heather who has been a constant source of joy, love, and inspiration. Her ability to see problems in new lights, push me farther than I thought possible, and to be a model of talent and hard work has made me not only a better scholar, but a

better man. She also deserves a special mention here as she was both brave and gracious enough to assist me in the process of editing my thesis. While it may be presumptuous to offer a dedication for a Master's Thesis, I will nonetheless dedicate it to her.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
NVA	National People's Army (GDR)
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany



## Chapter 1 Introduction

As East and West Germans mingled across the defunct Berlin Wall, editor of *GDR Review*, Lore Uhlmann, asked “Have we deceived you, our readers, our friends, those who have placed their hopes for socialism specifically in **our** country, have we willfully spread lies?” Uhlmann responded to herself in the special double issue of November-December 1989 with a resounding “No.” However, she did admit that what was presented in *GDR Review* was not always the complete reality; instead the magazine only presented particular representations of the truth of GDR (German Democratic Republic) life, articles that proudly discussed building projects or full employment while ignoring dilapidated town centers or inefficient labor use.<sup>1</sup> *GDR Review*, a highly pictorialized journal of external propaganda, presented only half of the picture, but it is a picture typical of an official exported GDR identity.

This paper seeks to use external self-representation of East German identity in official propaganda to examine how images of an idealized East Germany were instrumentalized to establish GDR legitimacy abroad. . These representations shall be examined through the lens of the magazine *GDR Review* from 1958-1989. The positive representation of East Germany in *GDR Review* was necessary due to the magazine’s role as cultural mouthpiece of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) regime. But, *GDR Review*, as a form of cultural diplomacy, still provides an intriguing look into the legitimization of the GDR. Legitimation was necessary because, as Gunter Minnerup wrote: “[The GDR’s] entire history since 1949 has been dominated by fending off the pressure emanating from its more powerful, populous, and prosperous

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<sup>1</sup> Lore Uhlmann, “The GDR in Upheaval: Speaking on Our Own Behalf,” *GDR Review*, no. 11-12 (1989): 1. For brevity’s sake *GDR Review* articles will be abbreviated to *GDR Rev.*, issue no. (year): page number.

Western neighbor.”<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, the socialist project itself was evolving as the early East Germany transformed into the self-proclaimed “real-existing” socialism of the later GDR.

While this analysis does not seek to demonstrate the existence of an internalized identity or legitimacy, it examines how an official magazine, such as *GDR Review*, portrayed East Germany to the outside world. It should be understood, however, that this particular form of exported identity cannot be wholly different from the reality inside the GDR. For foreign readers to accept the presentation of the GDR, it had to adhere to some of the versions given to them from other, Western, news sources. Furthermore, slippage between the representation of the official version of the GDR, the lived experience, and impressions of the readers of *GDR Review* was inevitable. This is not to say that what East Germans thought of themselves was determined by *GDR Review*, but rather that conditions within the GDR would alter the form and content of articles or that the magazine would present particular aspects of the GDR it felt was particularly attractive to its readership. Because this paper seeks to understand the evolution of a GDR identity in its attempts to achieve an externally-perceived, legitimate identity, it is important to begin the analysis with an interpretive frame for the GDR state itself.

The three main paradigms useful for contextualizing GDR history are those that focus on the SED regime as dictatorial, those that focus on the experience of the “failed experiment” that was the GDR, and a critical hybridization. The totalitarian paradigm, advocated initially by Hannah Arendt and Zbigniew Brzezinski, and later articulated by Klaus Schroeder and Eckhard Jesse, focused on political analyses of state power and its role in controlling everyday life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gunter Minnerup, *The GDR and the German Question in the 1980s* in *The GDR in the 1980s*, ed. Ian Wallace, vol. 4 GDR Monitor Special Series. (Leicestershire, England: Loughborough University of Technology, 1984), 3.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Totalitarian perspectives on GDR historiography see Eckhard Jesse, “Die Totalitarismusforschung im Streit der Meinungen” in *Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Bilanz der internationalen Forschung*, Eckhard Jess, ed. (Baden-Baden: NOMOS Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999), 9-40 and Klaus Schroeder, “Einleitung: Die DDR als politische Gesellschaft” in *Geschichte und Transformation des SED-Staates*:

Other similar historiography has criticized the GDR for being an *Unrechtstaat*, a state lacking democratic legitimacy.<sup>4</sup>

Directly contrary to the totalitarian position are the former East German historians who referred to the GDR as a “failed experiment.” These historians, who were often active in organizations such as the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, wrote to show GDR history in a more positive, and sometimes false, light instead of the simultaneous rejection of the GDR and glorification of the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany). Historians such as Werner Berthold and Kurt Pätzold wrote to legitimate their former historiography, often written in the GDR, as antifascist in juxtaposition to the historians of the early FRG who had accepted National Socialist rule.<sup>5</sup> Others, such as Rolf Reiig discussed long-term crises in the GDR to explain the failure of a noble experiment.<sup>6</sup>

The more critical middle ground between the totalitarian dictatorship and the “failed experiment” paradigms contains a multitude of moderate interpretations of the GDR such as *durchherrschte Gesellschaft*, *Eigen-Sinn*, and “welfare dictatorship.” The concept of *durchherrschte Gesellschaft* (thoroughly-ruled society), proposed by Alf Ldtke and later

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*Beitrge und Analysen*, Klaus Schroeder, ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 11-26. For the earlier conceptualization of totalitarian theory see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski. *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965) and Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (San Diego: Harcourt, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on GDR historiographical debates, see Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002). See also *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*. Konrad H. Jarausch, ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Stephan Berger, “GDR Historiography after the End of the GDR: Debates, Renewals and the Question of What Remains,” in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 270-272.

<sup>6</sup> Rolf Reiig, “Der Umbruch in der DDR und das Scheitern des ‘realen Sozialismus’,” in *Das Ende eines Experiments*, Rolf Reiig and Gert-Joachim Glaebner, eds. (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1991), 12. For an overview regarding the ideas of the “failed experiment” perspective on the GDR, see Konrad H. Jarausch, “Sich der Katastrophe stellen”: (Post-) Kommunistische Erklrungen fr den Zusammenbruch der DRR,” in *Halbherziger Revisionismus: Zum Postkommunistischen Geschichtsbild*, Rainer Eckert and Bernd Faulenbach, eds. (Mnchen: Olzog Verlag, 1996), 141-152.

explored by Jürgen Kocka, offers a means to examine GDR history by looking at state and society's interaction and the filtering down of control from party to society.<sup>7</sup> Concepts that use the related frame of *Eigen-Sinn* (self-assertion) try to focus on how individuals in society worked against the typical modes of the regime in their everyday lives.<sup>8</sup> Modernization theory has also been proposed as a means of interpreting the GDR, most notably with Kocka's concept of a "modern dictatorship" that seeks to contextualize the GDR within a broader framework.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the term "welfare dictatorship" proposed by Konrad Jarausch seems the most useful for this paper. This term comes closest to capturing "the central contradiction between socialism's emancipatory rhetoric and the corrupt practice of Stalinism within a single analytical category."<sup>10</sup> While the bulk of the literature on GDR identity examines the issue regarding whether or not a separate East German identity actually existed, this paper examines a particular representation of identity and legitimacy through the lens of the "welfare dictatorship" concept.<sup>11</sup>

With the understanding of the GDR as a welfare dictatorship, I have developed a particular methodology that combines textual and image analysis to examine representations of GDR identity used to create a legitimacy narrative. This interpretive methodology, known as "intermediality" provides the historian with an opportunity to examine both the textual and the

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<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Kocka, "Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft," in *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, Hartmut Kaelbe, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr, eds. (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994), 547.

<sup>8</sup> Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Probes and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Kocka, "A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*. Konrad H. Jarausch, ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 17-26.

<sup>10</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, "Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*. Konrad H. Jarausch, ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 60.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on this historiographical debate see Alan Nothnagel, *Building the East German Myth: historical mythology and youth propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) or Dietrich Orlow, "The GDR's Failed Search for a National Identity, 1945-1989," *German Studies Review* 29, no. 3 (2006): 537-558.

visual to see how they relate, disagree, and reinforce each other.<sup>12</sup> Intermediality has taken on many forms and definitions and does not have a wholly agreed-upon meaning. According to Peter Wagner, intermediality is “a sadly neglected but vastly important subdivision of intertextuality” where “images can be ‘read’ like texts.”<sup>13</sup> Others, such as Christian J. Emden and Gabriele Rippl offer a “minimal definition” that sees intermediality as a method that “seeks to stake out the space in which images and texts, visual culture and print culture, collide, refer to each other, and even converge.”<sup>14</sup> The “secondary intermediality,” of Birgit Neumann and Martin Zierold is also promising as it concerns itself with “the interrelation of aesthetic forms, topics or motives between different media offers and different media systems.”<sup>15</sup> The core of these various definitions is the understanding of an interaction between image and text that exists and is available for interpretive work. This term offers a useful conceptual model with the acknowledgment that any image, text, or image/text relationship is limited in its accessibility. Consequently, many images in *GDR Review* are politically contingent distortions, but these distortions are altered representations of a reality that the GDR was working to create. Thus, while any image/text relationship is a particular and incomplete representation, the images of East Germany in *GDR Review* can still inform the historian as to what kind of image of East

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<sup>12</sup> For more on this methodology see Peter Wagner, ed., *Icons, Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality* (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1996) and W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Wagner, “Introduction: Ekphrasis, Iconotexts, and Intermediality – the State(s) of the Art(s),” in *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts: Essays on Ekphrasis and Intermediality*, Peter Wagner, ed. (New York: de Gruyter, 1996), 17.

<sup>14</sup> Christian J. Emden and Gabriele Rippl, “Introduction: Image, Text and Simulation,” in *ImageScapes: Studies in Intermediality*, Christian J. Emden and Gabriele Rippl, eds., Cultural History and Literary Imagination vol. 9 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 10.

<sup>15</sup> Birgit Neumann and Martin Zierold, “Media as Ways of Worldmaking: Media Specific Structures and Intermedial Dynamics,” in *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking: Media and Narratives*, Vera Nünning, Ansgar Nünning, and Birgit Neumann, eds. (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 106. Here media offers refers to the actual product that is produced by a particular media form. For example, a media offer of television could be a soap opera.

Germany the SED wanted to export as well as depictions that may have contradicted official ideas of GDR legitimacy.

Intermediality, as a method, may seem simple to many observers, but it is more complex due to an almost axiomatic understanding of the particular roles of images and text in publications. For this paper, I will borrow Jefferson Hunter's interpretation that words "relegate" and "categorize" while photographs "assimilate" and "connect" in order to read these relationship "against the grain."<sup>16</sup> An example of this sometimes ambivalent or contradictory relationship can be demonstrated in captions that "may provide mere information, or a context altogether altering the significance of the photograph it accompanies, or an untruth for the photograph to mock."<sup>17</sup> This is not a method that is useful in every part of the *GDR Review*, but will be applied where images are featured or are particularly striking; otherwise traditional textual analysis of narrative representations of East Germans will be used.

Thus, when images tended to merely confirm the statements made in the accompanying article, this analysis turned to manipulated "truths" within text that were different from known historical realities in order to explore how and why these representations were altered. This method, used most commonly to interpret material from the Eastern bloc during the Cold War, is referred to as Sovietology. It attempts to develop a means to analyze why certain topics were "left undiscussed in the press and in the professional literature" and answer why these gaps or misrepresentations were created.<sup>18</sup> Due to the difficulty in obtaining information from the

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<sup>16</sup> Jefferson Hunter, *Image and Word: The Interaction of Twentieth-Century Photographs and Texts*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred G. Meyer, "Politics and Methodology in Soviet Studies," in *Post-Communist Studies & Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology*, eds. Frederic J. Fleron, Jr. and Erik P. Hoffmann, (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), 167. For more on this method and the study of official Eastern bloc materials, see also Alexander J. Motyl, "The Dilemmas of Sovietology and the Labyrinth of Theory," in *Post-*

Eastern bloc official production material, this method will be used to study *GDR Review* to explore the creation of a particular East German narrative.

The analysis of representations of the GDR in *GDR Review* will be framed by a series of questions. The first of these questions is: How and why does the journal's form and content change over time? A common assertion among historians is that an ossified gerontocratic society lacked any kind of legitimate change in the GDR and this paper shall challenge that claim. Next: What were the goals of the journal and how were the representations of East Germans and East German society mobilized to meet these objectives? The *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED – the ruling communist party in East Germany) had particular goals for their external image that evolved over time. Third: What do these changes over time and goals tell us about the evolution of GDR legitimacy beyond simple propagandistic claims? While it is somewhat easy to dismiss a propaganda journal such as the *GDR Review* as a mouthpiece for a defunct and ideologically uninteresting regime, there was an important connection between the shift in message about East German identity and the goals inherent in doing so that reflected broader changes within the GDR itself.

In answer to these questions I propose the thesis: Despite the current impression of a relatively static, hyper-politicized, communist society, a changing and externally-presented aspirational identity was developed in the GDR through a mutually-reinforcing dual-process of “defensive” counter-narrative construction and an “offensive” narrative of internal socialist development, both of which interacted to attempt to establish GDR legitimacy abroad. These changes are best understood through a four-stage process of legitimation, recognition, stabilization, and crisis that reveals an externalized GDR identity capable of responding to

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*Communist Studies & Political Science: Methodology and Empirical Theory in Sovietology*, eds. Frederic J. Flernon, Jr. and Erik P. Hoffmann, (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), 77-104.

changing political climates, the goals of the SED regime, and emerging social issues in the quest for legitimacy. There, of course, remains a degree of thematic continuity throughout the journal's development, but this model best encapsulates broad changes in emphasis if not always directly in content.



## Chapter 2 Presentation and Form

*GDR Review* was produced monthly from 1956-1990 first by the *Gesellschaft für Kulturelle Verbindungen mit dem Ausland* (Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) until 1962 and then by the League of the German Democratic Republic for Friendship



Among the Peoples. It was published in nine languages by the end of its production (Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, and Swedish). Each issue was published with a large photograph on the front cover that most often included smiling East Germans and images of collectible stamps on back and included a wide variety of images portraying East Germany abroad.<sup>19</sup> For example, the images portrayed within this section were a sampling of *GDR Review* through its duration chosen to show the development of color and some typical techniques and

stylization.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of the magazine is, of necessity, somewhat speculative, but the foundation date of 1956, and lack of clear prior iterations of the magazine, implies several

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the phenomenon of smiling, happy communists in East German photography, see Karl Gernot Kuehn, *Caught: The Art of Photography in the German Democratic Republic*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> The first of these is a typical cover from October 1950 demonstrating the common “smiling East Germans” trope, the next is from a youth festival pictured in the January 1972 edition and shows the youth focus of the journal that emerged in the 1970s in particular. The final photograph in this section was in an earlier edition of the *GDR Review*, from April 1961, showing the 5<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the SED and celebrating the victory of Socialism in the GDR. Other photographs within this paper will be placed near their cited references for better understanding.

possible reasons for the creation of *GDR Review*. For instance, it could have been an attempt to regain international favor, particularly with leftist sympathizing intellectuals that had become disillusioned with the violent repression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Also, it could have been a response to the Hallstein Doctrine of 1955 that stated the FRG would cease diplomatic relations with a state that recognized the GDR. To examine this purpose more closely, the publishers should be discussed.

The best way to interpret this magazine would be as an example of Cold War cultural diplomacy. According to Manuela Aguilar, cultural diplomacy is “the way a government portrays its country to another country’s people in order to achieve certain foreign policy goals.”<sup>21</sup> Cultural diplomacy also aims largely to change public attitudes abroad rather than interact directly with national governments, which have more official channels. To achieve this, states produce material that “tries to instill sympathy and understanding of the goals of a country’s domestic and foreign political actions and disseminates information for this purpose about all aspects of its life.”<sup>22</sup> Cultural diplomacy can often be interpreted as propaganda, but there is an important distinction in that there is some room where “the desires, the lines of policy, the targets, and the very definition of state interests become blurred and multiply.”<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that a production such as *GDR Review* was not a propaganda piece or was not representative of the GDR’s goals, but it does show that there was room for change over time in GDR ideas and individual action within these materials. The institution that produces the

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<sup>21</sup> Manuela Aguilar, *Cultural Diplomacy and Foreign Policy: German-American Relations, 1955-1968*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht, “What Are We Searching For? Culture, Diplomacy, Agents and the State,” in *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*, eds. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 10.

diplomatic material can inform the researcher about particular goals and trends in the production of the journal.

The Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries was founded in 1952 with their stated goal “to spread the truth about life in the German Democratic Republic throughout the world.”<sup>24</sup> These goals of the original publishing organization for the journal were consistent with the stated goals of *GDR Review*. For instance, in a celebration of the third anniversary of the founding of the magazine, an article stated that the authors of *GDR Review* have worked to “give you a picture of the new democratic Germany and so build a bridge to you, to the people



all over the world.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, *GDR Review* was founded as a press organ working towards peace and through this they hoped to “have helped win new friends for the GDR” and “succeed in contributing towards the peaceful sleep of children everywhere.”<sup>26</sup>

The League of the German Democratic Republic for Friendship Among the Peoples was founded on December 15, 1961 in Berlin as an organization to foster international friendship. According to the speech of its President, Phillip Daub, at its inauguration, the League had become necessary because “the time had, however, come to intensify support for the aims of these and other bodies in the GDR devoted to the cause of friendship and cultural relations with

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<sup>24</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1959, 43.

<sup>25</sup> GDR Rev., VII, 1959, IFC (Inside Front Cover).

<sup>26</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1960, IFC.

foreign countries, in the interests of deepening and extending such contacts.”<sup>27</sup> The League was designed to foster peace, coordinate friendship societies and inform other nations of the “character of the GDR as a peace-loving and sovereign state” and on its “socialist achievements and cultural and economic development.”<sup>28</sup> The need to win new friends and inform readers on “true” conditions in the GDR was essential for counter-narrative construction. This can be seen in letters received by the magazine throughout its existence stating that they had not heard of life in the GDR in this way. For example, in September 1967 a reader from India stated that the image of the GDR he had received from Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) publications had shown poverty, no freedom, and a lower standard of living.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it is likely that the magazine was an effort to achieve legitimacy and sympathy in the international scene counter to its depictions in Western productions. These particular themes remained somewhat constant, at least broadly. For example, in March 1989, *GDR Review* claimed that their friendship societies were so successful due to the GDR’s advocacy for peace, the “legacy of the antifascist resistance struggle, and “stable political, economic and social development.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, the dual-process of narrative construction is evident in discussions of antifascism which worked as a core “defensive” legitimizing factor in much of the GDR’s development while East Germany gradually built and modified socialist society in an “offensive” narrative.

In *GDR Review*, as in many state-run propaganda magazines, censorship was omnipresent. According to Susann Kowatsch, a former employee, the magazine was subjected to censorship by the editorial board and the *ZK der SED Abteilung Agitation und Propaganda*

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<sup>27</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1962, UP (unpaginated).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., UP.

<sup>29</sup> GDR Rev., IX, 1967, 25.

<sup>30</sup> *GDR Rev.*, III, 1989, 18.

(Central Committee of the SED Agitation and Propaganda Department).<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, the issue of state control was discussed in the journal where it was stated that all press in the GDR was run by publicly owned publishing houses and differed from their western counterparts due to their coordinated correspondence and relationship with the masses.<sup>32</sup> *GDR Review* defended its truth claims from the inevitable skepticism in the question “can there be anything better than to fight for the truth? For truth leads to understanding...that is the aim of every word which appears in *GDR Review*.”<sup>33</sup> Censorship was addressed directly later, with the statement that there was no censorship in the GDR, but that “the owners of the Press, the people, watch out that this true freedom of the Press is not misused by anybody for war propaganda or the spreading of racial hatred and the like.”<sup>34</sup> These restrictions, however, “should not be confused with a Press censorship.”<sup>35</sup> It is likely that, given the degree of emphasis in this article, and *GDR Review*’s focus on providing a “truth” claim to “reality” in the GDR, this article reflected a large degree of self-consciousness for journalistic integrity and the importance of maintaining its illusion for public consumption. Furthermore, given the fact that many articles were written considering travels to the West (which required that one belong to the *Reisekader*<sup>36</sup>) between Friendship Societies, it is likely that the contributors to the magazine were considered reliable by the regime and conducted a significant amount of self-censorship as well.

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<sup>31</sup> Susann Kowatch, “Propagandablatt ‘DDR-Revue’ – die Imagepflege der DDR,” November 11, 2009, NDR Fernsehen, Deutschland.

<sup>32</sup> GDR Rev, II, 1962, 12-13.

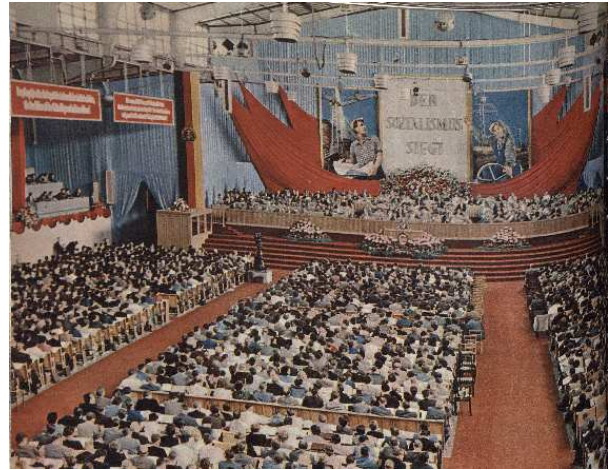
<sup>33</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1961, 40.

<sup>34</sup> GDR Rev, VI, 1964, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>36</sup> The *Reisekader* was a special group in GDR society that was given passports required for East Germans to leave the country. It was a great privilege to belong to this group and it represented a degree of trustworthiness of the individual for the regime. For more information on this see Jens Niederhut, *Die Reisekader: Auswahl und Disziplinierung einer privilegierten Minderheit in der DDR*, (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005).

The format of the magazine changed over time, likely reflecting attempts to garner greater interest. For instance, the magazines varied in length over its duration, but after an expansion of both size and page numbers in 1960, they typically were around 62-65 pages, except for the occasional double issues or end-of-year specials which could be approximately 80 pages and 30 pages, respectively. The use of color steadily increased over time in the magazine, with color sometimes used as a tool



to present favorable images of GDR citizens while making Americans and West Germans more ominous in black and white. The paper was, for the most part, very high quality and glossy throughout its production with numerous photographs and illustrations. Black and white supplements were often printed in the journal with titles such as “News and Views” that provided more typical newspaper stories and often included articles from press productions from socialist sympathizing western newspapers and *Neues Deutschland*.

In the absence of concrete subscription information, the targeted audience can only be guessed. The best information on this topic can be obtained from the various letters sent to the article series “International Mail Call” and “Mail Bag” that most often included letters from students, academics, and political activists. Thus, leftist sympathizers in Western nations were the primary targeted audience for *GDR Review*, but they were most often of Scandinavian, French, British, or Southeast Asian origin. The English version of the *GDR Review* spelled words in their “British-English” forms and emphasized reader interaction from the British Isles and Dominion, thus indicating a focus on a non-American, English-speaking audience. The

particular emphasis of *GDR Review* on relationships with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was clear in the early stages of the magazine. Furthermore, several academics from the United States and sometimes West Germany wrote articles for the magazine, while Labour Members of Parliament in the British government submitted letters and opinions. This would match the traditional pattern of cultural diplomacy according to Manuela Aguilar, who stated that the typical audiences for materials such as this would be “multipliers, such as journalists, politicians, publishers, university professors, and others, who influence larger audiences and thus multiply the effects of information work.”<sup>37</sup> More concretely, these audience members, when not obtaining free copies from embassies or libraries were charged nominal subscription fees that changed over time from their original price in 1958 which was \$0.14 an issue or \$1.50 for a year in the US to \$ .80 for a single copy in the US or \$8, \$14, or \$18 for one to three years, respectively in the 1980s. Circulation figures have been difficult to verify, but according to an interview of Kowatsch, the circulation of the magazine was 850,000 per year towards the end of its production.<sup>38</sup>

The organization of contents varied in each issue relevant to the topics being discussed, current events, and time period. Structure was one of the more variable aspects of the journal in that some article series would continue for some time and then disappear and, occasionally be resurrected. Some consistent overall themes in *GDR Review* were the use of foreign authors and the importance of reader interaction. The use of foreign authors varied over time, but included them writing articles, being interviewed, or simply writing a brief letter to the magazine. This was likely designed to bolster the “truth” claim of the journal as foreign observers would be

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<sup>37</sup> Manuela Aguilar, *Cultural Diplomacy and Foreign Policy: German-American Relations, 1955-1968*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Susann Kowatsch, “Propagandablatt ‘DDR-Revue’ – die Imagepflege der DDR,” November 11, 2009, NDR Fernsehen, Deutschland.

considered less likely to deceive in their analysis. Of course, this was not always the case. Instead, these articles very often presented extreme viewpoints the Socialist Unity Party agreed with, but hesitated to present officially. That being said, it is also very possible that these letters were either edited versions of actual reader letters, or were, in fact entirely created by the *GDR Review* for a particular purpose. Interaction varied in form, including editors calling for more letters from readers to article series where readers were invited to comment on particular issues, and articles dedicated to answering common reader questions such as “Are there political parties in the GDR?” There were also several sections dedicated to questions sent to GDR citizens from abroad and interviews of travelers to the GDR (from the various Friendship Societies - state organizations working to develop international cooperation) demonstrating a commitment to the internationalization of the GDR as a peaceful and friendly state. Interestingly, reader interaction, heavily emphasized for much of the journal’s existence, began a gradual disappearance from the early 1970s.

Unsurprisingly, the magazine was largely ideological in nature throughout its existence. The targeted themes changed over time, but tended to maintain similar messages, if often with slightly different core objectives. Consequently, *GDR Review* can, as Henry Krisch argued regarding GDR foreign policy, be seen “as a policy instrument employed to secure the existence and development of the GDR, to obtain for it an accepted place in the community of states, and to preserve an international environment favorable to its interests.”<sup>39</sup> *GDR Review* represented much of the official line of the SED, the ruling Communist Party of the GDR, and, as such, it both muted and amplified various themes within its production. For example, there was only vague reference made regarding the East German workers uprising of June 1953 as a western

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<sup>39</sup> Henry Krisch, *The German Democratic Republic: The Search for Identity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 53.



plot, the troubles in Poland in the early 1980s as exploitations of Western media and only complimentary references to the Soviet Union and their stabilizing force in Afghanistan. However, as was stated before, the representations of the GDR were not frozen in time, but were responsive to international conditions and periods of relative internal thaw in the GDR. Finally, the most important component to comprehending the nature of *GDR Review* is the understanding that comparison to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was, when not explicit, at least implicit in the production of the magazine. The counter-narrative of East Germany developed over the periods of its existence and, operating in tandem with an evolving socialism, reflected a shift over time from legitimation to recognition, then stabilization, and finally crisis, but all with the goal of portraying a state that could be interpreted as legitimate.

### **Chapter 3 Legitimation in the first decade of the German Democratic Republic, 1958-1960**

The GDR had to address extreme challenges to its legitimacy early in its existence. Faced with the creation of a new state with an entirely new system of government, as well as a diametrically opposed neighbor (the Federal Republic), the time period from 1958-1960 showed the GDR as it attempted to build up an impression of a *Rechtstaat*, a legitimate state, despite these challenges. It attempted to do so through the moral foundation of antifascism, the building of a socialist, “superior” state, portraying the GDR as a ‘normal’ state, and providing adequate responses to the “German question.” All four of these themes are dominant throughout the years in this period and through a variety of articles and messages, they advanced a narrative of the GDR that they considered not only more accurate than Western ideas, but also less biased.

Antifascism in the GDR referred to the legacy of resistance to National Socialism conducted by communists and some others under communist leadership. The victims of the Third Reich were often blanketed under the term “victims of fascism” where resisters were antifascists (including many of the major leaders such as Erich Honecker - the later leader of the SED and the GDR). The importance of an antifascist narrative can be seen in Alan Nothnagle’s argument that “the myth of the GDR’s ‘antifascist legacy’ was the *raison d’être* of both the Party and the state from beginning to end.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Jarausch argued that “such debates about fascism were never just about the past but also about the present” and antifascism “was

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<sup>40</sup> Alan Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 93.

instrumentalized from the start to justify the role of the new communist elite.”<sup>41</sup> The three main uses of antifascism in *GDR Review* during the foundational period of the journal were to discuss the cleansing of fascism in the GDR, the powerful remnants of nazism in the FRG, and what these dual legacies meant moving forward for these two states.

The antifascist denazification representations of this period highlighted the earlier attempted excision of all fascist elements in GDR society.<sup>42</sup> The antifascism of the GDR was commemorated through a variety of programs, including a focus on remembering the heroes of the antifascist resistance and a redefinition of the understanding of the legacy of fascism. For example, the citizens of the GDR more broadly were shown to reject fascism in Obersdorf where East German ski jumpers refused to participate in a competition’s awards ceremony (despite winning) when the band played the old German anthem “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,” “that ominous hymn with its associations of rapine and murder committed by the Hitler regime.”<sup>43</sup> During this time, the divergence between the two Germanys on the question of antifascism was even further demonstrated when young people from Essen (FRG) and Halle (GDR) were asked “Who was Hitler?.” When FRG respondents could only weakly identify him as a conqueror in Germany’s past while GDR respondents regarded him as the representative of

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<sup>41</sup> Konrad Jarausch, “The Failure of East German Antifascism: some Ironies of History as Politics,” *German Studies Review*, vol. 14, Issue 1, 85, 87.

<sup>42</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*, trans. Brandon Hunziker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20-21. One of the foundations of the GDR’s legitimacy was its claim to adherence to the principles of the Potsdam Agreement including demilitarization, denazification, decartelization, and democratization. The “D’s” of the Potsdam agreement are a somewhat contested heuristic device. Here the basic understanding was borrowed from Jarausch due to his focus on the steps taken to “civilize” the Germans after *Stunde Null* (the defeat of Nazism in Germany) in both Germanys.

<sup>43</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1958, XII. This was a different version of the anthem than that played under National Socialism.

capitalist and militarist interests, the divergence between the two group's narratives of German history became clear.<sup>44</sup>

While the GDR claimed to have cleansed itself of Nazism much earlier through large-scale purges, in 1958 the FRG was shown in *GDR Review* to be making disturbing returns to a fascist legacy. For example, in February 1958 *GDR Review* began their long running campaign "Let us turn the Baltic into a sea of peace." In this series, the GDR's peaceful motives of cooperation and trade were juxtaposed with the revanchist FRG whose naval commander, held up Nazi Admirals Dönitz and Raeder as idols in watching their "flank" in the Baltic.<sup>45</sup> More disturbingly, an article titled "SS comeback" stated that "twelve out of twenty-one party officials in the neo-fascist West German 'Refugee' Party...are former SS men."<sup>46</sup> Thus, despite their claims to denazification, the FRG was shown to have maintained fascist figures in power, or at least to idolize former fascists.

Antifascism was more than simply a legacy to be honored, but was a way of life exemplified in the emerging split between the FRG and the GDR. For example, the militaries of the FRG and the GDR were a source of constant comparison. As troops in the West German *Bundeswehr* enjoyed "the old nazi hate songs threatening the world with death and destruction" a "new kind of song is heard from the other half of Germany."<sup>47</sup> Here, the suave-looking GDR Minister of National Defense and former worker, Willi Stoph was juxtaposed with General

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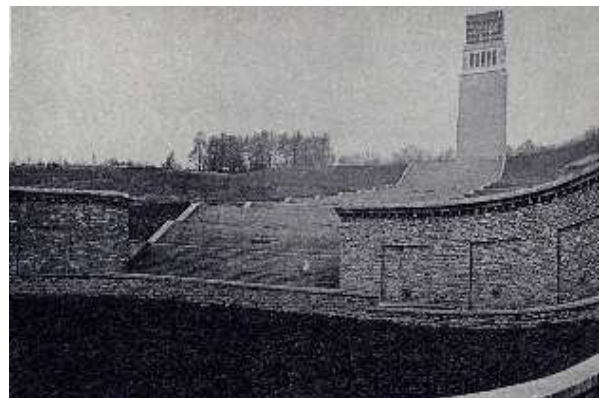
<sup>44</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1960, 5.

<sup>45</sup> GDR Rev., II, 1958, 9.

<sup>46</sup> GDR Rev, III, 1958, IV.

<sup>47</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1958, 39-40.

Heusinger, the former Nazi general<sup>48</sup>, to show that they worked at conflicting aims of peaceful coexistence and revanchist war, respectively. Similarly, in the highly emphasized Baltic Week campaigns, the GDR Baltic Week was said to be entirely different from the Kiel Week of the FRG because the GDR's goals were not to disguise "the aggressive aims and intentions of the German imperialists."<sup>49</sup> Most importantly, *GDR Review* confronted the concentration camp legacy of the Nazi period through discussions of camps such as Buchenwald, the "Camp of Horror, Citadel of Hope," where antifascists resisted and survived terrible conditions to emerge triumphant. Furthermore, the memorial and monuments were shown with dramatic images of space for 50,000 antifascists who would later come to "learn from the sufferings, from the solidarity and the ultimate triumph of the fighters of Buchenwald."<sup>50</sup> Thus antifascists and, most notably, communists had survived the terrors of Buchenwald and had risen to found the GDR as a German state that had renounced its fascist legacy and now worked to challenge the supposedly resurgent Nazism of the FRG.



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<sup>48</sup> General Adolf Heusinger, the first Inspector General of the *Bundeswehr*, was a general in the Second World War and was present at the July 20, 1944 attempt on Hitler's life. He was accused of complicity, but, despite evidence of contact with the conspirators, he was not arrested. For more about Gen. Adolf Heusinger, see Meike Thiele, "General Adolf Heusinger: Generalinspekteur der Bundeswehr von 1957-1961," Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, last modified December 3, 2013, <http://www.bmvg.de/portal/a/bmvg>.

<sup>49</sup> GDR Rev., VII, 1958, 8.

<sup>50</sup> GDR Rev., IX, 1958, 10-12.

Of course, this challenge to the FRG could only exist from a strong state based on the formerly repressed socialist ideology of antifascists and Soviet liberators. To that end, *GDR Review* worked to present the GDR as a state experiencing a surge of rebuilding, economic growth, and generous social welfare programs. Given the destruction of the Second World War in Germany, the GDR existed in a rather dire economic situation. And, when faced with the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) of the FRG, GDR propaganda worked to redefine the standards of progress that were focused on merely material advancement and to demonstrate a moral superiority as their economy worked desperately to compete.

For many years after the end of the Second World War, rebuilding the GDR's cities and housing remained a major task. The city of Dresden was used as a particular example of the rebuilding process as it was advertised as a "City with a Future." The city was shown with



comparison photos of Dresden on February 13, 1945 after its bombing (clearly connected with Western allied bombing campaigns) and then with newly reconstructed parts of the city such as the *Altmarkt* and the Dresden Zwinger Gallery of Art. This reconstruction was focused on two core issues: "to give the city a living centre" and "to provide a maximum

number of dwellings."<sup>51</sup> These dual goals were also reinforced by articles later about Berlin's need to create a city center that would "be socialist in character yet retaining the typical classicist

<sup>51</sup> GDR Rev., II, 1958, 25-30. For more on the "functionalization of the Allied bombing of Dresden," see Stefan Berger, *Germany, Inventing the Nation*, ed. Keith Robbins, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

elements of a great architectural past.”<sup>52</sup> The importance of housing was never ignored; instead it was presented as an issue from the past, a problem “through no fault of the government.”<sup>53</sup> The “Young Couple Urgently Requires Flat” article showed images of cooperative workers, homes, debris, and very dull prefabricated housing projects that subverted the triumphalist tone to the construction of a glorious new, socialist existence in the GDR even while the text worked to have enough truth to appeal as propaganda.<sup>54</sup> These representations of a rebuilding process worked to re-situate a still-recovering East Germany in a positive light and to refocus the benefits of recovery from the FRG to the GDR.

The economic development of the GDR in the late 1950s was steadily accelerating, but was shown constantly in comparison with the FRG. For instance, the reconstruction plans and work on housing for the citizens of the GDR were a component of the development of the GDR economy and the contested “Genuine Economic Miracle” that the GDR used as a counter-narrative to the much better known Western economic success.<sup>55</sup> At the Fifth Congress of the SED, the main “economic task” was to overtake the FRG in per capita consumption of food and consumer goods.<sup>56</sup> The economic viability of the GDR was reinforced when it was acclaimed as the fifth most important economy in Europe despite the difficulties of the still unclear German reunification question.<sup>57</sup> All of these assertions, however, came with the understanding that the

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<sup>52</sup> GDR Rev., XII, 1958, 8.

<sup>53</sup> GDR Rev., XII, 1958, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>55</sup> GDR Rev., V, 1958 X.

<sup>56</sup> GDR Rev., IX, 1958, I.

<sup>57</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1958, 8.

FRG remained superior to the GDR in economic development. To establish legitimacy, then, the GDR worked to emphasize the other aspect of constructing socialism, the welfare state.

The construction of socialism in the GDR involved both the literal building of basic state infrastructure, factories, and homes, but also the necessary apparatuses for a modern socialist welfare state including education, healthcare, and equality. For instance, the issue of healthcare was addressed in the article “Man’s Health the Primary Concern of the State,” where the GDR advertised their national health service. The redesign of medical care in the GDR included the division of specialists, increased availability of health care in regional polyclinics, free inoculation, and more access to medical education.<sup>58</sup> The emphasis on education was rooted in the idea that “the building up of a socialist order of society is unthinkable without the existence of a socialist school.”<sup>59</sup> As such, students received an education rooted in science and technology and by ideologically reliable teachers. The youth focus originated in the GDR with prenatal care and then state assistance to the parents through free health care and state grants of 1,000 Marks for a new baby.<sup>60</sup> Finally, women were also addressed as part of the socialist emancipatory rhetoric because they obtained equal rights in Article 7 of the GDR Constitution and were said to have obtained “real” equality due to their 43.5 percent employment rate.<sup>61</sup> The reconstruction of society and the emphasis on a comprehensive social welfare program for its population, demonstrated the GDR’s commitment to developing a counter-narrative as a state that was not only legitimate, but also was not the dictatorial, Soviet-occupied, Cold War outpost of Western propaganda.

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<sup>58</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1959, 8-11.

<sup>59</sup> GDR Rev., V, 1959, 4.

<sup>60</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1960, 6.

<sup>61</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1960, 17.



To present the GDR as a legitimate state, *GDR Review* first had to confront Western impressions of a destitute, oppressed people that lacked freedom. To do this, a series of articles were released about political parties, the dominance of the Soviet Union and religious freedom in the GDR. Taken together, they represented a series of answers to many reader's questions – or were at least framed in this manner – developed to legitimize the state in opposition to Western propaganda.

Political plurality, the independence of the GDR, and religious freedom all make sense in the context of denigrating Western views of Communism during the Cold War. Firstly, the dominance of Communist Parties in the Eastern bloc was a widely held assumption. To combat this monolithic image, *GDR Review* issued a series of articles detailing the various political parties that they claimed represented particular classes in the GDR. There was an acknowledgment of the leading role of the SED, but only as a part of a cohesive national front of five political parties that agreed “on all basic issues.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, the political independence of the GDR was questioned by those who viewed it as a satellite of the USSR. To combat this, *GDR Review* contained articles ridiculing those that thought only Russian plays were allowed in East Germany<sup>63</sup> or articles with images of East German women fondly bidding Soviet soldiers farewell.<sup>64</sup> Of course, these very denials indicated a degree of insecurity within the GDR about their legitimacy as an independent and free state.

The question of religious freedom was particularly acute in the GDR as *GDR Review* stated “our state recognizes the principle of unrestricted freedom of conscience and religious

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<sup>62</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1958, 45.

<sup>63</sup> GDR Rev., XI, 1958, 3.

<sup>64</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1958, 25.

belief.”<sup>65</sup> This was likely in response to international concern over the *Jugendweihe* the “secular alternative to church confirmation” in 1954 that worked to supplant the church’s alternative cultural perspectives among young people.<sup>66</sup> Later, a particular accommodation with the churches in the GDR was made with the Church Communique of July 21, 1958 that “the Church stands in every way for peace amongst nations” and mandated that “in accord with their religious beliefs, Christians fulfill their legally laid-down civic responsibilities.”<sup>67</sup> The importance of the basic legitimacy of the GDR, as defined by Western standards cannot be understood without the context of the German question and the possibility of reunification which could undermine the antifascist legacy, the construction of socialism, and, in fact, the GDR itself.

In this context, the German question involved the split between the two Germanys, the Cold War context, and the potential for reunification. The German question was so pressing for GDR legitimacy because the FRG claimed to represent all of Germany. On its face, this was viewed as a threat to the GDR not only on rhetorical antifascist grounds, but on an existential level. Thus, when proposing reunification, East Germany set up very clear restrictions such as “a reunified Germany must be a democratic, peaceable [sic] and sovereign state” with the progressive societal elements of workers and peasants in economic control.<sup>68</sup> In other words, Germany could only be reunited on East German, communist, terms. These requirements also made it simple for the GDR to portray an intransigent West unwilling to reunify Germany. For example, Konrad Adenauer was blamed for stalling negotiations to unify Germany due to his

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<sup>65</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1958, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism as the Grass Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-1965*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 2000), 136.

<sup>67</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1960, 14-5.

<sup>68</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1958, 46.

refusal to recognize East Germany.<sup>69</sup> This essential step was a frequent stumbling point, as was seen in 1960 when *GDR Review*

published an article “11 years of Struggle for German Unity” stating that only “on the basis of a contract grounded in international law, any relationship of domination by the one German state over the other



would be excluded.”<sup>70</sup> In this article, the Bonn government was depicted as too focused on rearmament to meet with the GDR and that the “free elections” proposed by the West would be a simple sham due to the ostensible coercive power of capitalist interference with what should be a truly democratic process. In this instance, *GDR Review* was certainly fighting an uphill battle. The somewhat thin justification of capitalist interference was particularly difficult for the West to swallow because free elections formed the basis of their political system and beliefs. Simultaneous with discussion of the possibility of reunification (and its impossibility) was another theme in *GDR Review* about the superiority of life in the GDR as opposed to the FRG.

Having lost, at least in the short term, the economic battle with the West, East Germany worked to establish itself as superior in quality of life. First of all, cultural achievements, such as the work of Bertolt Brecht were heavily emphasized in juxtaposition to vapid Western consumerism.<sup>71</sup> Then, to counter the omnipresent image of East Germans fleeing to the West,

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<sup>69</sup> GDR Rev., II, 1959, III.

<sup>70</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1960, 34-6.

<sup>71</sup> GDR Rev., IX, 1958, 23.

*GDR Review* attempted to flip the narrative by first stating that it was simply the occasional “romantic youth” that left for the FRG,<sup>72</sup> but then later talking about the increasing number of people that either fled east or returned to the GDR after an ill-fated Western sojourn. According to a June 1959 article, from 1958-1959 10,457 citizens left West Germany for the GDR with over 80% under the age of 35 many of whom were aiming “to avoid army service.”<sup>73</sup> Skeptical of these repeated claims, Jim Meurice, a reader from Belgium, wrote in to express his disbelief. In response, *GDR Review* stated that the reason for this exodus was the “vastly different pattern of development in the two German states within recent years” and the emigrants were representative of the “growing fear of social and economic insecurity; increasing suppression of freedom of political opinion; atomic arming...military conscription; short-time and unemployment.”<sup>74</sup> The greatly ironic mirroring of the FRG “other” in *GDR Review* thus came full force when discussing the relative appeal of the two German states, and in this zero-sum-game the GDR worked to establish its legitimacy as a separate state even while nominally maneuvering for reunification.

True legitimacy is not a quantifiable objective; it requires acceptance in the international community. In the climate of Cold War politics and the very real concerns of the West regarding repression in East Germany, the quest for legitimacy was seemingly Quixotic. The representations of East Germans and their state in *GDR Review*, however, do illustrate a common narrative of moral superiority in the face of material inferiority. The antifascist legacy established a baseline for the construction of socialism and the goal of achieving a legitimate state in the eyes of the international community. The German question and reunification posed a

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<sup>72</sup> GDR Rev., V, 1958, 27.

<sup>73</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1959, 15-17.

<sup>74</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1960, 8.

complicating factor that was ultimately resolved through mutual intransigence, but was utilized as a propaganda tool to advertise each side's goals and adherence to democratic principles. The goal of advertising a legitimate state did not disappear in 1961 with the Berlin Wall, but the rhetoric had to change to suit new needs and goals in light of increasingly complicated circumstances.

## **Chapter 4 The Search for Recognition of the German Democratic Republic, 1961-1971**

There were significant changes in GDR propaganda and foreign policy after 1961, but the messages were not so much different as they were modified to focus on altered goals. For instance, the overt focus on indigenous antifascism in the GDR shifted to a clearer analysis of the divergence between the two German states and the goals of a “revanchist regime.” Similarly, *GDR Review* maintained its focus on the social welfare programs of the GDR, but added a “humanitarian” focus to its program. Finally, these distinct programs culminated in a campaign of identity presentation tailored to obtain recognition of the “legitimate” GDR through peaceful understanding under international law. Practically, this meant a careful tailoring of the GDR’s identity as a state that was superior to its western neighbor, but also safely focused on human rights and participation in international organizations.

The rhetoric of antifascism did not disappear in 1961-1971, but it was incorporated into the broader discourse that justified the construction of the Berlin Wall. This legacy of victory through the defeat of fascism was followed by the familiar (and not strictly accurate) removal from “every position of power and influence held by war criminals, militarists and big landowners in East Germany.”<sup>75</sup> The discussion of the Wall did not enter in to *GDR Review* until 1962 and in this instance it was referred to as “controlling [the GDR’s] frontiers” to stop “a potential source of danger which might have sparked off a third world war.” As the paths to a

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<sup>75</sup> GDR Rev., IV, 1961, 22.

reunification of Germany diverged, the confrontation was put into a binary of peace for the GDR and “the true traditions of German militarism” in the Federal Republic.<sup>76</sup>

The Wall eventually adopted its own forms of justification through the prevention of “smugglers, spies, provocateurs, arsonists.” *GDR Review* showed these groups as figures stopped by a simple “white painted line” dominating the border and juxtaposed armed West Germans and Americans in observation towers with the hopeful GDR in the distance.<sup>77</sup> Further images of American soldiers treading on the line or West German mobs shouting and throwing stones at an unseen object served to delegitimize the protests of the West and emphasized the benevolent tolerance of the East Germans.<sup>78</sup> This point was pushed further in 1964 when articles discussed how many West Berliners went to East Berlin for Christmas without any mention of East Berliners travelling in a similar fashion.<sup>79</sup> The portrayal of the Wall in any form was actually a departure for GDR photography which was pushed away from publishing contentious photographs of uncomplimentary aspects of the GDR such as the Wall or the 1953 uprising.<sup>80</sup> This change in direction was likely due to the impossibility of denying the Wall’s existence and the necessity to diminish its imposing nature in Western imagination.

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<sup>76</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1962, 10.

<sup>77</sup> GDR Rev., II, 1963, 8-10.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>79</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1964, 39.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 194.



This reverse victimization through counter-narrative construction about the Wall reached a climax with the discussion of slain GDR NVA (*Nationale Volksarmee*) guardsmen on the border. Guards such as Peter Göring and Reinhold Huhn, who were slain during botched border crossings by supposed West German ‘smugglers,’ that were often fleeing the GDR dictatorship, were memorialized as victims in a desperate battle to secure a dangerous border, a clear right of any sovereign nation according to the *GDR Review*.<sup>81</sup> The twisted reversal of the victim narrative at the Berlin Wall focused on the few East German border guards killed (8 total to 1989) and ignored the much greater loss of life of East German fugitives and others totaling 128 lives to 1989.<sup>82</sup> The Wall was a particular disaster for GDR legitimacy in this time period as two-thirds of the deaths at the Wall occurred from 1961-1969 (90 deaths).<sup>83</sup>

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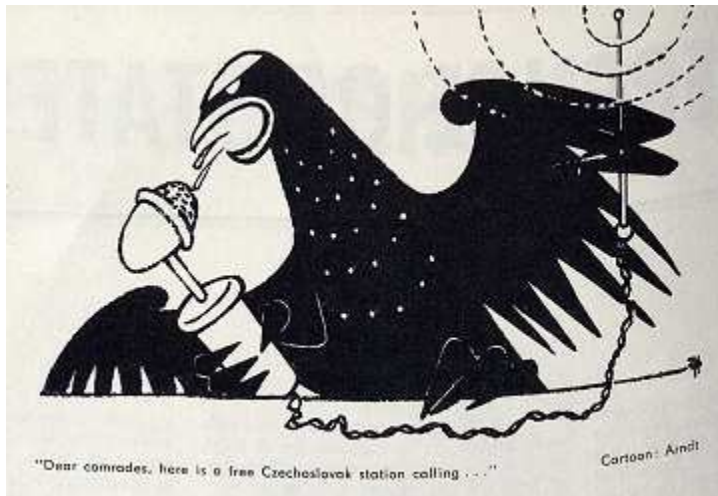
<sup>81</sup> GDR Rev., VIII, 1965, 18.

<sup>82</sup> Udo Baron, Christine Brecht, Martin Ahrends, and Lydia Dollmann, *The Victims at the Berlin Wall, 1961-1989: A Biographical Handbook*, eds. Hans-Hermann Hertle and Maria Nooke, trans. Miriamne Fields, (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2011), 21.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.



By the latter 1960s *GDR Review* instead began to focus on new challenges in Cold War Europe. In 1968, *GDR Review* celebrated its success in gaining significant reader correspondence and their promises that they would work for the recognition of the GDR in their home countries. Simultaneously, they were delighted that this success demonstrated “that [*GDR*



*Review's*] efforts to give a true picture of the socialist German Democratic Republic in our magazine are bearing fruit.”<sup>84</sup> Despite the partial achievement of their goals, however, the GDR had still not obtained its sought-after recognition. The

Hallstein Doctrine was the shorthand term for the policy of the FRG ceasing diplomatic relations with any country that recognized the GDR due to its lack of free elections and resulting illegitimacy. The Hallstein Doctrine still stymied many of the GDR's attempts at recognition and consequently the FRG was painted in an increasingly critical light. For example, there was an article published, when first discussing the Prague Spring, which was entitled “Bonn's Plans Were Frustrated.” In this article, the “aggressive main powers of world imperialism, the USA and West Germany” had sprung their trap of “long-term infiltration of the European socialist countries” with “political, ideological and economic weapons” to “sap[ping] their strength and cause[ing] differences between them.”<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Bonn was targeted as a hot bed for resurgent Nazism through articles about the neo-Nazi NPD (*Nationale Demokratische Partei*). *GDR*

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<sup>84</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1968, 24.

<sup>85</sup> GD Rev., X, 1968, 28-29.

*Review* claimed the fascist NPD was actually “in line with official policy” and was only held back from political prominence by an antifascist “political basis in the GDR.”<sup>86</sup> Thus the GDR was presented as the essential and tolerant walled bulwark against the advance of fascists, smugglers, and provocateurs, which countered the narrative of the repressive wall and further bolstered this image with a humanitarian self-characterization.

The social welfare programs emphasized in the first years of *GDR Review* did not disappear, but were instead accompanied by a modified emphasis on a humanist and free society. The split between the GDR and the FRG was made manifest by more than politics or militarism, but also culture. For instance, the GDR claimed to have “become the nation’s trustee of its humanist heritage” with its task to “raise the whole cultural life of the Republic” as “a model to all progressive people in Germany” while also fostering “humanistic and progressive cultural elements, trends and groupings in West Germany.”<sup>87</sup> The cultural cooption of Schiller and Goethe was thus paralleled with “plays and films...works of art that serve your [the GDR’s] state, your policy” into what the GDR termed a “humanist” German national tradition. Furthermore, daily life in the GDR was characterized as a society of caring, where people “realize that not even the best oil heating system can replace the human warmth which the citizen of the GDR is used to at home.”<sup>88</sup> Objections of a dwelling-deprived populace notwithstanding, the humaneness and warmth of the socialist people of the GDR became increasingly central to its self-identity especially as it sought to neutralize Western hostility engendered by the Berlin Wall.

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<sup>86</sup> GDR Rev., IV, 1968, 2-3.

<sup>87</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1961, 9.

<sup>88</sup> GDR Rev., II, 1965, 25.

In the latter 1960s another narrative change took place when a focus on international humanitarianism developed. Although it has often been presented as a purely post-Helsinki Accords transition, the GDR developed a human rights program in 1946 and “founded the Eastern Bloc’s only state-sponsored human rights organization in 1959.”<sup>89</sup> First, the GDR demonstrated its commitment to human rights in tandem with the UN Resolution that declared 1968 the International Year of Human Rights. To that end, the GDR government wanted all countries to “accede to those human rights conventions already in operation” such as those abolishing slavery, eliminating gender discrimination, prevention/punishment of genocide, and the end of racial discrimination. Of course, these conventions were “embodied in the GDR Constitution and are observed to the letter in its legal practice” despite the realities of a harshly repressive dictatorship.<sup>90</sup> Next, international humanitarianism was also utilized as a tool for the GDR to criticize Western actions. This criticism was first over differing conceptions of humanitarianism and then later over practices such as US and FRG involvement in the Vietnam War. When GDR Prime Minister Willi Stoph contacted Federal Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger, the latter replied, but did so by advancing the “‘inalienable’ right of the Federal Republic to speak for the whole of Germany” and “generally parading as the custodian of ‘humanitarian alleviations.’”<sup>91</sup> According to *GDR Review*, however, the GDR would “insist on the solution of” core issues such as “world-peace, security, good-neighbourliness and concrete proposals in this direction” all “in the name of humanitarianism.”<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the attempts of

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<sup>89</sup> , Edward (Ned) Richardson-Little, “The Exploitation of Man by Man has Been Abolished: Dictatorship, Dissent, and Human Rights in East Germany, 1945-1990,” PhD diss., University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill, 2013.

<sup>90</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1967, 29.

<sup>91</sup> GDR Rev., XII, 1967, 36.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 36.

West Germans to adopt a “new eastern policy”<sup>93</sup> was shown as merely the latest strategy of defeating the GDR from the June 1953 uprising and “bleeding the GDR white.”<sup>94</sup> Finally, the GDR demonstrated solidarity with oppressed national peoples such as the North Vietnamese while also protesting American “massacres.”<sup>95</sup> This stance of the GDR with North Vietnam did, in fact, serve as a major point of legitimacy and was also one of the rare propaganda points of the regime that much of the populace found worthwhile.<sup>96</sup> Thus, the GDR redefined humanitarianism to suit their needs in order to reflect not only the benefits of a warm socialist domestic policy, but also to criticize a potentially volatile Western aggressiveness. All of this, however, has been framed in constant relation to issues of recognition of the GDR’s legitimacy.

As the root of the insecurity of this time period, diplomatic recognition of the GDR was a dominant theme from 1961-1971. The construction of the Wall was also portrayed in the context of normal state relations, as Walter Ulbricht stated: “It is not a matter of a wall. It is the fact that the German Democratic Republic is a sovereign state which has its perfectly normal frontiers, also frontiers with West Germany and West Berlin.”<sup>97</sup> The wall and frontier became part and parcel of a broader push for international recognition explicitly on East German terms. Anecdotes such as former Vice President Nixon’s visit to East Berlin (and his border crossing) were used as examples of the “reality” that the West continually worked to deny.<sup>98</sup> Population

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<sup>93</sup> This referred to the increased role of Social Democrats in the government of the Federal Republic and their early proposals for what would become *Ostpolitik* with the election of Willy Brandt as chancellor.

<sup>94</sup> GDR Rev., VII, 1969, 35.

<sup>95</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1970, 8-9.

<sup>96</sup> For more on the importance of the Vietnam War and the GDR’s solidarity with North Vietnam see Gerd Horten, “Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR Government and the ‘Vietnam Bonus’ of the Early 1970s,” in *German Studies Review* vol. 36, number 3. Sabine Hake, ed. October 2013, 557-578.

<sup>97</sup> GDR Rev., IV, 1962, 4-5.

<sup>98</sup> GDR Rev., IX, 1963, XVI.

transfers across the border also became matters of concern. For instance, in an article entitled “Why do people move from the GDR to West Germany? Why do people from West Germany move to the GDR?,” *GDR Review* employed some false objectivity by only addressing those West Germans that came to the East<sup>99</sup> and were photographed showing smiling children by the lake and parents who are content with their newly-acquired job security.<sup>100</sup> *GDR Review* pushed this tactic even further when it addressed discontent within the GDR over not being able to travel to countries outside of the Eastern bloc. Rather than attribute this to Cold War geopolitics or genuine fears of mass emigration, *GDR Review* claimed it was due to Western nations not recognizing the GDR and, by extension, GDR passports.<sup>101</sup> Thus, recognition more generally became a means of overcoming the abnormality of the situation between the two Germanys, but also of shifting blame from the GDR to its Western antagonists who were increasingly shown to have no regard for peaceful relations in Europe.

German coexistence and peace were two primary themes in *GDR Review* that involved a logical leap associating inter-German relations with the potential for nuclear destruction. In other words, to ignore the potential threat of unstable relations in the center of Europe was to ignore the potential calamity of armed confrontation between Cold War powers. In a curious reversal of West German aims, the creation of diplomatic relations with the GDR was “of such far-reaching significance” due to the disagreements “so deliberately argued by Bonn.” According to the GDR, peace was threatened because the GDR did not exist as a legitimate state in the eyes of the West, and “whatever military action were taken against the GDR...would never be in the

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<sup>99</sup> For more on the phenomenon on West-East German migration, see Bernd Stöver, *Zuflucht DDR: Spione und ander Übersiedler*, (München: Beck, 2009).

<sup>100</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1964, 20.

<sup>101</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1965, 25.

nature of an aggression, it would never be anything of concern to the United Nations.”<sup>102</sup>

Consequently, British Labour MPs, Arnold Gregory and William Wilson claimed that the GDR should be recognized in the context of détente, but that the GDR should not be made more insecure in its position so that “nothing is done to encourage the revanchist and neo-nazi trend in West Germany.”<sup>103</sup> Simultaneously, the GDR was working to obtain full recognition by the UN as it would ensure “the securing of peace and relaxation of tension in Europe.”<sup>104</sup> The idea therefore was to demonstrate not only a commitment to world peace but also to “fully accord with the principles and aims of the UN Charter and therefore qualify...for full membership of the UNO.”<sup>105</sup> In other words, stability and recognition were essential for a peaceful Europe. Much of the period of 1961-1971 involved the essential creation of a GDR counter-narrative to Western attacks.

Olympic sports in the GDR served as a microcosm for its attempts to gain a legitimate standing in the international community. The actions of a neutral body, such as the International Olympic Committee were often scrutinized to show that the FRG was the only obstacle to the GDR’s entry in to an international system of fair play. For instance, in an article “IOC Demands Clear Decision,” *GDR Review* stated that from now on “the IOC will award future Olympic summer and winter games only to countries whose governments grant entry permits to all



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<sup>102</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1967, 37.

<sup>103</sup> GDR Rev., VII, 36-7.

<sup>104</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1967, 38.

<sup>105</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1967, 39.

sportsmen.”<sup>106</sup> In this period, due to the structures of the Olympic system, the GDR and the FRG competed on the same team from 1956-1964 and the competitive urge to outperform the West was often relegated to smaller events.<sup>107</sup> For example, the GDR would celebrate victories such as the 1963 triumph of the GDR handball team over the FRG.<sup>108</sup> However, even a unified German sports team could provoke comparison, as at Innsbruck where two of three gold and silver medals were won by athletes from the GDR.<sup>109</sup> Finally, in 1964, the GDR gained their own Olympic team despite the contrary machinations of the FRG against them.<sup>110</sup> The major triumph for the GDR occurred at the 1968 Mexico Olympics where the GDR received all manner of legitimate recognition through “true hospitality by observing the principles of equality, mutual respect and international friendship in the face of massive West German attempts to disrupt athletic harmony,”<sup>111</sup> while also outperforming the FRG by a large margin.<sup>112</sup> This success was particularly powerful because GDR, athletes’ success was meant to be viewed as the triumph of

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<sup>106</sup> GDR Rev., VIII, 1962, VIII.

<sup>107</sup> Christopher Young, “East Versus West: Olympic Sport as a German Cold War Phenomenon,” in *Divided, But Not Disconnected: German Experiences of the Cold War*, eds. Tobias Hochscherf, Christoph Laucht, and Andrew Plowman, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 148.

<sup>108</sup> GDR Rev., VIII, 1963, XVI.

<sup>109</sup> GDR Rev., IV, 1964, 39.

<sup>110</sup> GDR Rev., XII, 1965, 30.

<sup>111</sup> GDR Rev., IX, 1968, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Young, 149. For more information on the Olympic confrontation in the international community between the GDR and the FRG and its consequences for GDR recognition see Christopher Young, “East Versus West: Olympic Sport as a German Cold War Phenomenon,” in *Divided, But Not Disconnected: German Experiences of the Cold War*, eds. Tobias Hochscherf, Christoph Laucht, and Andrew Plowman, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 148-162. For a more in-depth history of this development up to the early 1980s see Gunter Holzweißig, *Diplomatie im Trainingsanzug: Sport als politisches Instrument der DDR in den innerdeutschen und internationalen Beziehungen*, (München, Wien: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1981). For a more updated analysis specific to the GDR see Hans Joachim Teichler, ed., *Sport in der DDR: Eigensinn, Konflikte, Trends*, Bundesinstitut für Sportwissenschaft, (Bergisch-Gladbach: Sport und Buch Strauß GmbH, 2003).

socialism over a revanchist West,<sup>113</sup> while the FRG remained confused about continued East German success despite clear economic and political superiority in the West.<sup>114</sup> Even more importantly, sports were some of the few activities through which the state could gain positive international attention in their campaigns for recognition and legitimacy and still have its own populace tune in.<sup>115</sup>

The disaster of the Berlin Wall and loss of citizens fleeing to the West damaged the GDR's image and, with the goal of recognition, the GDR required a redemptive narrative. Thus, it redefined the Wall as a peaceful protective barrier, the FRG as increasingly fascist, and the GDR as a humanitarian state. The peaceful prestige of Olympic success, as well as GDR independence from the FRG also worked to establish the GDR as a distinct state from its more powerful neighbor. The goal of recognition was not achieved until the next period, but it was at this point that the internal evolution of socialism entered the fore. The reforms of Honecker did much to shift GDR identity and legitimacy from an explicit counter-narrative to a more positive construct.

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<sup>113</sup> Gunter Holzweißig, *Diplomatie im Trainingsanzug: Sport als politisches Instrument der DDR in den innerdeutschen und internationalen Beziehungen*, (München, Wien: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1981), 10.

<sup>114</sup> Young, 151.

<sup>115</sup> Young, 153. According to Young, "half of GDR television viewers claimed to watch only major sporting events."



## Chapter 5 Normalization and Challenge, 1972-1979

Similar to the construction of the Berlin Wall, the rise of Erich Honecker to the position of General Secretary of the SED and de facto dictator of the GDR has been seen as a definitive event in GDR history. Despite the major pushes from the GDR to be accepted into the UN, by 1972 it remained an outsider in the international community. This status gradually began to change however, due to the Basic Treaty of late 1972 between the GDR and FRG and the GDR's admittance into the UN. These achievements of recognition, and a new focus on interior conditions, altered the character of the GDR to a state with basic diplomatic security, but with fears of a discontented population at home. To combat this, the SED poured great efforts into raising the amount of consumer goods produced in the GDR for its populace, emphasizing its gender egalitarianism, and its growing concern for environmental degradation.

The German Question was, to the GDR, resolved by 1972 due to the simple fact that there were two German states. In a speech by Honecker, he was emphatic that the "inviolability of the frontiers between the DDR and BDR" (German Federal Republic<sup>116</sup>) would be confirmed by the FRG. Previously, this was made clear at the Eighth Congress of the SED which stated that "[b]etween the socialist DDR and the imperialist BDR there is no unity, and there can be no unity."<sup>117</sup> The harshness of this division was even further reinforced with images of Honecker

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<sup>116</sup> The name Federal Republic of Germany was deliberately not used as an intentional slight to the Federal Republic, who often used derogatory terms such as "the zone" when referring to the GDR. The "zone" was a reference to the earlier Soviet occupation zone of the early postwar period and emphasized the foreign imposition of communism that delegitimized the GDR's government. Even later, the initials 'DDR' were surrounded by apostrophes to demonstrate illegitimacy. For more on language and its relationship to GDR/FRG legitimacy, see Stefan Berger, *Germany, Inventing the Nation*, ed. Keith Robbins, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 211.

<sup>117</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1972, 22-3.

shaking hands with NVA troops amidst artillery pieces, which simultaneously served to emphasize the willing defense of the GDR while subverting the “peaceful coexistence” narrative of earlier years. In December of 1972, *GDR Review* published an article “A Success for the Cause of Peace and Security” discussing the successful conclusion of the Basic Treaty with the FRG, as well as the achievement of membership in the United Nations Organization. In this article, the treaty and membership in the UN were strong steps towards “normalizing the relations between the GDR and the Federal Republic” which was attributed to the work of the people of the GDR with their Western allies and their struggles for peace.<sup>118</sup>



The achievements of basic relations and UN membership paved the way for the GDR to claim the creation of a new political climate. This new phase shifted from the Cold War to “peaceful coexistence” which was “becoming more and more the norm for inter-state relations.”<sup>119</sup> The Basic Treaty and UN membership also led to recognition by Western powers that aided the creation of favorable economic relations as well.<sup>120</sup> The Cold War, however, was not over and the GDR still worked to demonstrate that the peace of this *détente* would not last unless paired with social security. Thus, African women pictured in deplorable states were shown in an article juxtaposed

<sup>118</sup> GDR Rev., XII, 1973, 25-6.

<sup>119</sup> GDR Rev., XII, 1972, VI.

<sup>120</sup> GDR Rev., XI, 1973, 22-3.

with content East Germans where “freedom, equality, dignity and rights” matter even to the starving people who lack the security of a generous welfare state such as the GDR. This metaphor was also pushed to the West with accusations of racial intolerance.<sup>121</sup>

With much of their goals of recognition in hand, the GDR then sought to foster its support at home through greater focus on the consumption of consumer goods in what was termed the “unity of social and economic policy”. The goal in 1972 in the GDR became “everything for the welfare and happiness of the people, for the interests of the working class and the whole of the working population.”<sup>122</sup> This improvement, however, was not to be implemented without “a new demand on the capabilities and initiative of the working people.”<sup>123</sup> In other words, new production demands and ingenuity would be required by the workers. This refocus, emphasized for several issues, demonstrated an internal evolution of socialism, but it also involved a new juxtaposition with the West. In an article, “The Moon and Murder,” *GDR Review* acknowledged the remarkable achievements of Apollo 16, but also displayed the US B-52 bombers dropping explosives on Vietnam. Both of these ventures, it was stated, were piloted by air force pilots that were used as evidence of a “cult of technology in the US” that has not solved social problems such as unemployment, slums, and racism.<sup>124</sup> The GDR however, had focused its ingenuity and focus on improving the lot of workers and their welfare.

Simultaneous with this increase in consumer welfare, the GDR began to emphasize the aspects of its “democracy” that showed it was a mature state committed to a functioning government and a content populace. For example, the question from readers “What is the

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<sup>121</sup> GDR Rev., XII, 1973, UP.

<sup>122</sup> GDR Rev., II, 1972, 18-19.

<sup>123</sup> GDR Rev., V, 1972, 18.

<sup>124</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1972, 38-9.

Essence of Your Democracy and How Does it Work in Practice?” received an explanation of socialist democracy. Socialist democracy, according to *GDR Review* involved a continuing increase of state power and planning, but also “the growth of creative activity by the working people.”<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, these decisions were not simply made by upper government officials, but were instead “publicly discussed during their preliminary phases, thus enabling every individual to contribute his own suggestions and ideas.”<sup>126</sup>

By emphasizing the nominally participatory aspects of their governing, the GDR could demonstrate their state’s legitimacy while also portraying how consumer-oriented production that increased standard of living (the generalized impression of the West) could, in fact, fit within the evolving broader socialist context of state planning and control if given the people’s support. This popular consensus was pushed even further with the notion of a volunteer society. The “socialist personality” and “new human being” who emerged with the true adoption of socialism not only worked hard, but also did “voluntary work for society” involving working in the People’s Chamber, as executives in academic societies, or treasurers in trade unions.<sup>127</sup> More than anything else, the people of the GDR were shown to have not only shifted their identity to become socialists, but also to have developed a genuine stake in a democratic welfare state.

The group of people perhaps most targeted in this time period by GDR propaganda was women. The GDR’s emancipatory rhetoric concerning women’s equality under socialism did not simply appear after 1972. Up until that point there was a steady commentary on a variety of features of women’s experience including working, home life as a working mother, the housework day, and the notion of a female “surplus” in light of the death toll of the German male

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<sup>125</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1972, 27.

<sup>126</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1972, 27.

<sup>127</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1974, UP.

population in the Second World War. What changed in this period, however, was the degree to which women's experiences were emphasized, and how equality received persistent focus despite earlier claims to its de jure and de facto (to an extent) existence. The crux of this new argumentation involved a demonstration of socialist women's equality as existing in fact, as opposed to "the purely formal right" that existed in Capitalist countries. The Socialist-Capitalist binary was also fundamental to these claims of equality because the social pressures in the West often prevented women and mothers from their "right to take a job." *GDR Review* also claimed to be capable of making these judgments due to its former experience of a transition from capitalism to socialism where "many men were at first suspicious about the whole idea of equality for women."<sup>128</sup> Further claims to authority on this topic by *GDR Review* were made by interviewing many different women for these articles, if not actually having female authors write them. The equality in the GDR thus involved "freeing women from the traditional burden of family and domestic duties" through state-funded crèches, workplace lunch services, and participation of men and children in the household.<sup>129</sup> The paradox in this rhetoric, however, was as Dagmar Langenhan and Sabine Roß argued that "the rules associated with the 'family and career model' were focused on women, which meant that traditional gender roles and work patterns were not transformed, but instead, reinforced."<sup>130</sup> Simultaneously, the image of the

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<sup>128</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1972, 8-9.

<sup>129</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1972, 10.

<sup>130</sup> Dagmar and Sabine Roß Langenhan, "The Socialist Glass Ceiling: Limits to Female Careers," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 177-194. For more on this see Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

oppressed West German women entered the conversation as they were treated “as subordinate beings at work, in political life and in the family.”<sup>131</sup>

More complicated markers of women’s equality such as the legalization of abortion and women’s status in higher positions of authority also received attention. In the “Postscript to the Enquiry” on women’s equality, *GDR Review* confronted the challenging claim that women were not often promoted to higher positions or that they were forced to work by labor shortages in the GDR. According to *GDR Review*, the reasons for this were simple: many women were not so concerned about individual progress or promotion and thus often did not reach higher levels in the GDR.<sup>132</sup> However, women with lots of training often desired higher social status so they desired to keep working rather than confine themselves to traditional household roles. This idea, claimed *GDR Review*, “invalidates the argument that material need compels women in the GDR to go out to work.” The magazine acknowledged this also caused problems in the family due to “some old tenacious traditions and habits” despite “preconceived ideas suggesting that women were less suited for this or that kind of work,” but that these had largely been overcome.<sup>133</sup> Women in the GDR were thus presented as existing in a peculiar nexus of true equality, former capitalist prejudices, fulfilling work, and a lack of concern for their own progress.

This curious and confused relationship concerning women’s role in the GDR was a key component in the GDR’s identity counter-narrative, but it lacked true convincing power due to its often contradictory nature. In 1973, *GDR Review* also celebrated the March 9, 1972 law that legalized abortion. The justification for this legalization fit within the broader scheme of

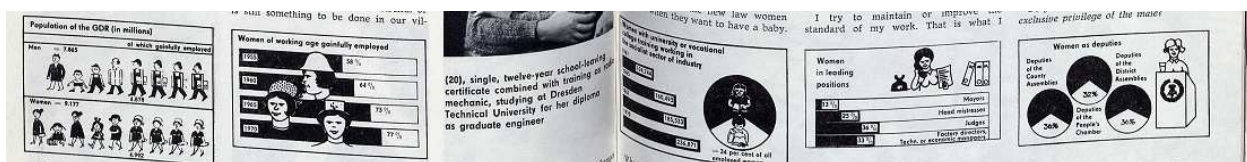
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<sup>131</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1973, 38.

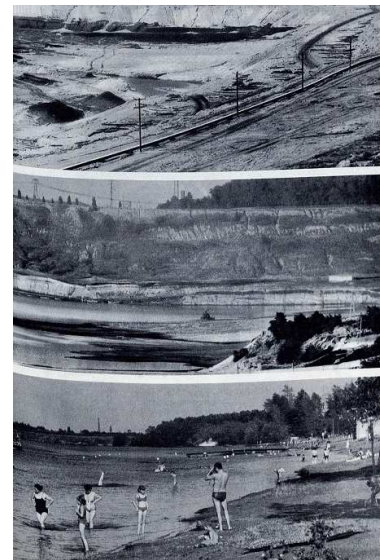
<sup>132</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1973, 40.

<sup>133</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1973, 40.

combining equality with social welfare as the state health care in the GDR also covered abortions.<sup>134</sup> It was also something of a propaganda tool to race the FRG to the legalization of abortion and thus be able to present itself as the continuing heir to all progressive action in German history. Ultimately, women in the GDR were presented as the beneficiaries of the positive direction of socialism and were used as a comparison in social freedom between the two German states.



Another emerging trend in the GDR was to address growing concern over environmental degradation. The remarkable amount of pollutants produced by GDR industrial and chemical production in tandem with the usage of predominantly soft brown coal had severely harmed the environment in the GDR. To combat this knowledge, *GDR Review* produced a series of articles regarding the work to be done to preserve and clean the air, water and soil.<sup>135</sup> The GDR



framed their environmental problems (there was no use denying this) by first stating that all industrial societies have to contend with these issues, but also by shifting blame to a destructive

<sup>134</sup> GDR Rev., IV, 1973, 25-6.

<sup>135</sup> As time went on, the GDR had to confront emerging resistance to its destructive environmental policies. For more on this see Julia Elizabeth Ault, "Contested Space: the Environment and Environmental dissidence in the German Democratic Republic, 1980-1990," (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina: Chapel Hill, 2011).

pre-socialist, uncaring capitalist industrialization, in other words “the GDR has to bear the burden of a sad legacy.”<sup>136</sup> Simultaneous with these discussions, all of the images portrayed factories producing clouds of smoke, clean waterways, and images of corn fields, beaches, and the “recovery” of a lignite mine. These contradictory images provided a scattered view of an environment suffering in the GDR, but also one that was on the mend with the government’s support. The factory spewing smoke was paired with the truck carrying environmental inspectors and wrapped in a guilt-free narrative. This narrative also celebrated the state’s role in controlling pollution to ensure public health while preserving the environment. The GDR advocated international cooperation through the UN in protecting the environment, and further demonstrated its commitment to their programs. The Environmental Conservation Law, of which the GDR was so proud, focused on a program of cooperation and vague “short term measures” that reduced “dust nuisance” from chemical factories.<sup>137</sup> The new concerns of the 1970s paired with the reassurance of recognition developed into an increase in concern over too much conciliation with the West that could gradually undo the efforts at differentiation in East Germany. When confronted with renewed Cold War tensions and an increasingly insolvent economy, the GDR had to once again resort to traditional narratives of antifascism, peace, and social welfare.

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<sup>136</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1972, 58-62.

<sup>137</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1972, 28-9.



## **Chapter 6 Crisis and Dissolution in the 1980s**

The three major concepts of the 1980s that represented the desired identity of the GDR, antifascism, social welfare, and peace/disarmament, were intertwined in the GDR. Each of these contended with crises of economy and Cold War tension both within and outside of the GDR and was fundamental to the state. Antifascism was both a counter-narrative to Western depictions of a dictatorial GDR and the foundation for a socialist Germany that claimed to have broken with the discredited German traditions of authoritarianism, militarism, and capitalism. It legitimated the regime in the eyes of intellectuals through its legacy of resistance and departure from the National Socialist path. The social welfare programs of the GDR were cultivated as a more “offensive” and constructive narrative for the GDR that emphasized the care for citizenry, improvements in life conditions, and the brotherhood of workers in a socialist nation in juxtaposition to the horrors of the German experience of the first half of the twentieth century. Finally, peace, as a core goal in the GDR’s narrative of moral superiority, represented a clean break with German revanchism and the history of National Socialist aggression while displaying the “true” focus of the GDR, the welfare of its citizens.

The rhetoric of antifascism in *GDR Review* during the early 1980s focused on juxtaposing the U.S. and the FRG to the GDR in reference to militarization and response to the existence of neo-fascism (Nazism). One mode of comparison was the military-industrial complex in the U.S. as a motivator to war similar to the falsely-perceived power of German companies under Nazism. This represented a continuation in the Marxist rhetoric that capitalism

drives wars, and US monopolies represent the new forms of IG Farben, etc.<sup>138</sup> Due to its peaceful stance, the GDR and the greater Eastern bloc was presented as the victim of a resurgent and aggressive fascism in the West that an antifascist GDR must guard against. Similarly a major article series from the early 1980s, “The FRG Today,” repeatedly demonstrated the existence of fascism in West Germany as opposed to the clean, antifascist, GDR. Consequently, the FRG was presented as a haven for former (and possibly current!) fascists as juxtaposed with the other articles in *GDR Review* demonstrating the supposedly clean nature of the entirely antifascist GDR. *GDR Review* tried to appeal to audiences that had become aware of Jewish experiences during the Holocaust while remaining within the pre-existing official paradigm of an East German antifascist legacy. The atrocities committed on the Jewish community represented a particularly difficult scenario for traditional GDR antifascism, as “the holocaust raises troubling general questions, since it demonstrates that race hatred can supersede class struggle.”<sup>139</sup>

One article, entitled “The FRG Today: Full Scope for Organised Neo-Fascism,” discussed the toleration of the FRG for neo-Nazi and fascist organizations. Next to the title was a *Reichsadler*, a German imperial eagle demonstrating the continuity of the FRG with Germany’s authoritarian past. Next, a newspaper clipping from the October 14, 1977 issue of *Deutsche National Zeitung* was shown claiming that the burning of the Jews was a lie and asking if Hitler will come again. Paired with the first line of the article: “The world public is watching with growing alarm the spreading proliferation of neo-nazi and openly fascist tendencies in the FRG,” this shows that the GDR was deliberately trying to present the FRG as increasingly

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<sup>138</sup> GDR Rev., VIII, 1981, 63-4.

<sup>139</sup> Konrad Jarausch, “The Failure of East German Antifascism: Some Ironies of History as Politics,” *German Studies Review*, Vol. 14, I, 90.

dangerous in this period as opposed to the antifascist GDR.<sup>140</sup> The reality of skinhead youth movements within the GDR were not discussed because, with their oppositional opinions and violent activities against non-Germans in the GDR (such as third-world students studying at universities) they were not a factor in a narrative calculated for international appeal.<sup>141</sup>

A major section of the article was about the FRG's toleration of two new neo-nazi parties formed in 1980, the *Nationalsozialistische Demokratische Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP – the same initials as the Nazi Party) and the *Vokssozialistische Bewegung Deutschlands/Partei der Arbeit*. There was a picture of a rally of the NPD with a sign that the “whole” of Germany should exist. This, consequently, was a criticism of the official stance of the FRG regarding the GDR when juxtaposed with the position of neo-nazis. The organizations were termed “Neo-fascist” by *GDR Review* and were presented with pictures of young members holding flags at night (with a caption drawing a direct comparison to the Hitler Youth) next to photos of the American Nazi party in SA gear and a Jewish cemetery marred with spray-painted swastikas. The rest of the article discussed how these groups are allied across the Atlantic Ocean and this showed how the FRG, unlike the GDR, had not accepted the past despite how “great talk is made about ‘making amends’, ‘democratic education’ and a ‘constitutionally governed state’ in the Federal Republic of Germany.”<sup>142</sup>

One example of a later 1980s antifascism article was titled “Is the far right ‘legitimate’?” In it, pictures of large protests with signs asking “January 30 ‘33/’89, Nothing learned?,” a woman swarmed by three police officers in a crowd and a man getting hit in the face by another

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<sup>140</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1981, 58-61.

<sup>141</sup> Gideon Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement: The Development of a ‘National Opposition’ in East Germany,” *Contemporary European History* 21, 4, (September 2012): 558-9.

<sup>142</sup> GDR Rev., I, 1981, 58-61.

were all meant to demonstrate the renewed fascist violence in the FRG. These photographs presented a clear division between the West German people, who wanted to recognize the past and eliminate neo-Nazis and the state police whose acts of violent oppression put down the demonstrations. This article questioned the legitimacy of the election of Republicans to some State Assemblies. The article states that Republican groups drew young people and were based on attacking foreigners, Jews, and communists. However, rather than this violent rhetoric, the Republicans on the far right (presented as neo-Nazis) were elected because they claimed to be able to solve the problems of “mass unemployment, the housing shortage, the education crisis, the lack of training possibilities, drug abuse and crime.” Furthermore the article stated that neo-Nazism was still a major issue that could not be solved unless the FRG adopted the same model of antifascism promoted by the GDR.<sup>143</sup> The images thus showed that the West Germans were unhappy with the election, but paired with the text, made the reader wonder if the West Germans were in fact unhappy with their living conditions in the “increasingly deplorable state of affairs in the FRG and West Berlin.” The images of state repression paired with textual references to the FRG’s defense of neo-Nazism evoked the image of a Federal Republic lacking democratic legitimacy (a mirroring effect of the GDR’s goals for legitimacy). In the later 1980s antifascism was less confrontational in *GDR Review*. This lessening of confrontation did not mean that the GDR abandoned its rhetoric. Instead, antifascism was gradually brought into relation with the social welfare and peaceful motives of the GDR in juxtaposition with the FRG. Furthermore, articles on antifascism in general became less common and significantly shorter.

In the early 1980s the construction of more and new housing was a major issue in GDR society. In a society of social welfare and care for the common man, a lasting housing shortage thirty years after the founding of the GDR was a core threat to GDR legitimacy. To combat this

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<sup>143</sup> GDR Rev., IV, 1989, 29.

impression, *GDR Review* argued housing demand was increasing too fast due to “the desire of many, including older people, for high-quality living accommodation. Today people are less satisfied than they were with what their parents or grandparents thought of as more than adequate.”<sup>144</sup> In response, the GDR discussed how “hundreds of thousands, even millions, of GDR citizens will be able to move into a new home over the next five years.”<sup>145</sup> One of the major issues with the housing campaign initiated at the Eighth Party Congress of 1971 was the restoration of increasingly run-down buildings in the older town centers.

One article entitled “A New Lease of Life for Old Houses: Plans and Problems of Socialist Construction in the GDR” examined that exact problem in the town of Erfurt. Two photographs were placed on the front page of the article to demonstrate the construction process.

One showed a crumbling brick framework and a partially deconstructed building while on the other page a very pleasant residential neighborhood with restored facades was presented.<sup>146</sup> The article stated that the delay in the housing program that began in 1971 was due to the need to create a “viable economy” and to erase the legacy of capitalism,



such as “the housing shortage, inadequate sanitary facilities...and the dilapidated and dingy dwellings in many residential areas.”<sup>147</sup> Other photographs in the article showed outdoor construction of bathroom extensions added on to the buildings or the courtyards inside

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<sup>144</sup> GDR Rev., VII, 1981, 56.

<sup>145</sup> GDR Rev., VII, 1981, 56.

<sup>146</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1981, 2-3.

<sup>147</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1981, 4.

prefabricated houses. The large and emphasized photograph at the end of the article showed the restored city center of Erfurt that was “modernised” in the 1970s. This photograph showed mostly attractive buildings with their traditional facades still largely intact.<sup>148</sup> The article presented the GDR building campaign as having made great progress and was aimed at a very positive forward trajectory. However, prefabricated housing was much cheaper than renovation and the need to take a “realistic approach” to the modernization hinted at issues with restoring the older buildings. A particularly telling phrase was that each house needed to be “waterproof and warm...have a bathroom and toilet and the structural fabric of the building must be guaranteed for the next 20 or 30 years.”<sup>149</sup> The GDR was primarily concerned with basic housing and simple restorations, which often caused issues with maintaining historical facades or keeping pace with the rising standards of the inhabitants. Lore Uhlmann mentioned this in her reflective editorial on the fall of the Berlin Wall when she discussed how *GDR Review* failed to present the “increasing dilapidation of buildings, particularly in the old town centres of which only a few have been restored.”<sup>150</sup>

The building program in the later 1980s adopted a much different tone from the triumphalist and forward-looking representations of the early 1980s. For instance, in an article entitled “The Path of Stones: Building in Rostock,” photographs of prefabricated buildings dominated much of the article with only a limited amount of depiction of the restored facades of the town center.<sup>151</sup> According to the article, the building of many homes quickly came at the cost of “the neglect of buildings in the town centre. Necessary repairs were postponed. This was

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<sup>148</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1981, 6-7.

<sup>149</sup> GDR Rev., X, 4.

<sup>150</sup> GDR Rev., XI-XII, 1.

<sup>151</sup> GDR Rev., IV, 1989, 2-10.

unavoidable.”<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, parts of the town center had to be demolished and were beyond saving. One small photograph showed a very run-down neighborhood with peeling and stained facades that was set up to be destroyed and rebuilt. Thus, the presentation of Rostock was of a work in progress that has caused sacrifices in some areas, rather than a simple solution. This complicates the earlier version presented by *GDR Review* and is representative of a softening of the hard ideological propaganda of the early 1980s.

The discussion of environmental protection and treatment in the GDR in the later 1980s was particularly interesting. One article, named “Spring Cleaning a River Bed,” discussed the actions of a League of Culture group in Erfurt that decided to clean the Little Gera a rivulet in a former foundation pit. The photographs accompanying the article alternated between showing pleasant nature scenes marred by trash and young people gathering garbage and walking down the concrete beds of the rivulet. These photographs showed a somewhat barren landscape with lots of concrete, industrial machinery in the background, and even some prefabricated housing.<sup>153</sup> The tone of the article was celebratory and playful, discussing how a group of responsible young adults (80 people) gathered to clean the rivulet and encountered various civilian refuse that the article claimed was “evidence of some near-by residents having renounced their responsibility for a piece of environment before their front-doors by using the river as a dump.”<sup>154</sup> The article presented the group’s activities as a contractual commitment made necessary because mechanized cleaning was too difficult and paid manual cleaning too expensive. Thus, the Society for Nature and Ecology, a branch of the League of Culture, assisted

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<sup>152</sup> GDR Rev., IV, 1989, 8.

<sup>153</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1988, 31-4.

<sup>154</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1988, 32.

with the cleaning by volunteering with the local city council to argue their case for cleaning and planting additional trees.<sup>155</sup> The pictures and article told an important story, because the environment was a major concern of large groups in the GDR that were dissatisfied with the pollution caused by heavy industry. The article showed an official group with largely young members channeling their passions into a safe and non-critical (of the state) activity.

Furthermore, the article's emphasis on civilian refuse and the necessity of environmental protection on the individual level showed that the state was not responsible for the destruction of the environment. As was seen before, the environmental degradation of the GDR was due to its heavy industry developed over the course of time and the increasingly deplorable state of the environment eventually became a core part of the dissent against the SED as crises mounted in the 1980s.

In stark contrast to this portrayal is another article entitled "Natural Resources" that showed a slag dump right next to a bush in bloom. The harsh juxtaposition and jarring nature of the picture was not matched by the article. Instead, the article discussed that although the destructive nature of industry on its environment was unfortunate, the resources extracted were necessary. Indeed, as the Soviet Union decreased oil deliveries to the Eastern bloc, GDR reliance on domestic resources became even more extreme. Thus, the prime resource the article discussed was lignite (brown coal) that was an essential energy source for East Germans throughout the country's existence.<sup>156</sup> The brown coal was much more harmful to the environment than coal of superior quality or Soviet oil, which was harshly demonstrated in the photograph. In fact, it was this brown coal which produced large amounts of sulfur dioxide that

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<sup>155</sup> GDR Rev., VI, 1988, 31-3.

<sup>156</sup> For more on this see Andre Steiner, *The Plans that Failed: An Economic History of the GDR*, trans. Ewald Osers, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).



caused acid rain and respiratory problems for GDR citizens. These negative effects could have been limited through filtering, but was not due to overwhelming focus on production standards in the GDR rather than on health and welfare in the 1980s.<sup>157</sup> The article focused instead on how the areas could be reclaimed and used for farms later or turned in to recreation areas such as the Senftenberg Lake area.<sup>158</sup> The environmental destruction was thus couched in a more positive impression of a custodial state working to preserve its resources. This narrative related to a broader identity and demonstrated community involvement in cleaning and preserving nature, which was constructed to counter known environmental issues in the GDR that despite obvious degradation were kept officially as state secrets.<sup>159</sup>

The most frequent and recurring topics of *GDR Review* in the early 1980s were peace and disarmament. The specific topics varied, but all tended to be in the categories juxtaposing social welfare vs. rearmament, fears of the end of détente, and nuclear disarmament. The GDR presented itself as very much in favor of peace and continually mentioned their desire to prevent a war from starting on German soil ever again. To this end, *GDR Review* continually emphasized its support of the increasingly powerful peace movement in Western Europe and the FRG specifically. *GDR Review* portrayed these various topics within the umbrella of peace through specific article series such as “In the Name of Life Stop the Arms Race,” etc. but also with “news” coverage of global protests over NATO placement of medium-range nuclear weapons in the FRG and the development of the neutron bomb.

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<sup>157</sup> Daniel Charles, “East German Environment Comes into the Light,” *Science* 247, no. 4940, (January 1990): 274.

<sup>158</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1988, 62-3.

<sup>159</sup> Daniel Charles, “East German Environment Comes into the Light,” *Science* 247, no. 4940, (January 1990): 274.

An interesting recurring piece in *GDR Review* displayed the cost of the Cold War and rearmament through the expense of individual military weapons and their monetary equivalent in social and economic goods. Within each of these segments there was a picture showing first the American or West German military product, then a picture of a social good that those funds could sustain. For instance, one article showed a KC-10A transport and refueling plane that cost thirty-four million dollars to build or enough for 2,720 jobs in the health services and displayed the daily cost of rearmament as more than 500,000 million dollars yearly.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, an Alpha Jet (FRG fighter) cost twenty million D-Marks, or enough for 180 three-room flats. The article continued to discuss how the company profiting from this cost was Dornier, which “was one of the main producers of bombers for the fascist militarists.”<sup>161</sup> The costs of rearmament and “aggression” were thus presented as directly counter to the social welfare advocated by the peaceful GDR, who instead of paying for militaries builds schools. No mention was made of the GDR military contribution to the Warsaw Pact; instead the Soviet Union was portrayed as the defender of Eastern Europe. The GDR gained additional fuel to criticize the NATO military modernization campaign beginning in 1979 and in to the 1980s due to the Western public’s protest against this dramatic increase in war materials. These conventional weapons and materials were often as unpopular, if less publicized, than the placement of the medium-range nuclear missiles, the SS-20s.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> GDR Rev., VIII, 1981, 15.

<sup>161</sup> GDR Rev., III, 1981, 11.

<sup>162</sup> Annie P. Baker, “The U.S. Armed Forces and the Development of Anti-NATO Protests in West Germany, 1980-1989,” in *GIs in Germany: The Social, Economic, Cultural, and Political History of the American Military Presence*, eds. Thomas W. Maulucci, Jr. and Detlef Junker, (New York: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2013), 311.

The peace movement of the 1980s emphasized the necessity of renewing negotiations, stopping the neutron bomb, removing medium-range missiles from the FRG, and on finding ways to renew détente. In one article entitled “for a Secure Peace – Against NATO’s Intensified Arming,” *GDR Review* began using the rhetoric of “Europe” to demonstrate a common identity separate (for the FRG and Western Europe) from the USA. To that end, *GDR Review* chronicled local meetings of citizens declaring “we will devote our strength to forcing the repeal of the ominous NATO missile decision, which threatens the lives not only of all peoples in Western Europe [sic].”<sup>163</sup> The focus of the peace campaigns depicted in this article was the US and NATO’s deployment of new US missiles in Western Europe. The photographs in the article emphasized the protests in the FRG in Potsdam and Bonn. Protesters criticized the stationing of US rockets in Europe and advocated for peace through both conventional and nuclear disarmament. These photographs showed large groups of people from the very young children to elderly West Germans.<sup>164</sup> Interestingly, the GDR emphasized these spontaneous protests in the FRG and Western Europe, but made no mention of the pre-existing Soviet medium-range missiles that had been stationed in Eastern Europe in the mid-1970s.<sup>165</sup> According to Thomas Rochon, the peace movements in the early 1980s in Western Europe did, in fact, criticize the placement of Soviet missiles in central Europe, but the majority of the demonstrations were arranged “in an unsuccessful effort to persuade their governments to reverse their decisions.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1981, 19.

<sup>164</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1981, 18-21.

<sup>165</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 227. This book examines the political and military conditions of the Euro missile standoff of the early-mid 1980s.

<sup>166</sup> Thomas R. Rochon, *Mobilizing for Peace: The Antinuclear Movements in Western Europe*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), xvi. For more information on the peace movements throughout Europe in the early 1980s see this monograph. It focuses on the creation of the movements and their political activities.

The large protests which occurred throughout Western Europe often proposed destabilizing questions about maintaining membership in NATO and the continuing validity of the Cold War alliance system.<sup>167</sup>

In contrast to the unofficial West German protests, the GDR sponsored specific peace demonstrations against the US nuclear expansion to Western Europe. An article commemorating World Peace Day in the GDR in 1981 entitled “Halt the NATO Warmongers! Stop US Nuclear Arms Escalation!,” was accompanied by numerous photographs showing a march for peace, disarmament, and the end of neutron

bomb research. Young children of the FDJ (Free German Youth) made posters and sung in a concert for peace, while more photos showed workers meeting to discuss what they can do to advocate peace. The text declared that the Soviets had continually offered peace



and disarmament options to the FRG, but were rejected.<sup>168</sup> These September 1<sup>st</sup> demonstrations showed that the people “expressed their contentment at being able to live in a socialist state in which the maintenance of peace and the social well-being of all citizens are the top priorities.”<sup>169</sup> No mention was made of any unofficial peace movements within the GDR. Thus, the unofficial

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<sup>167</sup> Lou Marin, “GIs Under Siege: The German Peace Movement Confronts the U.S. Military,” in *GIs in Germany: The Social, Economic, Cultural, and Political History of the American Military Presence*, eds. Thomas W. Maulucci, Jr. and Detlef Junker, (New York: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2013), 332.

<sup>168</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1981, 18-19.

<sup>169</sup> GDR Rev., X, 1981, 20.

nature of the protests in the FRG and Western Europe was of particular significance because it demonstrated that the West German people felt isolated from their government that supported the stationing of the US Pershing missiles, while the GDR preferred peace and the welfare of its citizens in official demonstrations.

The late 1980s continued the trend of peace demonstrations in the FRG in juxtaposition to the peaceful intentions of the Soviets and the GDR. In an article published concerning the West German protests prior to President Ronald Reagan's visit to West Berlin on June 12, 1987 entitled "'Freedom and Peace' – As They See It" West Germans were shown protesting nuclear weapons, and the Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars). An interesting series of photographs showed first a peaceful demonstration, then riot police attacking piles of unarmed civilians, and finally a man being carried away in a stretcher towards an ambulance. The article stated that most West Berliners want peace and disarmament, but "those who are normally so quick to preach or dictate to others on questions of freedom and democracy found this democratic expression of the people's will most unwelcome" and sent police in to break up the demonstration.<sup>170</sup> The harsh repression of the people's desire for peace in the FRG was even more forcefully emphasized given the speech of President Reagan that "called into question the existing state boundaries in Europe."<sup>171</sup> Ironically, the GDR's continued coverage of these protests in Western Europe opened themselves up to pacifist criticism and, as the crises mounted, "caught between its pacifist rhetoric and militarist practice, the SED reacted nervously."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> GDR Rev., VII, 1987, 34-5.

<sup>171</sup> GDR Rev., VII, 1987, 34. This speech of June 12, 1987 included the famous line: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

<sup>172</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 36-37.

The 1980s in the GDR were a period of some of the great heights of GDR legitimacy as well as a confrontation with some of its greatest challenges. The increasing closeness with West Germany (*Annäherung*) despite the increased tensions of the Cold War threatened the demarcation of a distinct German state that the ruling Communist Party in Germany had worked to achieve (*Abgrenzung*). Antifascism once again rose as a powerful differentiating factor in East German rhetoric even as the social welfare promises of the 1970s gradually paled in comparison to the wealth of the GDR's western neighbor. Even the impression of the GDR as the peaceful German state began to lose legitimate standing. All of these features culminated in an increasingly desperate attempt to develop both a defensive counter-narrative to the crises in the GDR as well as an offensive narrative against fascism and militarism in the FRG, but showed a gradually evolving socialism that could no longer maintain an existence that lacked popular support and Soviet backing as the revolutions of 1989 shocked the world. East German identity had been created in an ideal form, but it had not convinced its own people or the world community of its legitimacy, and, due in large part to the crises of the 1980s, the GDR fell.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

The German Democratic Republic was a highly conflicted state. This simultaneously dictatorial and welfarist state produced an array of representations of an official identity for a society that lacked clear legitimacy. Cynicism towards any claim made in a publication such as *GDR Review* would have been remarkably easy. However, a more critical examination of these identity representations produces meaning within these official productions that help to identify a much broader trend in GDR history. Ultimately, the GDR aspired to have an internationally legitimate and economically thriving antifascist welfare state of socialists living in peace. To achieve this goal, the GDR produced publications of cultural diplomacy, such as *GDR Review*, that presented a particular East German identity through a defensive counter-narrative to Western conceptions of the GDR and an offensive and idealized presentation of socialist society. However, this publication and identity narratives “painted a picture of the GDR which did not encompass all aspects of the reality.”<sup>173</sup> These frequent misrepresentations or alterations presented a more perfect GDR in a narrative tailored for international public appeal.

The four developmental periods used in this analysis reflect common divisions within GDR history. This chronological approach offers a developmental understanding of an official GDR identity through a dual-process of a “defensive” counter-narrative to the presentation of the GDR coming from the West and an “offensive” narrative of a developing socialism. Perhaps the best way to understand the relationship between these “offensive” and “defensive” narratives is through a mirroring process. More concretely, the East German counter-narrative often mirrored

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<sup>173</sup> GDR Rev., XI-XII, 1989, 1.

the Federal Republic in a Cold War context by responding to issues that would have been known in the West, such as the construction of the Berlin Wall, the Prague Spring, the repression of religion, and one-party control and seeking to re-narrate their pre-existing Western presentation to make the GDR seem better. This mirroring process, however, was not simply one-sided. Instead the GDR looked to the FRG to find ways to shift its own identity narrative to be seen as more progressive, even while also re-interpreting less favorable events in its own state and bloc to seem like Western sabotage or normal events. For instance, anti-fascism could serve both an offensive and defensive purpose in the German “mirror.” On the one hand, anti-fascism, as a core belief of the GDR, established at least a baseline of legitimacy as it attempted to demonstrate a clear break with the Nazi past in a new society. On the other hand, by accusing the FRG of maintaining fascist influence the GDR worked to discredit antagonistic claims made by the West against the East and diminish the immediate Western association of the two German dictatorships. The mirror ultimately shattered as the GDR began to approach economic failure and a receding Soviet Union retreated to its own troubled state. East Germans, who had long ago understood their material deficit vis-a-vis their Western counterparts, recognized their own lack of personal political identification with the regime, its narrative, and ultimately their nation.

In its early stages, *GDR Review* portrayed their original legitimacy narrative of comparative anti-fascism, the construction of a benevolent welfare state, and the GDR as a “normal” state among modern nations. Later, from 1961-1971, the GDR refocused to campaign for recognition by other states simultaneous with the complications of the Berlin Wall and increasingly confrontational Cold War. To that end, the GDR promulgated a “defensive” narrative of FRG antagonistic provocation, and an “offensive” narrative about the morally superior socialist society. Supposedly, the GDR belonged as a legitimate member of the



international community due to its adherence to international conventions and a dedication to peaceful coexistence. Next, from 1972-1979, the GDR felt increasingly normal and secure having obtained recognition from many Western nations, and continued to develop its narrative of moral superiority to the FRG through women's equality and environmental protection while integrating economic aims of improving the production of consumer goods and leisure time. Finally, in 1980-1989 the GDR was confronted with increasingly severe crises including economic struggle and a renewed Cold War. To combat these scenarios, *GDR Review* worked to rekindle the antifascist flame of earlier periods and emphasize its peaceful aims as it worked to provide for its people through standard of living increases.

Many of the above themes maintained some form of presence throughout the course of the magazine, but the developmental structure shown here focuses on their relative weight and the theme's particular usage within broader goals that the SED had for their own legitimacy through representations of their state's and people's identity. The GDR craved legitimacy both to maintain its own existence in the international world, but also as a means to assure a peaceful Europe and world. Both Germanys faced a unique burden during the Cold War due to their placement at the center of the international divide. If war were to break out, the GDR knew it would be fought on German soil.

The stakes were high for East Germany and a redeeming narrative construction was essential to garner some degree of Western support. They sought to establish a legitimate separate identity in juxtaposition with its more rich and powerful neighbor within the greater context of a polarizing Cold War. The claims towards representations of identity made in the various sections of this paper cannot sum up the lived experiences of GDR citizens, their daily reality, or even the "message" of the state in its entirety. However, it can begin to speculate that

the nearness of the FRG, not only geographically through kinship and media, but also in the mirroring effect in the creation of a GDR counter-narrative of legitimacy prevented any kind of clear separation between the two Germanys. Indeed, one of the great ironies, perhaps, of the “better Germany” is that it had achieved so many of its goals of recognition and established relations with its estranged Western counterpart even as it began to fall apart.<sup>174</sup>

It is fair to speak of East German identity and legitimacy in terms of failure, but it is a legacy of failure that maintains its relevance in German history as the still, comparatively, backward Eastern regions confront the realities of their historical experience. *Ostalgie* certainly glosses over the dictatorial aspects of the GDR, but its memory is often that of more pluralized individual counter-narratives or of alternatives to the often crass consumerism or dehumanized capitalism of the West. One should never forget the *Stasi*, the murders on the Berlin Wall, or the degrading grind of a life lacking true freedom, but, one should accept that, perhaps, there was something in the GDR worth remembering, even if only as a concrete example of an attempt to establish socialism as the great alternative to liberal democracy. Indeed, as the debate rages on in modern Germany over identity and political direction, it becomes important to remember the ambivalent legacy of the German Democratic Republic and to avoid assuming utter irrelevance in failure and complete correctness in triumph.



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<sup>174</sup> Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR, 1945-1989*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992).

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