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The West knows Best: East Germans left behind after Unification

Arwen A. Puteri

University of South Florida

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The West knows Best: East Germans left behind after Unification

by

Arwen A. Puteri

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History
Department of History
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Keywords: German Unification, GDR, Stasi, Socialism

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Dad, Mom, Robert, Sarah, Enno, Pauli: Ich hoffe, meine Arbeit und mein Fleiß haben euch stolz gemacht. Ich bin euch sehr dankbar für alle kleinen und großen Dinge, die ihr im Laufe meines Lebens für mich getan habt und die ultimativ zu meinem Erfolg beigetragen haben.
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GLOSSARY

Alte Bundesländer | Old Federal States of Germany (former West Germany)
Amblemännchen  | Symbol shown on Pedestrian Signals in Germany
Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark. | Film about the Rostock-Lichtenhagen Riots
Amt für Nationale Sicherheit | New name given to Stasi
Arch+ | Quarterly German Magazine for Architecture and Design
Aufbau Ost | Reconstruction of East Germany after Unification
Ballon | Film about an East German Family’s Escape to West Germany
Bauhaus | German Art School from 1919 - 1933
Beitritt | Joining or Annexation
Berlin is in Germany | German Film about East-German Struggles
Berliner Schloß | Berliner City Castle
Berliner Zeitung | Daily Newspaper based in Berlin
Besserwessi | A know-it-all West German
Boat People | Vietnamese Refugees who fled Vietnam by Boat in 1975
Bornholmer Strasse | Film about the Events leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall
Bundeskriminalamt | Federal Investigative Police Agency in Germany
Bundesnachichtendienst | Federal Intelligence Service
Bundesregierung | Cabinet of Germany (chief executive body)
Bundestag | German Federal Government
Czerni | Alleged Stasi Name of Lothar de Maizière
Demokratie Jetzt | East-German Political Movement in 1989
Der Geteilte Himmel | Christa Wolf’s Novel, They Divided the Sky
Der Spiegel | German Weekly News Magazine
Die Zeit | German Weekly News Magazine
Dessau | East-German City
Deutsch-deutscher Literaturstreit | German Literature Dispute (Referring to Christa Wolf’s Literature)
Deutsche Mark | Official Currency of (West) Germany from 1948 - 2002
Die Linke | The Left (democratic socialist political party)
Dresden | East-German City
Erich’s Lampenladen | Erich’s Lamp Shop, Referring to the Palace of the Republic
Fristenregelung | Law permitting Abortion within the first three months of pregnancy
Gastarbeiter | West-German Guestworker
Gläserne Blume | Glass Artwork in shape of a Flower that was located in the Main Hall of the Palace of the Republic
Glasnost  Police and Practice of a Transparent Soviet Government
Haus des Volkes/Kulturhaus Community Center
Humboldt Forum Museum in the new Berlin Palace (Stadtschloß)
Indikationsregelung Law permitting Abortion in case of rape or poor health of mother
Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter Undercover Stasi Agent
Jammerossi A whining East German
Marx-Engels-Platz Former East-German Name for the Schloßplatz
Ministerium für Ministry for State Security or Stasi, East German Secret Police
Staatssicherheit
Moritzburger Group of Vietnamese who studied and stayed in Moritzburg
Nachdenken über Christa T. Christa Wolf’s Novel, The Quest for Christa T.
Neue Bundesländer New Federal States of Germany (former GDR territory)
Neues Deutschland East German Daily Newspaper
Neues Forum East-German Political Movement in 1989
Ostsozialisiert Socialized with East-German Values and Traditions
Palast der Republik Palace of the Republic (Hosted the Volkskammer)
Perestroika Political Movement for the Restructuring of the Soviet Political and Economic System
Plattenbau Building constructed of Prefabricated Concrete Slabs
Red Army Faction West-German Far-Left Militant Organization
Rhineland-Palatinate Cabinet of Germany (executive body)
Go, Trabi, Go German Comedy about Unification
Sonnenallee German Comedy about the GDR
Good Bye, Lenin! German Comedy about events after Unification
Ostalgie The longing for East German Products and Culture
Studio Babelsberg Film Studio in Potsdam, outside of Berlin
Treuhand/Treuhandanstalt Agency established to privatize East German Companies
Rostock-Lichtenhagen Lichtenhagen is a neighborhood in the East-German City Rostock
Solidaritätssteuer Solidarity Tax, applied to West-German taxpayers
Sonnenblumenhaus Vietnamese Residential Home in Rostock
Sozialistischer Realismus Idealized Realistic Art originated in the Soviet Union
Spreewald Gurken Pickles made in the Spreewald Region (East Germany)
Unrechtstaat Unjust State (Referring to the GDR)
Vertragsarbeiter East-German Contract Worker
Volkskammer Unicameral Legislature of the GDR
Was Bleibt Christa Wolf’s Novel “What Remains”
Wirtschaftsnationalismus Economic Nationalism
Wirtschaftsunion Economic Union of East and West Germany
Zone/Ostzone Derogatory Term for East Germany
Zwei-Plus-Vier-Vertrag Treaty that allowed Germany Unification on basis of all Four Powers renouncing their rights in Germany
PEOPLE

Alexander Cammann  German Journalist
Benedict Anderson  Irish Historian and Political Scientist
Bertold Brecht  German Theater Director, Playwriter, Poet
Bruno Friel  German Architect
Burhan Qurbani  German Filmmaker
Christa Wolf  German Author
Christian Schwochow  German Filmmaker
Christiane Peitz  Editor
Daphne Berdahl  American Anthropologist
Detlev Karsten Rohwedder  German Politician and Manager of the Treuhand
Eckhard Jesse  German Political Scientist
Erich Honecker  Preceded by Walter Ulbricht until 1989
Ernest Renan  French Historian, Philologist, Philosopher
Frank Schirrmacher  German Journalist
Fritz Vilmar  Political Science Professor
Gerhard Riege  East-German Law Professor and Politician
Gerlinde Sinn  German Economist
Gregor Gysi  German Attorney, President of the Party of the European Left
Günter Grass  German Novelist, Poet, Playwriter, Illustrator, and Sculptor
Günther Krause  Parliamentary Secretary of the GDR, Negotiated Unification Treaty
Günther Rohrbach  Producer, Founder of the German Film Academy
Hannes Stöhr  German Filmmaker
Hans Scharoun  German Architect
Hans-Werner Sinn  German Economist
Heinrich August Winkler  German Historian
Heinrich Peus  German Politician
Heinz Graffunder  German Architect
Helmut Kohl  German Chancellor during Unification, CDU
Joachim Gauck  German Politician (CDU), President of Germany 2012 - 2017
Jörg Roesler  German Historian
Jürgen Habermas  German Philosopher and Sociologist
Jürgen Kocka  German Historian
Konrad H. Jarausch  American-German Historian
Kurt Hager  East-German Statesman and Chief Ideologist of the SED Party
Leander Haußmann  German Film Director
Lothar de Maizière  German Attorney, Elected Prime Minister of the GDR
Marcel Reich-Ranicki  Literature Critic
Marieke Reimann  German Journalist
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<td>Maximilian Kalkhof</td>
<td>German Journalist and Author</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mikhail Gorbachev</td>
<td>Russian and Soviet Politician, Last leader of the Soviet Union</td>
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<td>Paul Betts</td>
<td>American Historian</td>
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<td>Paul Cooke</td>
<td>Professor of German and Film</td>
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<td>Peter Timm</td>
<td>German Filmmaker</td>
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<td>Pierre Bourdieu</td>
<td>French Sociologist</td>
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<td>Rita Süssmuth</td>
<td>German Politician, President of the German Bundestag</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Havemann</td>
<td>East German Chemist and Dissident</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rudolf Bahro</td>
<td>Philosopher, Author, Political Figure, Dissident from East Germany</td>
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<td>Simon Clarke</td>
<td>British Sociologist</td>
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<td>Thomas Brasch</td>
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<td>Thomas Oberender</td>
<td>Author and Curator, Director of the Berliner Festspiele</td>
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<td>Timothy Garton Ash</td>
<td>British Historian</td>
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<td>Ulrich Greiner</td>
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<td>German Journalist and Literature Critic</td>
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<td>Volker Schlöndorff</td>
<td>German Filmmaker</td>
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<td>Walter Ulbricht</td>
<td>First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, Head of the GDR</td>
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<td>Wolfgang Becker</td>
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<td>Wolfgang Dümcke</td>
<td>German Filmmaker, Producer, Author</td>
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<td>Wolfgang Richter</td>
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<td>Wolfgang Schäuble</td>
<td>German Attorney, CDU, Negotiated the Unification Treaty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>AfD</td>
<td>Alternative für Deutschland</td>
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<tr>
<td>AfNS</td>
<td>Amt für Nationale Sicherheit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BND</td>
<td>Bundesnachrichtendienst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BStU</td>
<td>Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFA</td>
<td>Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAZ</td>
<td>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>Freie Demokratische Partei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany, West Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic, East Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>MfS</td>
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<td>NVA</td>
<td>Film by Leander Haußmann</td>
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<td>Ossi</td>
<td>Short for Ostdeutscher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDS</td>
<td>Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEGIDA</td>
<td>Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SED</td>
<td>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRV</td>
<td>Socialist Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stasi</td>
<td>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trabi</td>
<td>Trabant, East German Car</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wessi</td>
<td>Short for Westdeutscher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZDF</td>
<td>Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ze.tt</td>
<td>Name of an Online Magazine</td>
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<td>ZK</td>
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The East-German euphoria of unification in 1989 and the subsequent transition from a communist to a market economy that had promised West German standards and prosperity in East Germany vanished rapidly. A hastily negotiated unification treaty and emerging West German dominance – in numbers and economic power – resulted in vast unemployment, bankruptcies, and the large-scale collapse of the East German economy. In addition, East-German culture, accomplishments, and experiences were not respected and valued in a unified country that was focused on Western values, languages, and ways of life. With nothing to offer, East Germans became hopeless and resentful and developed a feeling of second-class citizens in their own country that is lasting until the present day.

This dissertation examines how West Germans constantly and consistently disrespected and delegitimized East-German culture and accomplishments in politics, the arts, education, and everyday life. It argues that the work of East Germans and their accomplishments were not evaluated based on their merit but rather on their East-German origin or East-German party affiliation. For that, this dissertation focuses on the narrative of the leading conservative party of the unification chancellor Helmut Kohl, the CDU. Furthermore, it surveys the dominant West-German newspapers that largely contributed to a public scrutinizing and shaming of everything East German. And lastly, it provides a close reading of post-unification German films that illustrate the challenges East German faced when navigating in a new world. Recognizing the
magnitude of this wide-ranging disrespect that is constantly and consistently manifested, provides a counter-narrative of the “Jammerossi” (the whining East German) as East Germans are often berated when complaining about the status quo.
INTRODUCTION

Thirty-one years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, contemporary German citizens are still preoccupied with the contentious dynamics of the unification process.¹ Concerns with geopolitical fractiousness are deeply rooted in German history and still affect the citizens’ present-day attitudes toward a unified nation. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent rejection of socialism was a chance to recover and unify what was perceived to be an “incomplete” nation; yet, despite these actions, social unity between East and West Germans has never been fully realized and a wall still persists as a metaphorical barrier in the minds of many German citizens. After three decades of lacking social unification efforts, questions about the unification process provide a context rife with opportunities for a historical, cultural, and social-studies analysis, because such an analysis can inform the reasons for lingering social disunity between East and West Germans so that this challenging issue may be better understood and potentially remedied.²

In this dissertation, through the evidence of politics, journalism, and the arts, I argue that until the present day, East Germans have been consistently and continually denied legitimacy and respect after unification. Furthermore, East Germans have continued to be othered and excluded in what should have been an integrative and inclusionary unification process. This

¹ Throughout this dissertation I chose the term “unification” instead of “reunification,” as Germany with its current borders, had previously not existed in this form.
othering on a political, social, and cultural level has led to widespread alienation and disaffection of the East Germans in everyday life. Additionally, it led to a turning away from traditional politics in a search for radical political philosophies that seem to restore dignity to the Eastern Germans, such as those propagated by PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), the AfD (Alternative for Germany), and the Neo Nazis (or even a nostalgia as expressed in the strong support for Die Linke). In other words, thirty years hence, the German unification project has remained a very much imperfect and even flawed process that has not been sufficiently and objectively discussed through the lens of East Germans.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, I was nine years old. My positionality, that of German and French nationality/ethnicity and Rhineland-Palatinate regional identification, made me ignorant to the challenges that my fellow Germans were experiencing in East Germany. But this ignorance was – partially – institutionalized. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, my knowledge and therefore, interest, about East Germany was very limited because in school I did not learn anything about East Germany. It was as if the country did not and after 1989 had not existed. My understanding was that West Germans had saved East Germans and that the “communist/socialist” problem was solved. I was also taught that nothing worthy and salvageable came out of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The only occasion I was confronted with anything East German was when we suddenly had one East German girl called Mandy in my class, but nobody interacted with her. In those days, the name “Mandy” was uncommon in West Germany. Mandy, Cindy, or Sandy were all names given in East Germany and displayed my classmate’s Mandy’s otherness. We ended up calling her “Mandel,” the German word for “almond.” I also remember, of course, the lack of “exotic” items in the GDR; when referring to East Germany, the lack of bananas, kiwis, or Hollywood films was always
discussed and a reason to chuckle. This is where my knowledge about the other part of Germany ended. When I moved to Berlin, I started evaluating unification and the East-German condition under a more critical lens. I worked in a restaurant with East and West Germans and noticed that each group mostly associated with their “own.” When I organized a small get together with colleagues, my closest (East-German) friend asked whether I had also invited West Germans. This question seemed odd to me at that time but upon researching how East Germans were – and still are – treated and othered by West Germans after unification, in politics, the arts and entertainment, and in the press, the lingering social disunity of East and West Germans and the resulting “us/them” narrative started to makes sense.

GERMAN UNIFICATION: 1990 - 2000

Shortly after unification, East Germans were often the laughingstock of the nation, because of their dubious portrayal in the entertainment industry. The cinematic representation was crucial, as this was one way of “getting to know” the East German. The widely successful comedy Go, Trabi, Go (1991), which depicts a Saxon family in their unreliable East-German car (the Trabi) on their family vacation to Italy, attracted 1.5 million viewers. The film used clichês and stereotypes to portray the East German as unrefined, naïve, and silly, and therefore, reinforced the notion of the East German as the “other.”³ In a 2019 interview, director Peter Timm recollected how renowned West German producer Günther Rohrbach of Bavaria Film in Munich recruited him for the film that should feature the East German car Trabi (short for Trabant), since it was first appearing on the West German Autobahn and the producer wanted to

³ Go Trabi Go, directed by Peter Timm (1991; Munich, Germany: EUROVIDEO, 2016), DVD.
“introduce” it to the West-German audience.⁴ According to Timm, Rohrbach chose him as director because he had lived in the GDR until he was exiled for his critical evaluation of the system in 1973, suggesting that this would make him the “East Germany” expert on set.⁵ Still, the funding, the production, and the distribution were all West German. Timm furthermore claimed that the main goal of the film was the humanization of the Trabi; the filmmakers did not aim to ridicule East Germans.⁶ However, if the Trabi was utilized as a representation of the East German (since the Trabi was exclusive to East Germany), specific scenes of the films, for instance, when the Trabi is unable to drive over a hill without being pushed or the East German family does not have enough money to pay for a proper hotel accommodation abroad, inevitably make the East German appear inadequate and pitiful. Considering that the Trabi “evokes the unproductiveness, inefficiency, and obsolescence of the GDR industry” it seems impossible to depict the East German in a favorable light.⁷

Lastly, Timm discussed an incident on the Go, Trabi, Go set on October 3, 1990, the day Germany officially united; as a result, some of the East German crew were hugging each other and crying, in fear of the loss of employment in the GDR that their friends and family might face and the general uncertainty of their future. It then appears out of place to produce a film depicting funny East Germans traveling abroad when serious existential concerns were distressing the crew.

Yet, the most astounding and concerning fact is that the film did not generate harsh criticism or dismissal that the German press would have usually delivered.⁸ It was not until 2019,

⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid, 166.
when *Go, Trabi, Go* was re-released in German cinemas in commemoration of the thirtieth year of unification that led Bert Rebhandl to acknowledge in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) that the GDR had been “the prey of jovial ironists” in German film after unification. He claimed that excellent GDR films, such as *Die Architekten*, *Imbiss Spezial*, or *La Villette*, offered a nuanced portrayal of the transformations that occurred in East Germany. These films, however, never became big box-office successes.

After the *Trabi* films in the early 1990s – there were more than one – the interest about anything East Germany faded on the big screen. Quoting film mogul Atze Brauner: *Der Osten stinkt* (The East Stinks). Although by the late 1990s nobody wanted to see any films about the GDR anymore, according to East-German director Leander Haußmann, he still decided to make one that depicted the “survival of little people in the everyday life of the GDR” in an effort to facilitate the communication between East and West Germans. His film *Sonnenallee* in 1999 became the next box-office success that portrayed the East-German “hero” in cinemas. The film attracted 1.8 million viewers and quickly gained cult status in the East-German provinces. Haußmann contributed the success to an East-German “longing for recovering a little bit of identity.” But since the audience followed East-German adolescents in a coming-of-age comedy, on their universal quest for love and acceptance and their interest in music and fashion,

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10 Ibid.
13 *Sonnenallee*, directed by Leander Haußmann (1999; Munich, Germany: Universum Film GmbH, 2018), DVD.
West Germans were also able to identify and somewhat get to know their fellow Germans. Sonnenallee also started what Germans call Ostalgie, the nostalgia for the GDR, specifically its culture and products, that was later reinforced in Good Bye, Lenin!. Considering that Haußmann’s goal was inciting communication between East and West Germans and a general interest about East Germany, Sonnenallee was a success. Although the film received positive reviews overall, critics such as Christiane Peitz accused Haußmann of a false depiction of the GDR and exaggeration.\(^{16}\) Her film review displayed a crusade against the GDR state instead of merely focusing on the storyline, and/or the artistic and technical realization of the film. She started, “[t]he theater has never been too good for lying.”\(^{17}\) When discussing Haußmann’s decision to make a film about young adults, she asserted, “[u]ltimately it is about a country, where actually nobody was allowed to come of age. What other options did the citizen have but that of eternal youth?”\(^{18}\) In wickedness difficult to vanquish, she commented on the actors:

> Only the old (Katharina Thalbach, Henry Hübchen, Ignaz Kirchner) revive something human in the asbestos-contaminated living room-enclosure: the faintheartedness of those, who always just muddled through. Their complicated manner to be in the way of their own lives, forebode what kept the GDR together: not the Berlin Wall, but the smell of barn with its mixture of mediocrity and lack of oxygen.\(^{19}\)

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.
\(^{19}\) Ibid.

As seen in Atze Brauner’s and Peitz’s comments, the bad smell or the derogatory term “mief” (“stink”) of the GDR is recurrently used by West Germans to describe the GDR (this is further identified in the ensuing chapters of this dissertation).
Peitz’s quest to devalue the GDR and ultimately, the product of an East German, did not end with this criticism. In another article, reviewing Haußmann’s film *NVA*, she dismissively stated, “[t]he GDR fairy tale uncle ran out of narrative power,” discrediting the East German, too.\(^2^0\)

In the 1990s, demeaning East-German productions was a common practice. Films made by the East-German film academy *DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft)*, such as *Herzsprung* (1992) or *Stein* (1990/1991) that in a sensible manner covered topics about the existential crises of East Germans after unification and, therefore, offered East Germans a voice, were not promoted; on the contrary, influential West-German filmmaker Volker Schlöndorff called *DEFA* films “*furchtbar*” (terrible) and since he had the authority as the CEO of Studio Babelsberg, dismissed the *DEFA* legacy by eliminating its name.\(^2^1\) He furthermore claimed that he watched *DEFA* films during his studies in Paris just to laugh about them.\(^2^2\) After his assertion caused controversy, he wrote a statement “not relativizing, apologizing, or distancing himself” from his “casual remark” but rather asking why such fuss was created that only “GDR nostalgics” would concern themselves with.\(^2^3\)

The *DEFA* ceased to exist in 1992 when the *Treuhandanstalt* (a federal agency founded to privatize East-German companies owned by the state) sold its studios to a French conglomerate. Nonetheless, that *DEFA* films have merit is confirmed by their recent boom in Germany, where the films are regularly broadcasted on television, featured at festivals, and sold


\(^{22}\) Ibid.

on DVD. Even the Museum of Modern Art in New York City showcased DEFA films during the “Rebels with a Cause: The Cinema of East Germany” retrospective in 2005.  

Immediately after unification, the press focused dominantly on the Stasi involvement of major East-German politicians, artists, and intellectuals. A myriad of articles in every major newspaper and magazine such as the Frankfurter Allgemeine, Der Spiegel, or Die Zeit, discussed the Stasi involvement of key figures and furthermore used their mostly speculative conclusions in order to discredit East-German accomplishments and expertise often solely based on allegations and assumptions. Journalist Evelyn Finger wrote in her 2003 article, “Does anyone remember the arm-thick Stasi files that one threw around in the early 90s?” This obsessive concern with the Stasi was not shared with East Germans to the same extent. On December 29, 1991, the new Stasi Files Law (Stasi Unterlagen Gesetz) allowed for the public to review their Stasi files that the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic (Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, BStU) provided. Interestingly, until today, approximately three million people have requested their files; a number that is described as “great interest” on the BStU’s website. However, considering that in 1989 the GDR had about sixteen million citizens, three million does not seem great in comparison. Evaluating the extensive Stasi coverage in the media, it seems as if West Germans were more invested in discovering the Stasi involvement of East Germans than the East Germans themselves.

Another pressing issue largely covered in the media was the mismanagement of East-German companies by the Trustee Agency (Treuhandanstalt or short Treuhand), an agency established in 1990 by the Volkskammer aimed to privatize all of the government owned companies. The idea of such an agency was born out of the desire that Eastern capital would not fall in the hands of West-German or international investors and that jobs would be saved.\textsuperscript{27} However, when the Treuhand dissolved in 1994, it had liquidated 3,718 out of 13,815 companies and from 4.1 million workers only 1.2 million remained.\textsuperscript{28} In the two years after unification, the East-German GDP shrank more than 40\%.\textsuperscript{29} Instead of restructuring and rehabilitating East-German companies to make them survive in a competitive capitalist market, the people in charge caused the collapse of the East-German economy.

Economist Wolfgang Dümcke and professor of political science Franz Vilmar used the phrase “colonization of [the East-German] economy” to describe the “deindustrialized and structurally broken system” in their work \textit{Colonization of the GDR}.\textsuperscript{30} False speculations, misjudgment, false investments, negligence, and of course, personal greed caused the destructive deindustrialization of East Germany that even the federal government was not always able to detect or prevent. Instead, many journalists investigated on their own and published their findings in newspapers. In a 1994 document, delegate Dr. Fritz Schumann asked the \textit{Bundesregierung} to confirm twenty-five allegations of criminal action between

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.  
\end{flushleft}
individuals/companies and the Treuhand that were previously released by the press. Dr. Schumann separately itemized all twenty-five cases with the respective press listed in parentheses. The Berliner Zeitung, Handelsblatt, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Neues Deutschland, WirtschaftsWoche, Die Welt, metall, taz, Der Morgen, Tagesspiegel, Junge Welt, Die Woche im Bundestag, and Der Spiegel were among the newspapers that had released information about such suspicious or criminal activity.

This exemplifies the extensive interest of people that was further incited when Treuhand manager, Detlev Karsten Rohwedder, was shot and killed in April 1991. Although the Red Army Faction (a West-German far-left militant organization) claimed responsibility, the murderer was never found and many theories, for instance, suggesting the former Stasi members as perpetrator, remain. Over the years, Rohwedder’s death continued to preoccupy Germans, for instance, when the German Federal Office of Criminal Investigation (Bundeskriminalamt) reopened the case in 2001 when new methods for DNA analysis identified evidence, or in 2020, when Netflix broadcasted their documentary series A Perfect Crime that discussed Rohwedder’s assassination.

Similarly, in the early 1990s, scholarship predominantly focused on the turbulent economic unification of Germany, as the economic transition caused ample commotion in Germany but also influenced international markets, for instance, through the external value of the Deutsche Mark. Hans-Werner Sinn and his wife Gerlinde Sinn, both economists and

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professors, have extensively written about the economic transformation of Germany after unification and the errors made that caused the deindustrialization of East Germany. Hans-Werner Sinn assessed that one of the dominant problems occurred during wage negotiations. Disturbingly, West-German employee’s associations and East-German unions – advised by West-German unions – negotiated East-German wages, which resulted in the adjustment of East-German wages to West-German standards within only five years.\textsuperscript{34} This was theoretically a favorable outcome for the East Germans, but it was practically motivated to avoid putting West-German jobs in jeopardy and ultimately resulted in a less competitive East-German market, since companies and factories needed extensive repairs and restructuring. As an economist, Sinn offered specific measures to reform the broken system.

Many politicians, artists, or scholars, for instance, Gregor Gysi, Günter Grass, Jürgen Habermas, spoke against the rapid pace of unification and had offered alternatives. In 1990, shortly before the negotiation for the unification treaty began, German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas specifically criticized federal chancellor Helmut Kohl for wanting “West Germany to become the master of the [unification] process” and for delegitimizing the GDR opposition that had sought to alter structures internally.\textsuperscript{35} These oppositional groups, according to Habermas, were invested in self-determination and self-stabilization.\textsuperscript{36} Habermas furthermore accused the \textit{Bundesregierung} of “economic nationalism” (\textit{“Wirtschaftsnationalismus”}) that was guided by “politics of a fast hand” and “fait-accompli


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
politics” that would hinder East Germans time to reflect on their self-determination. Habermas maintains this position today.

With little temporal distance, German-American historian Konrad H. Jarausch tackled the hastiness of unification in his work The Rush to German Unity, published in 1994. He rightfully stated that because of the hasty events and the people’s euphoria, Germany was “overreported and underanalysed.” In his work, Jarausch contextualized the peaceful revolution and specifically discussed a third way option, a reforming of the GDR, that had gained momentum in East Germany and even found supporters in the West. When this idea failed and the GDR joined West Germany, conflict between both sides occurred due to specific solutions put in place, for instance, the Aufbau Ost (“Construction East”) program. Amongst other initiatives, the Aufbau Ost program introduced a solidarity tax of 7.5% that was added to the West-German income tax. This additional tax created resentment on the West-German side. Jarausch’s work explained the broader context of the rushed unification process; however, as this was written so shortly after unification, certain patterns, such as the consistent and continual denying of East-Germans’ identity and accomplishments, were not discussed.

British historian Mary Fulbrook, who has extensively written about German history, paid attention to the radical physical changes East Germans were facing. She claimed that, for instance, new street names, new symbols, and new colors in the cities were unnerving and disorientating for the older population, as this also meant that East Germans had to learn to live with new rules. She also pointed out the shortcomings of unification; like most other historians,

37 Ibid.
39 Ibid, 79.
40 Ibid, 204.
she discussed the Stasi witch-hunt, the rising unemployment in the East, the difficulties women faced in unified Germany, or the purge of the intellectuals. Fulbrook had correctly foreseen that, if social issues would not get resolved and under the premise that international migration would increase, we would see “two Germany nations in one multicultural state.”

When examining the xenophobic attacks that occurred in the East, partially because of unemployed and dissatisfied East Germans, she mistakenly concluded that “large numbers of Germans are prepared to condemn acts of racism and violence” and that “there is a will at the center to stem the tide, to ensure that the historical clock is not turned back.” The large PEGIDA gatherings and the election of the AfD into the Bundestag have illustrated that the number of German bigots or of German xenophobia is increasing (or the search for scapegoats for their current and past problems). The short period of time between unification and Fulbrook’s essay, published in 1994, did not allow sufficient time to examine the evolving relationship between East and West Germans. Three decades later, for example, xenophobic sentiments against foreigners further increased with the large influx of Syrian refugees in Germany, building on a long developing groundswell.

A turning point occurred in 1996, when Wolfgang Dümcke and Fritz Vilmar published a collection of essays that while evaluating the economic shortcomings of unification also discussed the destruction of East-German identity, shifting from the economic hardships to the social disaster of unification. Dümcke and Vilmar’s often-quoted analyses are invaluable, as they boldly coined the unification process as a “capturing-process” (“Vereinnahmungsprozeß”

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42 Ibid, 225.
43 Ibid, 230.
instead of “Vereinigungsprozeß”) and speak of a “colonization of the people.” They define the term “colonization” as: “… a destruction of domestic economic structure, an exploitation of existing economic resources, the social liquidation of the political elite and the intelligence of a country, as well as the destruction of the cultivated – however problematic – identity of the population…”

To prove that such political, economic, and cultural colonization occurred, Dümcke and Vilmar offered empirical evidence that illustrate the structural elements of East-German colonization by the West. Crucial to Dümcke and Vilmar’s work is their call for a “critical appreciation of the socialist achievements.” Dümcke and Vilmar were not referring to the communist/socialist ideology but specific institutions and customs in East Germany that were more progressive than in the West, such as secured day care, abortion rights, the polytechnical school system, and an easier access to cultural events for everyone (including the workers), among other accomplishments. Although this dissertation discusses the consistent and continual denying of legitimacy and respect for East Germans that are in congruence with Dümcke and Vilmar’s assessment, in the following chapters I discuss an imposing of West-German values and way of life, and not, per se, a colonization. While I agree that a take-over occurred, it was not unilateral or forced. In the end, even if East Germans did not predict the ensuing discrimination they would face on a massive scale, or the pervasive dogmatic and swanky talk from the West, they had still negotiated, voted on, and signed the unification treaty. However, Dümcke and Vilmar’s evaluations remain crucial, as they gave legitimacy to East Germans’

45 Ibid.
grievances and pointed out the flaws of unification on the social scale and offered alternatives to the unification process.

In 1997, *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*, a collection of essays edited by Jarausch, discussed the German desire for a shared identity, which postulated a coming to terms with their past(s). In the essay, “The Presence of the Past: Culture, Opinion, and Identity in Germany,” Jarausch, Seeba and Conradt examined the difficult – and seemingly impossible – task of Germans negotiating their past after unification, when they had to confront having (more or less) supported two dictatorships. The authors discussed the public debate, especially the accusatory discourse by the West-German media that was invested in portraying the GDR as an oppressive totalitarian state, accomplished by a witch-hunt against the Stasi and its members. Such condemnation, however, led to the “discrediting of everything East German.” The academic discourse, according to Jarausch, offered more controversy. He differentiated three approaches; the “accusatory camp,” consisting of former opponents of the SED regime, who morally disapproved of the East-German regime based on totalitarian theory, such as that of Hannah Arendt. Just like the press, this condemnation stance rejected everything East German and saw the West-German, democratic way as superior and necessary. The counter narrative, or the “apologists,” saw the GDR in a more favorable light and its ideology in its essence noble, which resulted in downplaying the crimes of the oppressive SED regime and in a distorted view

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49 Ibid.

of capitalism.\textsuperscript{51} The third group of scholars analyzed the GDR through a more objective lens and discussed the “complexities and ambiguities” of the GDR.\textsuperscript{52} Jarausch concluded that the similarities between the discussion after 1945 and unifications were striking.

Jarausch alluded to the West-German dominance and the public condemnation of everything East-German. However, a close account how this disapproval manifested in every day live of East Germans is lacking. German historians Jürgen Kocka and Renate Mayntz described one of these manifestations in their collection of essays that analyze the academic discipline in Germany after the abrupt change of the political regime.\textsuperscript{53} Kocka claimed that after unification more professors and scholars were expelled from university than after the Nazi purge in 1945.\textsuperscript{54} Within five years after unification, 500 East-German professors were replaced at the leading Humboldt University in Berlin alone. Every scholar who had been member of the SED party had to go. The issue was that almost everyone, actively or not, was part of the party since party affiliation was a job requirement. In the collection of essays, Kocka et alia tackled the question how academia in the East changed after the appropriation of the West-German model.

**GERMAN UNIFICATION: 2000 – 2010**

Ten years after unification, more time had passed to reflect and critically evaluate the unification process. During these ensuing ten years, the GDR became the focus of attention again because new films that offered a more nuanced narrative of unification and the East-German condition


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 40.


after the demise of the GDR had achieved world-wide success. In 2001, the film *Berlin is in Germany* introduced Martin, the East-German hero, who is released from jail and discovers the new Germany eleven years after unification. His struggles to navigate through his city that has become foreign to him and to adjust to the rapid changes in his new life, are relatable to the audience, as almost everyone has felt lost and alone at some point in life. Martin bravely masters every hurdle thrown at him; he reconnects with his wife and his son and studies for his taxi-driver license. It is mostly the people he interacts with who see and treat him as an outsider because of his dated clothing and his ignorance of new products, such as modern toys and other products he only knows from watching television. *Berlin is in Germany* illustrates ample criticism of unification; for instance, when Martin meets his wife who now works in a travel agency, posters of exotic places are on display, and an airplane flies over Martin’s head when he exits the shop. All these beautiful places and newfound opportunities are available, if only Martin had the money to afford it. *Der Spiegel* called the film, “sensitive and tender” and Martin “a charismatic hero of everyday life.”

In 2003, the internationally successful film *Good Bye, Lenin!* also gave East Germans agency and told the story of the GDR from an East-German perspectives. In this film, main character Alex Kerner (Daniel Brühl) recreates the GDR after unification, in order to prevent his sick mother from another heart attack. A supporter of socialism, she was in a coma when the Berlin Wall fell and was now supposed to believe that life was still the same. Alex goes to great length to revive the GDR; he redecorates their apartment in the typical GDR seventies-style by reclaiming their old furniture that had been resting in the scrapheap and procures their dated clothing at good-will stores. During the entire length of the film the audience witnesses him on a

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comical but often sad hunt to find old relics of the GDR, such as coffee, pickles, and champagne, in order to comfort his mother. In an attempt to adjust to recent events, he produces false news on VHS tapes depicting the GDR in a more favorable light, a GDR with socialist ideology but an open border policy. Constantly rushing between the “fake” GDR and the new Germany, Alex illustrates the East-German struggle to make it in a new world while keeping alive its identity that was forcefully vanishing in front of their eyes. While Alex is depicted as happy and adventurous in unified Germany, the everyday struggles to come to terms with a past that everyone in the West seems to deny is evident. At the end of the film, Alex puts this into words: “The country, that my mother left, was a country that she believed in and that we kept alive until the very second of her life. A country that in reality never existed like that. A country that in my memory I will always associate with my mother.”

The newspaper Tagespiegel claimed, “‘Good Bye, Lenin!’ … was the burial of the GDR, thirteen years after its end. And it offered dignity, a dignity that anyone had no longer anticipated.” The tragicomedy celebrated unification but allowed for subtle criticism that was continually disguised in comedy so that the West-German audience would not feel offended. On the contrary, the Ostalgie-theme depicted in the film, for instance, Alex’s obsessive search for a specific East-German pickle, the Spreewald Gurken, entertained the East-German as well as the West-German audience. Especially when Alex’s mother was tricked into eating a West-German pickle – disguised in an East-German pickle container – and did not taste the swindle. For more, the pickle proved that the GDR and West Germany were not that different after all.

56 Good Bye, Lenin!, directed by Wolfgang Becker (2003; Berlin, Germany: X-Filme Creative Pool, Warner Bros., 2003), DVD.
Although *Good Bye, Lenin!* hinted at the loss of culture and identity East Germans felt after unification, the film was often interpreted as a glorification of East Germany.\(^{58}\) Repeatedly, critics assessed the film based on the fact that the GDR was not sufficiently vilified. Films that focused on the East-German oppressive regime, such as *Der Tunnel* (2001), or academy award winner *The Lives of Others* (2006), dominated in numbers. Although these films have merit, as they reflect the wrongdoings of a dictatorship, they at the same time helped perpetuate a one-sided narrative that continually promoted a generalization and vilification of all things East-German.

In the decade after unification, scholarship still focused on economic history. East-German historian of economics Jörg Roesler offered an economic and social history of both Germanies from 1945 until 1990 “on a level playing field,” as described in his title.\(^{59}\) Roesler examined the dissimilar developments of both economies after 1945, the issues of periodization of German history after the Second World War, and, lastly, the coming together and the annexation of the GDR to West Germany. On the final two pages of his text, he briefly discussed the flawed unification process on the social level. He quoted a part of Lothar de Maizière’s State of the Nation Address from 1990 that was delivered before the *Volkskammer*. In this speech, de Maizière asserted what East Germans could bring to unification: “We bring our identity and our dignity. Our identity is our history and culture, our failures and our accomplishments, our ideals and our sufferings. Our dignity is our human right for self-determination…”\(^{60}\)

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Roesler’s sarcastic reply to this assertion, however, is that East Germans were only able to bring the left-turn arrow and the *Ampelmännchen* – the symbol shown on pedestrian signals. He continued that the “asymmetrical unification” resulted in an economical, judicial, and social annexation of East Germany by the West, while the lack of unity in people’s minds was lamented by politics and the media for years. Again, the emphasis in Roesler’s work was on the two German economies and the economic take-over by the West. The East-German voice after unification is neglected.

German historian and professor Heinrich August Winkler also claimed that in 1990 Germans had “mistaken the degree of mutual alienation that had occurred during the forty years of separation” and that right-wing radicalism, anti-West prejudices, and antisemitic resentments were the result. Although Winkler acknowledged the differences between East and West Germans, he seemed to sweep them under the rug and failed to address the potential ramification it could have long term. He surprisingly concluded that Germany now had a “European question” and that it was reasonable to focus and contribute to the European identity.

In 2005, scholar Paul Cooke offered a refreshing insight into East-German accomplishments after unification. Similar to Jarausch, he discussed the academic split between anti-communist rhetoric/totalitarian views and left/liberal consent after unification that both provided grounds for either a vilification, or a measured idolization of the GDR. This

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61 The *Ampelmännchen* (literally translated “little traffic light man”) in East and West Germany were different. The West version was thinner and longer, the East version wore a little hat. After unification the East German *Ampelmännchen* quickly gained cult status and was sold as merchandize in stores, called *Ampelmann* stores. Please view the photos provided at the end of this introduction; Jörg Roesler, *Momente deutsch-deutscher Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte 1945 bis 1990: eine Analyse auf gleicher Augenhöhe* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006), 215.


63 Ibid.

discussion is an effective foundation to understand the broader context of how Germans dealt with the past. Novel and provocative in his work were his analyses of East-German literature after unification that prompted its readers to detect West-German assumptions and to concurrently assess the GRD in a more nuanced manner. Cooke also provided close readings of *Sonnenallee* and *Good Bye, Lenin* (amongst other cinematic representations). Cooke argued that, despite its comic nature, *Sonnenallee* still offered an uncompromisingly direct and honest depiction of the GDR. While *Good Bye, Lenin!* literally bid farewell to the GDR, it did not refrain from criticizing the West and capitalism in general. What Cooke pointed out is that the ensuing success of *Good Bye, Lenin!* inspired, and even encouraged, the commercialization of the GDR, or the newly celebrated *Ostalgie* on TV. One of the most popular shows, the *Ostalgie Show*, attracted up to 4.8 million viewers.\(^{65}\) Cooke’s strengths are the literature and film analyses and his overall recognition of East-German art that he accurately contextualized. What was missing, though, again, was the persisting struggles East Germans were still facing and how this affected art, academia, and East Germans’ everyday lives.

**GERMAN UNIFICATION: 2010 – PRESENT DAY**

Around 2010, when I started researching the East-German condition after unification, the topic was not widely discussed in the media anymore. Whenever I mentioned it in a discussion, my interlocutors did not understand the urgency of writing about it. This sentiment was shared by German filmmaker Burhan Qurbani, who mentioned during an interview with me that when he started working on his 2014 film, *Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark*, which examines the post-unification situation of East-German adolescents, people commented that this topic was “old

\(^{65}\) Ibid, 141.
hat.\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark} discussed the challenges of East-German adolescents, who, upon unification, struggle to find purpose in life, when unemployment and the disappearance of cultural youth institutions left them hopeless and resentful.\textsuperscript{67} Asylum seekers who had gained access to East Germany after unification were living on the streets of residential areas because of politicians’ avoidance of responsibility and decision-making. They became perfect scapegoats for the unacceptable conditions in the East. Qurbani’s message is clear: the devastation and hopelessness that turned into anger could happen to anyone. The newspaper \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung} offered a peculiar review, however, stating that “…the film does not provide educational intention. Because it wants to show everything, it only shows a bit of everything, especially something that could touchingly unsettle the audience: the forlornness of a youth in a situation of upheaval, the insecurity of politics in terms of immigration,…”\textsuperscript{68} This, however, was the intention of the filmmaker. Qurbani’s film never demonized nor glorified the GDR. By means of real footage of the events, it often factually explained the situation without assigning blame.

Another film about the GDR, \textit{Bornholmer Strasse}, was released in 2014.\textsuperscript{69} Named after an actual street in Berlin that separated East and West, East-German director Christian Schwochow decided to recollect actual events of the night of November 9, 1989. Although the reception of the film was overall positive, some critics disapproved of the “tragicomedy” genre that the director used. Rena Lehmann wrote, “Schwochow decided for incomprehensible reasons to tell the dramatic night at the border crossing in a tragicomedy. He should have acquitted

\textsuperscript{66} Burhan Qurbani (German filmmaker) in discussion with the author, June 2017.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark}, directed by Burhan Qurbani (2014; Hamburg: Indigo Musikproduktion, 2015), DVD.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Bornholmer Strasse}, directed by Christian Schwochow (2014; Munich: Universum Film, 2014), DVD.
himself to the real crime thriller that happened.”70 This statement seems odd, since a crime did not occur that night. In her review, she criticized that the GDR border patrol was not depicted in a more negative light and that their victims, probably felt ridiculed. This, however, is an assumption.

Starting in 2015, the GDR became a hot topic again. TV series about the GDR, such as Der gleiche Himmel (2017), Honigfrauen (2017), and Deutschland 83, 86, 89 (2015, 2018, 2020), flooded the screen. The thriller Ballon, released in 2018 by Bavarian comedian Michael Herbig, depicted an East-German family secretly building a hot air balloon to flee the GDR. What all these film and series have in common is their focus on the Stasi and espionage in the GDR, ultimately offering a one-sided portrayal. Bornholmer Strasse and Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark depict the confusion and messiness of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the results of a flawed unification process. Is it a coincidence that they were made by an East German and a German with a migration background?

Coincidentally, when Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark. was released in 2014, the far-right political movement PEGIDA was founded and tens of thousands of – mostly East Germans – demonstrated against the Islamization of Germany in the streets of Dresden. East Germans were in the media again, but, once more, depicted in a negative and damaging way. The large support of the PEGIDA allowed for the far-right AfD to gain enough momentum to become the third-largest party in Germany, gaining 94 seats in the Bundestag, sanctioning their representation in the Bundestag (by passing the 5%-of-the-vote threshold required to enter the German parliament). The extensive coverage of these events marginalized the East Germans again. In the ze.tt. article “Why we are not unified,” published on October 3, 2017, the 28th anniversary of

German unification, Marieke Reimann discussed why Germany is still socially divided into an Eastern and Western “zone” today, more than a quarter century after the fall of the Berlin Wall.\textsuperscript{71} Her statements are based on personal experiences that she had living in Berlin and working in the media that, according to her, is monopolized by West-German news coverage and staff. She mentions that disparaging remarks, such as “East Germans are dumb anyways,” are still common practice. Reimann explains that the “furious” are to be blamed that the “face of the East is distorted into a grimace.”\textsuperscript{72} The furious, according to her, consists of two groups of people: the neo-Nazis and the former East-German citizens who after unification felt left behind and consequently politically and culturally voiceless. These people often have tendencies to lean far right politically and tend to channel their rage in protest and violent behavior. It is this rage that the media chooses to highlight.

Reimann is chief editor for the \textit{ze.tt}, an online magazine of the \textit{Zeitverlag}, a leading German publishing conglomerate. \textit{Ze.tt} aims to attract an audience of readers between the ages of 16 and 35. When Reimann took over as chief editor in October 2018, she decided to shift the magazine’s focus to topics around East Germany and East Germans. Reimann was still a child when the Berlin Wall fell, but she states in an interview that she was “\textit{ostsozialisiert}” (socialized in an East-German way) due to the influence of her parents, teachers, and friends who all held socialist values and world views that were taught and practiced in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In an attempt to point out the bias of Western media coverage, and specifically rebuff the dominant coverage about the \textit{Stasi} and neo-Nazis of East Germany, she specifically

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
chooses to cover the everyday life of East Germans from Mecklenburg-West Pomerania to Thuringia.  

Reimann’s attempt to reconstruct readers’ perceptions of East-German identity offers a more nuanced way beyond party affiliation and ideological orientation to understand and accept the (historically grown) cultural differences between East and West Germans. However, it is likewise crucial to examine the roots of this misperception. Before unification, East and West Germans principally relied on media coverage for information about the other German. Thus, their opinions of their neighbors were biased, as they were constructed, often fabricated and presented through a third-party lens. Unification offered a new beginning when East and West Germany were able to physically meet, and form opinions based on tangible experiences.  

The rise of the AfD and the East Germans’ search for radical political philosophies that seem to restore their dignity propelled a more nuanced examination of the East Germans’ dissatisfaction. In 2019 Steffen Winter wrote a lengthy eight-page Spiegel article, “That’s how he is, the Ossi, Clichés and Reality: How the East ticks – and why they vote differently,” that offered specific examples of West-German disrespect towards East Germans and the East Germans’ inability to catch up in the capitalist world order.  

Most importantly, Winter discussed why educated East Germans who had been voting for the CDU (Christian Democratic Union) turned to the AfD and PEGIDA. The former conservative CDU, according to East Germans that Winter interviewed, had become a more centric party that allowed too many refugees and the money spent on refugees, should have been invested in education. Interestingly, Winter

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75 Ibid, 18.
mentioned a survey of 400 PEGIDA members. According to this study, only 2% lacked employment and one out of three held a university degree (in the general population it is one out of six).\textsuperscript{76} The general perception of the “dumb” Ossi, as Reimann described, who votes AfD out of fear of the unknown or fear to have jobs taken away, is evidently untrue. The East Germans Winter interviewed provided different reasons; they believed that proper integration had failed in Germany and that money should be sent to the refugees’ country of origin to rebuild or ameliorate those countries.

Winter also provided reasons why East Germans felt like second-class citizens. In fact, among 81 East-German higher education institutions, none are led by an East German.\textsuperscript{77} Similarly, only 23% of East Germans are in executive positions in the East, a shocking 1.7% in Germany in total. No East-German company is officially traded on the stock market. These sobering numbers were confirmed by East-German politician Gregor Gysi, who has been fighting for East Germans equality and dignity tirelessly since unification. On October 3, 2020, for the thirtieth anniversary of unification, he posted income and employment inequality statistics and claimed: “30 years of German unity: in society as a whole, eye level has not been established, which is a result of the West-German government that could not stop winning and that was not willing to inherit somethings from the East, of which West Germans would also have profited.”\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 19.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Gregor Gysi, “30 Jahre Deutsche Einheit: Gesamtgesellschaftlich ist die Augenhöhe immer noch nicht hergestellt, was wesentlich auch damit zu tun hat, dass die Bundesregierung bei der Herstellung der Einheit nicht aufhören konnte zu siegen, dass sie nicht bereit war, eine Vereinigung zuzulassen und etwas aus dem Osten zu übernehmen, was auch den Westdeutschen zugutegekommen wäre” Facebook, October 3, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/notes/­gregor-gysi/­einheit-braucht-eine-vereinigung-auf-augenhohe/10221508167007206.
In conclusion, Winter’s insightful article offered abundant explanations for the East Germans’ discontent and the appeal to acknowledge their fears and concerns and take them seriously. Regrettable is the cover picture the *Spiegel* chose for this story. It depicts a bucket hat in black, red, gold (the colors of the German flag). The main actor in *Go, Trabi, Go* also wore a bucket hat. Maybe to attract a readership, the magazine resorted to clichés, instead of depicting a successful East German or an East-German accomplishment that would break the old and unquestionably exhausted narrative.

After 2010, historians provided insights into life in East Germany. In *Within Walls*, Paul Betts for instance examines the possibilities and limitations of East Germans’ private life. Contrary to the popular narrative, Betts argues that East Germans were able to negotiate and shape their private lives while living in a totalitarian regime. Ned Richardson-Little published a work that examines how East Germany imagined itself to be a human rights champion in a dictatorship. Edith Sheffer and Astrid M. Eckert wrote about border town and how the East and West German divide emerged psychologically and later physically. In its core, they argue that it is the competition between capitalism and socialism and the resulting visible differences that caused emerging social divide.

In recent years, East Germans have worked on changing the one-sided narrative. Thomas Oberender, director of the *Berliner Festspiele*, an institution offering cultural events, decided to give his organization a focus on East-German cultural history. Oberender also published the book *Empowerment Ost*, with the aim to retell history from an East-German perspective. He claimed that a 2019 survey of the federal government indicating that 57% of East Germans still

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feel like second-class citizens surprised him and made him want to create more “awareness and sympathy.” Alexander Cammann offered a recension in the newspaper Die Zeit, in which he criticized two aspects; first, Oberender’s “paternalistic” claim that the West had pushed or manipulated the East into abandoning their idea of a third option and succumbing to the West-German system (a claim also made by Habermas which I mentioned above). According to Cammann, the majority of East Germans wanted to join West Germany. And second, Cammann questioned why it took Oberender so many years to engage with this topic. Cammann’s first criticism exemplifies why East Germans have felt unheard and like second-class citizens, as Cammann’s assertions were not founded on research. For that, he would have had to study CDU campaign slogans and methods of manipulations to assess whether East Germans were rushed into unification. His second criticism bears no weight, as the amount of time to reflect is a personal choice and cannot be categorized in right or wrong.

The thirty-year anniversary of unification in October 2020 illustrated abundant returning interest in Germany. British historian Timothy Garton Ash claimed that “Since unification, Germany has had its best 30 years. The next will be harder,” ignoring all of the East-German struggles. But others, such as journalist Melissa Eddy, wrote a more nuanced and critical article for the New York Times, in which she examined the economic, political, and social inequalities after unification. She concludes that unification, overall, has been a great achievement, but that

80 Ibid.
inequalities, such as wage disparity and the lack of East Germans in leadership positions, still needed to be addressed. In “Covid-19 Sparks New East-West Divide in Germany – 30 Years After Reunification,” Ruth Bender examined in the *Wall Street Journal* how these inequalities, for once, benefited the East. In this article she discussed how the spread of Covid-19 has been far less disturbing in the East than West. Although no conclusive scientific data was available, she pointed to several plausible theories that could explain the difference in infection rates. East Germany is less densely populated and lacks large industrial areas or sizeable corporation compared to the West, which can be attributed to the flaws of unification, when corporations were privatized and unemployment significantly increased, as previously discussed. Another valid reason stated was the lack of travel funds due to depressed wages that is statistically proven. Furthermore, all the major airports gathering large crowds of people, are also in the West, such as Frankfurt or Munich. Lastly, a local resident of Rostock had her own theory and explained the disparity on the East-Germans attribute of obeying the rules that the government imposes, “Ossis follow the rules more […] That was the case back then and is the case now.”

As stated in this conclusion, unification has been widely discussed in the past thirty years. Scholars specifically focused on the rushed economic transition and the lasting ramifications of this in the East. It has been widely recognized that the hasty economic transition caused inequalities, such as wage disparity and unemployment, and that the East is still today catching up. Scholars, for instance Dümpcke and Vilmar, discussed an economic but also a cultural colonization, pointing to the delegitimizing of everything East Germans by West Germans. Historians have offered analyses of the roots of the social divide; mainly the dominance of the

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West-German economy and the resulting envy and distrust in the East and the constant comparison and evaluations of both systems. A lot has also been written about the life in the GDR, and of course, the *Stasi*.

In recent years, there has been a change of narrative depicted in the *Spiegel* article: “That’s how he is, the Ossi, Clichés and Reality: How the East ticks – and why they vote differently.” The article steers away from blaming East Germans and rather explaining why they have been dissatisfied – even after the West has so generously paid towards the “*Aufbau Ost*” program. Lastly, East Germans, such as Marieke Reimann and Thomas Oberende, have actively participated in a new narrative that would point away from the GDR *Unrechtstaat* (unethical state) idea and instead argue for a much greater recognition of East-German accomplishments.

However, the consistent and continual disrespect and delegitimizing of East-German accomplishments remain a widely accepted experience. Either the East-German voices are ignored, as seen in Timothy Garton Ash’s recent article that pointed to thirty years of bliss, or Alexander Cammann’s estimation that East Germans agreed to all aspects of unification and, therefore, had no right to complain. In this dissertation, I argue that East Germans and their accomplishments have been consistently and continually disrespected and delegitimized after unification. What strengthens my argument is that I discuss facts illustrating this in all areas of life, such as in politics, art, architecture, and everyday life. The wide compilation of these examples in all fields then refute the argument that East Germans’ complains are unfounded and unreasonable and prove the West-German dominance and ignorance.

I divided this dissertation in specific events that exemplify this West-German dominance and ignorance. The first chapter discusses the political accession (*Beitritt*) of the GDR to West Germany. I examine the aspirations and efforts of East-German politicians to negotiate a treaty
consisting of shared values, traditions, symbols, and laws that were largely dismissed by West Germans, thus creating a “unified” country that was in its entirety foreign to East Germans. I specifically discuss the East-German request to have two legal changes in the German criminal code, the decriminalization of homosexuality and abortion, included in the unification treaty, as they reflected the different cultural and social experiences and norms in the GDR. I will then discuss the ways the West chose to circumvent the implementation of these requests and prohibit them from becoming law.

Furthermore, I examine the dismissive rhetoric used by key politicians, cultural figures, and especially the media following the fall of the Berlin Wall that would stigmatize East Germans, with ramifications lasting until the present day. To demonstrate this, I assess, for instance, Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s historic speech in Dresden shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the speech of West-German politician Wolfgang Schäuble delivered in 1990, when the unification treaty was finalized. Kohl and Schäuble were respected leaders in Germany and the world and members of the dominant conservative party CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and therefore influenced public opinion more than any other party. These leaders had the opportunity to create a narrative that would depict the East Germans and East-German culture as a new, valued addition to Germany. Although the Stasi and the SED party were undoubtfully unethical and ruthless, the West did not offer a fair and nuanced distinction between active Stasi members, citizens that were forced to participate in Stasi activities or ones that only offered positive reports on their victims, and those who were asked to engage but refused. Instead, they created a narrative of an all “unethical-state” with evil agents or naïve participants.

Lastly, I discuss the different reactions of East-German key politicians, who have been accused of having been part of the Stasi. Here, I look at two examples. I first discuss Lothar de
Maizière’s resignation. De Maizière was the last democratically elected prime minister of the GDR and an important negotiator during the unification treaty. When Stasi allegations arose – that were never confirmed – he chose to resign and remove himself from the public eye. I also examine the case of East-German politician Gregor Gysi, who vehemently opposed the treaty. He had previously demanded a collaboration of both states on the principle that each would keep its sovereignty. He decided to remain an active member in the German Parliament (Bundestag), even after he was accused of having worked for the Stasi. The partisan reactions of West-German politicians to his requests, and his policies in general, will be investigated. I will provide evidence that these partisan reactions still echo in the Bundestag today. Gysi and De Maizière were key politicians representing East Germany, like Kohl and Schäuble in the West. Their tarnished reputation discredited their accomplishments, political views, polices, and could harm their representation and decision-making in politics.

In chapter two, I examine how West Germans used similar rhetoric to discredit East-German artists and intellectuals. First, I discuss the German-German Literature Dispute (Deutsch-deutscher Literaturstreit). I demonstrate how influential authorities, such as several leading West-German intellectuals, used cultural channels to undermine East-German identity and accomplishments. To do this, I discuss the Literature Dispute in 1990 that discredited literature produced by East-German writers during the Cold War, such as the novel What Remains (Was Bleibt) by Christa Wolf. The dispute was initiated by the most influential German-speaking literature critic, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, who was considered the Pope of Literature (Literaturpapst) by the media; thus, he wielded significant power in influencing public
opinion. Reich-Ranicki and other fellow critics accused Wolf of political apathy in the GDR and debated whether art could be produced within an oppressive system.

In the second part of chapter two, I transition to film to examine how West-German filmmakers portrayed the conditions of East-Germans in their everyday life, especially the ways in which they were treated and perceived by West Germans. For this, I conduct a close reading of two German films, Good Bye, Lenin! and Berlin is in Germany. Those films, as cultural products, offer further insights into West-German’s attitude and stereotypes of East Germans.

Chapter three focuses on how East Germany, specifically East Berlin, physically changed after unification and how West Germans prompted these changes, often against East Germans’ objections. I discuss how the destruction of the Palace of the Republic (Palast der Republik), which housed the East-German federal government (Volkskammer), divided the nation again. I chose to discuss the palace because it represents the most famous example of destruction of East-German historical architectural heritage. The Palast der Republik was a beloved building among many East Germans because it largely housed public spaces for cultural events and entertainment. It therefore gained a positive connotation amongst most East Germans. The destruction of it, in 2003, was widely protested, especially because the city of Berlin lacked funds and no alternative plan had been decided upon. The destruction, therefore, was considered yet another affront against East Germany’s culture and another faux pas in the process of coming to terms with Germany’s past.

In the second part of chapter three, I analyze effective scenes in the previously discussed films Good bye, Lenin! and Berlin is in Germany, as they expose spatial transformations in East Berlin. These changes resulted in either unsettled ground or in a disorientation of the East

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Germans’ sense of place and home that further added to their challenges in a new country that had become foreign to them.

Chapter four is dedicated to another group that was left behind after unification: the Vietnamese contract workers (Vertragsarbeiter) in the GDR. Although the GDR hosted contract workers from other socialist countries, such as Cuba, China, or Mozambique, I chose to illustrate the conditions of the Vietnamese contract workers for two reasons: Vietnamese were amongst the first who arrived in the GDR in the 1950s and stayed until the demise of the GDR, and, with more than 70,000 workers, the Vietnamese were the largest group of contract workers in the GDR.

Second, the Vietnamese in Germany after unification suffered similar coethnic challenges as the East Germans: whereas the “anti-communist” and mostly southern Vietnamese “Boat People,” who had fled after the Vietnam War in 1975, found refuge in West Germany and had become respected citizens, the mostly northern Vietnamese contract workers in East Germany struggled to be allowed to reside and work in unified Germany. Furthermore, their reputation amongst the Vietnamese in West Germany was tarnished, as they were seen as the communists who had come to the GDR voluntarily and – in large part and rather unfairly – earned notoriety for participating in small-crime business activities to support their families in Vietnam.

In chapter four, I first address when the contract workers in the East Germany and the “Boat People” in the West Germany arrived and how each government and the German population received them and, most importantly to my argument, I discuss the challenges the contract workers faced after unification, similar to the issues East Germans confronted. In the
final section, I provide a brief analysis of the 2014 German film, *We are Young. We are Strong (Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark)*, previously mentioned in this introduction.\(^86\)

This film provides a unique opportunity to probe elements of East Germans’ identity as they emerged from the Communist era, and which groups were left behind after the demise of the GDR. My goal is to describe the paradoxes of East-German identity (as experienced by East Germans and the Vietnamese) in order to better understand the challenges of German unification in forging a common identity and generate a collective sense of belonging among all of those who previously lived in the GDR.\(^87\) I argue that the euphoria of unification experienced by the majority of Germans and contract workers rapidly vanished among the residents of the New States (*Neue Bundesländer*), the states that formerly formed the GDR.\(^88\) The often hasty process of unification resulted in not only the desolation and desertion of native East Germans but also the contract workers who had moved there.

While this study is often based on a close reading of work by artists, journalists, critics, politicians and historians, I also explore several kinds of primary sources besides the artistic, political, journalistic, or scholarly interpretation of this flawed process of unification. The experiences and patterns I describe in chapter four are based on archival documents pertaining to contract worker laws, regulations, and even propaganda between the Ministry of Labor in the GDR and the administration of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), which were obtained from the federal German archive located in Berlin. Among other primary sources that this dissertation showcases are my interview with Dr. Wolfgang Richter, who was the foreign

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\(^86\) Lichtenhagen is a neighborhood in the East German city Rostock. A photo of the *Sonneblumenhaus* is exhibited at the end of this chapter.

\(^87\) The film *We are Young. We are Strong (Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark)* depicts a fictional account of a group of young East German adolescents and their participation in the infamous Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots against a Vietnamese contract worker residential building on August 24, 1992.

\(^88\) New federal states in Germany, *Neue Bundesländer*, denotes all the states that formerly belonged to the GDR whereas *Alte Bundesländer* are the states that belonged to the FRG.
representative (*Auslandsbeauftragter*) in Rostock and happened to be inside of the *Sonnenblumenhaus* (the residential housing of the contract workers) on the night of the xenophobic attacks. In the interview, he was able to provide detailed information on the political and social disruption leading to the escalation of the situation. I was also fortunate to interview Burhan Qurbani, the director of *We are Young. We are Strong*, who offered insightful commentary about his reasoning to tell the story of East-German adolescents and Vietnamese contract workers and their struggles in unified Germany.
Figure 1: The East-German Ampelmann

Figure 2: The West-German Ampelmann

89 Figures 1 and 2 were photographed by the author in Berlin in 2019.
CHAPTER ONE
THE UNIFICATION TREATY:
THE DECLARATION OF DOMINANCE OVER EAST GERMANS

The first chapter discusses the political accession (Beitritt) of the GDR to West Germany. I examine the aspirations and efforts of East-German politicians to negotiate a treaty consisting of shared values, traditions, symbols, and laws that were largely dismissed by West Germans, thus creating a “unified” country that was in its entirety foreign to East Germans. I specifically discuss the East German request to have two legal changes in the German criminal code, the decriminalization of homosexuality and abortion, included in the unification treaty, as they reflected the different cultural and social experiences and norms in the GDR. I will then discuss the ways the West chose to circumvent the implementation of these requests and prohibit them from becoming law.

Furthermore, I examine the dismissive rhetoric used by key politicians, cultural figures, and especially the media following the fall of the Berlin Wall that would stigmatize East Germans, with ramifications lasting until today. To demonstrate this, I assess, for instance, Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s historic speech in Dresden shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the speech of West-German politician Wolfgang Schäuble that he delivered in 1990, when the unification treaty was finalized. Kohl and Schäuble were respected leaders in Germany and the world and members of the dominant conservative party CDU (Christian Democratic Union) and therefore influenced public opinion more than any other party. These leaders had the
opportunity to create a narrative that would depict the East Germans and East-German culture as a new, valued addition to Germany. Although the Stasi and the SED party were undoubtfully unethical and ruthless, the West did not offer a fair and nuanced distinction between active Stasi member, citizens that were forced to participate in Stasi activities or ones that only offered positive reports on their victims, and those who were asked to engage but refused. Instead, they created a narrative of an all “unethical-state” with evil agents or naïve participants.

Lastly, I discuss the different reactions of East-German key politicians, who have been accused of having been part of the Stasi. Here, I look at two examples. I first discuss Lothar de Maizière’s resignation. De Maizière was the last democratically elected prime minister of the GDR and an important negotiator during the unification treaty. When Stasi allegations arose – that were never confirmed – he chose to resign and remove himself from the public eye. I also examine the case of East-German politician Gregor Gysi, who vehemently opposed the treaty. He had previously demanded the collaboration of both states under the premise that each would keep its sovereignty and decided to remain an active member in the German Parliament (Bundestag), even after he was accused of having worked for the Stasi. The partisan reactions of West-German politicians to his requests, and his policies in general, still echo in the Bundestag today. Gysi and De Maizière, like Kohl and Schäuble, were key politicians representing East Germany. Their tarnished reputation discredited their accomplishments, political views, polices, and could harm their representation and decision making in politics.
RUSHING A UNIFICATION TREATY

After the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, negotiations for a unification treaty began between the two German parliaments, the East-German 10th Volkskammer and the 11th West-German Bundestag. The delegates from each side formally represented a parliamentary system of government, with the same responsibilities and authority, such as engaging in legislation, scrutiny of judiciary and executive, formation of the government, among the more important ones. However, the delegates of the Bundestag had functioned in this well-established system without being “guided” by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland or SED) in East Germany that predetermined anything of political importance. They had gained the proficiency needed to confidently navigate through the process. The SED was the only party in the GDR.

Günther Krause, Parliamentary Secretary of State of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and Wolfgang Schäuble, Federal Minister of the Interior of West Germany, were selected by each side to negotiate the unification treaty. Their discussions were rushed, in an attempt to finalize political reform quickly to ensure stability. Considering that economically the GDR was aiming to rapidly adjust to Western standards and using the West-German Deutsche Mark as currency, politicians felt forced to respond swiftly in order to avoid a crisis. In their view, drafting a completely new constitution that involved lengthy discussions within both governments would have caused destabilizing delays. Instead, the two negotiators hastily entered an agreement accepting the West’s cultural norms and setting aside limited exceptions for East-German citizens’ cultural priorities, that only applied in the former territories of the GDR.

A timeline of events displays just how rushed this process took place. During the first meeting in Bonn, on June 1, 1990, Krause and Schäuble scheduled four negotiation proceedings,
thereby setting a timeframe that would lead to the final date of August 31, 1990, when the treaty was projected to be signed. Two countries that had operated separately for 40 years, were scheduled to culturally, economically, juristically, politically, and socially unify in only three months, which was an ambitious strategy.

On June 30, 1990, minister Krause sent out a first questionnaire to several East-German departments that was designed to facilitate the first negotiating proceeding that were scheduled for July 6, 1990. The East-German department heads of finances, justice, foreign affairs, and defense were asked to participate in devising ideas for the treaty. Within this set of questions, Krause asked, for example, “Which legal norms of West Germany have to be changed or amended by interim arrangements,” and, “In which ways should further agreements or contracts between the states [Länder] of West Germany (as well as its institutions and its private companies) and the departments of the GDR be pursued?”90 The representatives of each department offered in response both specific questions they thought crucial to ask or, on the other hand, offered specific proposals to anticipated issues.

The previously discussed recommendations from the East-German government’s negotiators indicate that there was a general understanding, at least among the East-German politicians, that laws would be discussed and negotiated, and a common version developed that would apply to a unified Germany. This is furthermore evident in the protocol of the first official negotiation proceeding of July 6, 1990. The language that the delegation of the GDR used signifies their wish to negotiate a treaty that would reflect shared interests. In section two of the preliminary statement rendered by Lothar de Maizière, the delegation of the GDR declares interest in identifying the treaty as “Einigungsvertrag” rather than calling it a separate treaty for

each of the two states.\textsuperscript{91} The German word “\textit{Einigungsvertrag}” is a composition of two words: “\textit{Einigung}” meaning agreement/unification and “\textit{Vertrag},” treaty. De Maizière sets a tone that identifies two equal partners bringing their ideas and values to the negotiation table and will endeavor to come to a fair resolution. Furthermore, he adds that it is important to conduct discussions at great length and achieve a balance duly taking note of all things that have developed and evolved differently in both territories in the previous 40 years.

Notable here again is the language he uses. Ambiguously, De Maizière writes “\textit{die Teilung sei nur durch Teilen zu überwinden}” ("the division can only be overcome by sharing").\textsuperscript{92} In German, the term „\textit{teilen}“ can mean both divide and share, which appears to suggest that De Maizière stresses that at this turning point in history, the two authorities must use their power to find shared values and common grounds for unity, instead of creating or enshrining policies and laws that divide the country and its people once again.

The notion of combining the culture and traditions that had grown separately in the past forty years and building a new unified country is exemplified in section 4.2 of the protocol. De Maizière suggests here a new name for the country. Instead of using the two former names of the countries, “German Democratic Republic” or “Federal Republic of Germany,” he suggests “German Federal Republic,” an attempt to symbolically indicate a new beginning for each side combining something of each postwar name. He also advises to use the second stanza of the East-German national anthem as well as the third stanza of the West-German national anthem for a unified Germany national hymn. As we know today, these suggestions were not adopted, and

\textsuperscript{91} Lothar de Maizière was the first and only democratically voted prime minister of the GDR in 1990. \\
the West-German name “Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” and the “Deutschlandlied” remained in place for unified Germany.\textsuperscript{93}

Bender argues in his article “Willkommen in Deutschland” that by denying these requests of symbolic nature, Schäuble failed to “build an emotional bridge for East Germans” to transition and feel welcome in a new state.\textsuperscript{94} He claims that West-German politicians were oblivious to East-German grievances and possible frustrations that would arise from this, as they had never experienced a change of regime themselves and, therefore, did not take into consideration that those actions could offend East Germans.\textsuperscript{95} Bender furthermore addresses the “underestimation of the non-material“ wishes and needs of the East-German citizen. He explains that the West granted great financial assistance that kept many East-German cities from falling into further decay and allowed citizen new ways of communicating and exploring the world, such as the addition of phone lines. However, he criticizes the lack of empathy in cultural and social matters, for instance, by denying the inclusion of a national anthem stanza of the East-German hymn, or the rejection of the request to create a new flag and a new name for the unified new country. He furthermore thinks that a redesigning of those symbols might have offered a more welcoming transition for East Germans, as they were navigating their course in a changed country that bit by bit was adjusting to new norms, socially, economically, and spatially.\textsuperscript{96}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[93] Deutschlandlied is the name of the German national anthem.
\item[95] Some politicians, such as Wolfgang Schäuble born in 1942, had technically lived through a regime change but were too young to remember.
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THE ABORTION AND HOMOSEXUALITY DEBATE

Two significant differences between the cultural norms and practices of East and West Germany involved the East’s legalization of abortion and the decriminalization of homosexuality. The implementation of the Abortion Law (Gesetz über die Unterbrechung der Schwangerschaft) or Regulation of Term (Fristenregelung,) in the GDR had been simple. On March 9, 1972, the Volkskammer met to vote on the issue. A crucial speaker, the Minister of Health Prof. Dr. Mecklinger, delivered a lengthy plea in favor of the law. He first reminded his audience that matrimony, family, and maternity were under the protection of the socialist state according to article 38 of the constitution and that the Law for the Protection of Mother and Child and the Rights of Women (Gesetz zum Schutz für Mutter und Kind und über die Rechte der Frau) were passed in 1950. He claimed that equal rights were achievements of the socialist state that were initially demanded by the revolutionary labor movements. Furthermore he stated that in 1931, the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or KPD) had already filed a motion for the implementation of an abortion law that should legally allow women to abort. In order to remain consistent with the socialist agenda, Mecklinger claimed that equal rights also meant that women should have the right to decide about abortion. Furthermore, the protection of matrimony, family, and maternity would also bear the responsibility of the state to allow women to be happy in their marriage and professional lives and love their children, which could not be guaranteed if women were forced to keep an unwanted child or seek illegal dangerous methods to have it aborted.

The majority voted for the law to pass. In the GDR, abortion was then legal if performed by a licensed medical doctor within the first twelve weeks of pregnancy and when the patient had

97 Kirsten Thietz, Ende der Selbstverständlichkeit? Die Abschaffung des § 218 in der DDR Dokumente (Berlin: Basis Druck Verlag, 1992), 176.
sought counseling beforehand. The next day, the East-German newspaper New Germany (Neues Deutschland) published an exemplary with the cover headline “Rights and Dignity of Women fully guaranteed” (Recht und Würde der Frau vollauf garantiert). The GDR adhered to this position.

Interestingly, the East-German laws on abortion and homosexuality were more in line with the views and directions of other countries in the Western world. The United States Supreme Court, for example, struck down outright abortion bans in Roe v. Wade in 1973. France legalized abortion in 1975. England legalized homosexuality (the Sexual Offences Act) and abortion in 1967. The state of Illinois was the first US state to remove criminal laws against homosexuality or sodomy in 1961, with 19 states following in the 1970s. France revoked all sodomy laws during the French Revolution in 1791 and enacted a law in 1985 prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Given the concurrence of East-German laws with laws from other European nations, the East Germans proposed that their current law regarding abortion and homosexuality should be adopted in all Germany. According to the documents presented by the East-German ministry for justice, paragraphs 175 and 218 of the West-German law that criminalized homosexual behavior and abortion respectively, should not be included in the pan-German criminal code.

98 Ibid, 177.
99 Ibid, 178.
However, the abortion debate had been far messier in West Germany. After the Second World War, when abortion was punished by death or prison sentences, laws changed constantly. The attempt in 1974 to regulate the *Fristenregelung*, like in the GDR, was impeded a year later by the Federal Constitutional Court in Germany (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*), the highest court in Germany.\(^{105}\) It was then followed by a new amendment in 1976 that punished abortion with a fine or up to a three-year imprisonment, codified in criminal code 218.\(^{106}\) The last change to the law prior to unification implemented the Indication Regulation (*Indikationsregelung*) that permitted abortion in the case of rape or when the health of the mother was at risk.

Despite the fact that the laws of the GDR were more “Western” by comparison with laws in West Germany, West-German negotiators still refused to decriminalize abortion and homosexuality across all of Germany. It is noteworthy to mention that SED policies aggressively forced a non-religious culture in the GDR. While 96% of East Germans were a member of either the catholic or protestant church after the Second World War, by 1989, 70% were non-denominational.\(^{107}\) In West Germany, the numbers after 1945 were similar: 96% of the population belonged to the church; however, in 1989, it was still 85%.\(^ {108}\) This might explain why the West-German government decided that paragraphs 175 and 218 of the West-German criminal code should both remain in place in West Germany. During the negotiations for the unification treaty, the delegates failed to reach a consensus about a common abortion law, which resulted in different laws in East and West. The West-German legislator however demanded for a common solution that should be voted on by the latest December of 1992. In a source


\(^{106}\) Ibid.


\(^{108}\) Ibid.
published by the German parliament in 2017, the German abortion debate during unification is summarized as such, “During the negotiations of the accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic of Germany, it remained unsuccessful in expanding the intended ‘indication solution’ of the criminal code of the FRG to the acceding territory [East Germany]. Therefore, for a brief period, partial federal law remained in both parts of Germany.”¹⁰⁹ Then, article 31. IV of the treaty is quoted, “[the legislator has to] find a regulation by December 31, 1992, that will better protect the prenatal life and offer pregnant women the judicially right to social services and counseling, as is currently the case in both parts of Germany.”¹¹⁰

Notable in this paragraph again is the language that indicates the West-German dominance over East Germans exhibited by the West-German lawmaker and the author of the Scientific Services of the German Parliament (Wissenschaftliche Dienste des Deutschen Bundestages).¹¹¹ The author indicates that the “indication solution,” the law in West Germany, was intended to be expanded to the East-German states. This however comes from a West-German perspective, as East Germans wanted their solution expanded to the West. In fact, many East German protested against the expansion of the “indication solution,” by writing letters and petitions that were presented at the Volkskammer on June 1990.¹¹²

Second, since both parties did not reach a consensus, the lawmakers (which would then consist of mostly West Germans) would be obliged to find a solution within two years.¹¹³ However, it is suggested that prenatal life should be protected by the state, as was not the case in

¹¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹¹ The Wissenschaftliche Dienste assists the delegates of the German parliament by providing data, facts, and analyses about subject-specific knowledge. The WD is a part of the Bundestag since 1949.
¹¹³ Only 144 members of the Volkskammer transferred to the Bundestag.
both parts of Germany then. It is not specifically stated that the prenatal life is not protected in East Germany but, since the *Fristenregelung* allowed abortion in the East for the first three months, it becomes clear that the drafter of this phrasing is suggesting that West-German law should be assumed to prevail in the future. Either case illustrates the dominance of West Germans and their confidence that their laws and traditions would override those of the East.

Despite the West-German negotiators’ failure to decriminalize abortion and homosexuality, shortly after unification, former East-German law did become the law of unified Germany. The West-German laws continued to criminalize homosexuality until 1994, but then legislators removed it shortly before the law was scheduled to expire.\(^{114}\) In 1992, unified Germany’s legislators permitted abortion in all of Germany by a law that closely mirrored the former GDR code.

The unification negotiations surrounding the socially significant issues of abortion and homosexuality arguably show a lack of empathy on the part of West Germans for the East-German way of life. The West-German politicians could have embraced these two more enlightened practices of East Germany, which were more aligned with other nations and the progress of which West Germany proudly boasted. Such compromise could have brought together the two peoples. However, the conservative leaders of the CDU found it difficult to support this progressive law. In a letter exchange between member of the *Volkskammer* Gisela Sept-Hubrich (SPD), who had spoken for the extension of the *Fristenregelung* to unified Germany, and President of the *Bundestag* Rita Süssmuth (CDU) from August 8, 1990, Süssmuth explained that West-German jurisdiction could not support such law that was “not ethically

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justifiable.” Süssmuth argued that even the West-Germany *Indikationslösung* was not in line with the German jurisdiction, as it also did not protect the unborn life in every case. She therefore suggested a third option: the state and the society should agree that the most important legal interest should be the preservation of life and all should commit to extending “material and ideal help and a child-friendly environment” for mothers. Süssmuth went even further and proposed a modified, what she termed, “Lebensschutzgesetz” (Law of the Protection of Life), of the German criminal code that would include the new paragraph, “The unborn, the disabled, and the dying human life are under the special protection of the state order.” In order to better protect the (unborn) life, Süssmuth listed several improvements and assistance for the mothers (to be), such as increased child benefits, social welfare, or extended parental leave.

Süssmuth’s concerns were valid and had been shared and contested in other democracies in the Western world. However, in the East-West unification debate, it is not her argument itself that is reason for criticism, but the lack of compromise illustrated while reaching the agreement. Considering that only two years later, the German legislators adopted the *Fristenregelung* in unified Germany indicates that this progressive law of the GDR was not irrational after all.

East Germans had similar progressive views about homosexuality, especially compared to other Eastern blocs. In the Soviet Union, for instance, one could get a prison term of up to five years for homosexual activities under article 121.1, a law that was not overruled until 1993. In 1968, homosexuality was decriminalized in the GDR and on August 11, 1987, the Supreme Court of the GDR held that “homosexuality, just as heterosexuality, depicts variation of human

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116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid, 4.
behavior. Homosexuals therefore are not outcasts in socialist society but entitled to civil rights in the same way as all other citizens.”

During the unification treaty negotiations, the West-German legislators, on the other hand, adhered to section 175 of the criminal code prohibiting “male sodomy” in the western part of Germany.

The West-German gay community however, had already started to publicly demonstrate on the streets against persecution since 1979, when they participated in Christopher Street Days, large gay parades. These parades were held in major German cities, such as Berlin, Munich, and Cologne. Various German parties, except the CDU, participated in such Emancipation Movement (Emanzipationsbewegung) events and for the first in 1980, the West-German FDP, Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei) demanded in the Bundestag to abolish paragraph 175. However, it was not until the crucial AIDS crisis in the 1980s when public opinion and the vilifying of homosexuals in West Germany started to gradually change. Rita Süssmuth and Heiner Geißler, both health minister of the CDU, started a campaign against the taboos in politics, which sanctioned a more open discussion about sexuality in Germany. Although this did not change the status of paragraph 175, it allowed the media to explore the topic of homosexuality and make it more accessible and present in the every-day life of West Germans. One well-known example was the first gay character and the first romantic kiss between two men in one of the most prominent German TV shows, Lindenstraße, in 1990.

While homosexual activities were not considered criminal in East-German territory after unification, they continued to be illegal in the West. Still, surveys indicate that East Germans felt

120 Wolfram Setz, Homosexualität in der DDR: Materialien und Meinungen (Hamburg: Männerschwarm Verlag, 2006), 137.
121 Christian Könne, “Homosexuelle und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Gleichberechtigte Mitmenschen?” in Deutschland Archiv 2018 (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2018), 74.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid 75.
pressed to follow societal norms, such as heterosexual marriages, that were valued and encouraged by the party. As a consequence, many people in the East-German gay community decided to get married to a partner of this opposite gender. This collective pressure did not exist to the same extent in West Germany. A large exodus from West to East in order to live a sexually free life did therefore not occur.

These examples show how a division was created that had severe consequences for the everyday life of East Germans. Homosexuals who had been given freedom in the former GDR could not freely express their sexual identity in large parts of their new country. Similarly, women no longer had complete control over their body if they moved to the West. Both of these issues were heavily debated over many years. In hindsight, the West-German negotiators maintained the status quo in both the East and West after unification. The East Germans, however, wanted one common law, but were overruled.

The unification treaty can be considered the moment of birth of a new German nation, but it was fundamentally flawed. Both East and West should have been equal partners as Germans. Providing these examples above, it is evident that the unification treaty did not live up to the promise of its name. Whereas important cultural and symbolic wishes of the East Germans were denied by West Germans, once the unification treaty was agreed, it was introduced to the public with an additionally humiliating West-German rhetoric of superiority that I will further discuss in this chapter. The terms Besserwessi, a composition of Besserwisser (Know-it-all) and Wessi (West German), and Jammerossi (whining East German) were quickly embraced in the everyday

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jargon of Germans. In a 2019 survey conducted by the ZDF, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (German Public TV Channel), 49% of the East-German interviewees still regard West Germans as Know-it-alls and 34% of West Germans think East Germans still whine too much. In another evaluation led by the research institute Emnid in 2018, 56% of East Germans claimed that West Germans still treat them in an arrogant manner.

DOMINANT WEST GERMAN RHETORIC

West Germany was not a monolithic bloc. As previously stated, there were three different attitudes towards the GDR; the “accusatory camp,” consisting of former opponents of the SED regime, who morally disapproved of the East-German regime based on totalitarian theory, such as that of Hannah Arendt. Just like the press, this condemnation stance rejected everything East German and saw the West-German, democratic way as superior and necessary. The counter narrative, or the “apologists,” saw the GDR in a more favorable light and its ideology in its essence noble, which often resulted in downplaying the crimes of the oppressive SED regime and in a distorted view of capitalism. The third group analyzed the GDR through a more objective lens and discussed the “complexities and ambiguities” of the GDR. In this

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130 Ibid, 40.
dissertation, I focus on the narrative of the dominant party in West Germany, the CDU, as it was the Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s leading party.

This attitude of West-German superiority was reflected in various instances. Chancellor Helmut Kohl, also called the “Unity-Chancellor,” held a speech in Dresden in December 1989, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In this speech, he assured that the West respected the wishes, self-determination, and opinions of the East and was not going to patronize them: “We respect what you will decide for your country.”131 In December of 1989, it was still uncertain how a “unification” would be brought into existence, but Kohl declared that the main goal of the West would be to ameliorate the living conditions of East Germans and make them feel comfortable in the East so that they could remain in their “Heimat” (home, homeland, belonging,) and find their happiness.132

Kohl’s assumption that East Germans were not happy and comfortable in East Germany is still often shared today. However, in his book Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic, Paul Betts describes how – within the physical walls erected by the state, as well as the private walls in their homes – East Germans were able to negotiate and protect their private lives. This sophisticated and layered insight into the everyday life of East Germans demonstrates that especially during Honecker’s “relative liberalization” in the 1970, East Germans used their homes and Dachas (garden plot in the country that usually included a small living space where East Germans spent their weekend and/or holidays, from the Russian dacha), as their refuge of freedom, happiness, and self-expression, therefore, debunking Kohl’s

132 Ibid.
assumption that a happy and comfortable life in the socialist regime had never occurred.\textsuperscript{133} Kohl furthermore mentioned in his speech that after Second World War, he had “the chance to grow up over there [the West].”\textsuperscript{134} Although in his speech Kohl asserted Western-German respect, support, and solidarity, it is statements like these that made West Germans appear insensitive.

One of the most notorious examples of West-German dominance openly expressed is Wolfgang Schäuble’s speech after the unification treaty was finalized in 1990. The speech translates as follows:

Dear Citizens, it is a question of entry of the GDR into West Germany, not the other way around. We [the West Germans] have a good constitution that has proven it worth. We will do everything for you. We welcome you. We do not want to ignore your wishes and interests callously. But a unification of two equal states is not occurring here. We are not beginning from equal starting positions. There is the constitution and the Federal Republic of Germany. Let us emanate from the conditions, from which you were excluded for 40 years. Now you have the right to participate [in the constitution and the FRG] and we will be considerate of that.\textsuperscript{135}

Like a bull in a China shop, Schäuble avoids all subtleties while asserting the West-German dominance over the East. During the treaty negotiations, East Germans expressed aspirations that they requested to be realized in the new Germany, but those were not granted

\textsuperscript{133} Paul Betts, \textit{Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic} (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 142, 144.
(such as the wish to rename the country), while West Germans did not accept the validity of East-German laws in their side of Germany. Thus, East-German wishes and interests were at most only partially met, while West Germans did not have to make any concessions.

The West was praised in the domestic and international media and by leading politicians at home and abroad for its monetary sacrifices to East Germany, for instance the “Begrüßungsgeld” (welcome money)\textsuperscript{136} and the “Solidaritätssteuer” (solidarity tax),\textsuperscript{137} while it was also praised for their non-monetary contributions during unification. Individual Western politicians were praised, sometimes long after. For instance, in 2016, Wolfgang Schäuble became an honorary citizen of Berlin for his speech in favor of moving the parliament and administration from Bonn to Berlin. However, it was De Maizière who had suggested it and provided specific reasons for his proposal during the first unification treaty meeting on July 8, 1990.\textsuperscript{138} During this meeting, Schäuble claimed that this decision should be reserved to the legislator and decided short term.\textsuperscript{139} When it finally came to a vote, it was just with a small margin that a majority supported the move. According to Michael Müller, then acting mayor of Berlin, the majority was reached specifically because of Schäuble’s efforts and his “historic” speech in favor of the move.\textsuperscript{140}

In this speech, Schäuble mentioned that many had discussed the necessity of overcoming the division of the two Germanys through sharing. In his opinion, sharing meant the willingness

\textsuperscript{136} Every East German received 100 Deutsche Mark Willkommensgeld (“welcome money”) when entering West Germany until December 29, 1989.
\textsuperscript{137} The solidarity tax was established in 1991, first, to cover expenses for the Golf war and other costs relating to foreign affairs, however, in 1995 it was solely used to finance costs related to the unification of Germany. It was taxed only in West German or the Alte Bundesländer.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 6.
of both sides to adjust to changes. His speech was constantly interrupted by applause and exclamations of support. Elements of Schäuble’s speech can be detected in De Maizière’s opening remarks during the first negotiation meeting discussed in the beginning of this chapter. Considering the amount of symbolic changes that the East-German side suggested, Schäuble’s call for Berlin to be the capital as a new symbol for unified Germany was an important step but not enough. Furthermore, declaring Berlin the capital seemed inevitable due to its large size, its metropolitan nature, and fairness, since it had been the only city divided between East and West. Schäuble’s words amounted to scoring a goal into an empty net. In an interview with Die Zeit, Schäuble indicated that Berlin was elected possibly due to the attack that left him paralyzed and in a wheelchair. When he held his pro-Berlin speech, it was the first time that the delegates saw him in a wheelchair on the podium and everyone most likely felt “touched.” He claimed that this sight must have had a strong effect.

It is indeed puzzling why the East-German effort to make Berlin the capital was not honored, for instance, by nominating De Maizière as honorary citizen. In the protocol of the first unification treaty negotiation, it is even said that in fact Schäuble did not want to include the “Hauptstadtfrage” (the question whether Berlin should become the capital again) in the treaty but rather let the legislature decide on this issue later. It was De Maizière who insisted on including it in the treaty. He listed several reasons why Berlin should become the capital again. Most importantly, Berlin as capital would allow a better integration of the five New States (Neue Bundesländer) that are all in rather close proximity of Berlin. Furthermore, Berlin as the capital

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141 “Warum Wolfgang Schäuble auf Parteitagen nur selten applaudiert,” Die Welt, December 4, 2019, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article204032996/Wolfgang-Schaeuble-Warum-der-Bundestagspraesident-so-selten-applaudiert.html; Schäuble was the target of an assassination attempt on October 1990 that left him paralyzed, and in a wheelchair ever since.
142 Ibid.
from the start until recently had never been disputed, and nowhere else could the divide and the reconciliation be documented better than in Berlin.¹⁴³

While Berlin was declared the capital in the unification treaty, the seat of the unified parliament and administration remained in Bonn. In a separate meeting of the Bundestag, on June 20, 1991, the “completion” of this decision to restore Berlin as Germany’s capital, the move of the parliament and administration from Bonn to Berlin, came up for a vote. In his speech in favor of Berlin as seat of the government, De Maizière addressed the Bundestag stating that during the unification negotiation, a move to make Berlin the capital had been agreed. This implied that all capital functions, such as seat of the parliament, would therefore move to Berlin. He claimed that during this decision, nobody had “a schizophrenic capital idea” in mind that was devoid of its meaning, that is, having Berlin merely be a symbolic capital rather than a meaningful one housing the government. He ended his speech with the now famous saying in Berlin, “Wer A sagt, muss auch Berlin sagen” (“whoever says A, has to say Berlin, too”), which is a word play on the German saying, “Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen” (“In for a penny, in for a pound”).¹⁴⁴ De Maizière made a stronger and more persistent argument about the importance of Berlin as the capital of a united Germany, and yet his voice was muted and his role erased.

Why Schäuble’s speech was selected, and deemed “historic” and influential, rather than De Maizière’s consistent advocacy of Berlin as the new German capital, is unclear but the decision to choose him as honoree for the honorary citizen list of Berlin is consistent with a common trend. Since 2002 only two East Germans, Wolf Biermann and Joachim Gauck, became honorary citizens of Berlin. Both of them are known to have fought the East-German regime.

Although Wolf Biermann spent the first 17 years of his life in Hamburg, he relocated to East
Berlin in 1953 where he went to university and later worked as a theater director, writing his own
productions. In his plays, he continually criticized the GDR until he was deprived of his East-
German citizenship while hosting a concert in West Germany. His exile was extensively covered
in the West-German media and he is depicted as a person, who “…brave and steadily stood for
freedom and democracy…”\textsuperscript{145}

Joachim Gauck also fought the East-German regime. The induction of his person, in the
honorary citizen of Berlin’s description, was because of his extensively involvement in the
dissolution of the \textit{Stasi} and the department of national security. Furthermore, when he left office,
he continued to be “involved in the commemoration of historical injustice and [the cultivation of]
a lively democratic culture.”\textsuperscript{146} The Members of the Berlin Parliament (\textit{Abgeordnetenhaus}) and
the Senate Chancellery (\textit{Senat von Berlin}) chose other (West-German) honorees, such as
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, who became an honorary citizen in 2000, because his artistic work at
the Berlin Festival (\textit{Berliner Festwochen}) and the German Opera helped achieve worldwide
recognition and made Berlin a music city.\textsuperscript{147} The lack of East-German honorees seems unusual
and upon emailing the \textit{Senatskanzlei Berlin} and specifically asking if there is an official reason
why most of the East-German honorees were not transferred from the – still existing –
East-German list to the official German list, an employee sent the following reply:

\textsuperscript{145} Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin, “Verdienste um die Stadt Berlin. Berliner Ehrenbürgerinnen und Ehrenbürger,”
Parlament Berlin, accessed May 9, 2020, https://www.parlament-berlin.de/de/Das-Haus/Berliner-
Ehrenbuerger/Wolf-Biermann?open&ref=9BV9PW136SHEQ.
\textsuperscript{146} Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin, “Verdienste um die Stadt Berlin. Berliner Ehrenbürgerinnen und Ehrenbürger,”
Parlament Berlin, accessed May 9, 2020, https://www.parlament-berlin.de/de/Das-Haus/Berliner-
Ehrenbuerger/Joachim-Gauck?open&ref=9BV9PW136SHEQ.
\textsuperscript{147} Abgeordnetenhaus Berlin, “Verdienste um die Stadt Berlin. Berliner Ehrenbürgerinnen und Ehrenbürger,”
Parlament Berlin, accessed May 9, 2020, https://www.parlament-berlin.de/de/Das-Haus/Berliner-
Ehrenbuerger/Dietrich-Fischer-Dieskau?open&ref=9BV9PW136SHEQ.
Due to the divide in Berlin, there were two different honorary citizens lists. In 1992, after unification, the Senate of Berlin (in compliance with the Members of the Parliament) decided, which people with extraordinary cultural and scientific merit for Berlin should be transferred from the honorary list of Berlin (East) to the honorary list of the country and the city of Berlin [the West-German list]. In the case of the remaining honorary citizens of the “Capital of the GDR,” such extraordinary merits could not be determined. However, a “de-recognition” [strip someone from her/his honorable distinction] did not occur. Although the decision-making of awarding or transferring the honorary citizen laureateship is in principle confidential, I hope to have helped you with this information.\textsuperscript{148}

Examining the employee’s language, it is striking that the West-German list was and remains the chosen standard. This list was not evaluated by East Germans to assess whether or not certain honorees should be “dishonored.” Overall, only 9 out of 24 East Germans were transferred to the official honorary citizen list that is posted on the Senate Chancellery’s website today. Noteworthy is the example of Soviet General Nikolai Erastowitsch Bersarin, first city commandant of Berlin and part of the honorary citizen list of East Germany due to his humanitarian work assisting for the destitute citizens in the capital after the Second World War. Bersarin was removed from the official list in 1992, on the basis of the incongruous claim that

nobody could know how he would have behaved in Berlin in the postwar years, since he had passed away shortly after the end of the war. In 2003, following public pressure, he was added again to the list. Yet, a lack of East Germans or people that East Germans deemed honorable, is undeniable among those recognized as Berlin’s honorary citizens.¹⁴⁹ This provides yet another example of how the West-centered unification process effectively ignored and erased the experiences of East Germans.

DEFAMATION OF EAST GERMANS

Lothar de Maizière was not honored for suggesting Berlin as the capital. When examining his complex political career after unification, a common tendency of undermining East-German key figures after unification becomes manifest. Since this chapter discusses the unification treaty, I want to specifically examine the marginalization of those East-German politicians – directly and indirectly – involved in the negotiations of this treaty by their West-German colleagues and the West-German media. The unfavorable representation and treatment of East-Germans public figures, as they represented the other German, had lasting effects on how East Germans were and are perceived by West Germans. I will discuss this idea further in the following chapters.

De Maizière began his career as a viola musician in East Germany and toured theaters in the GDR as part of an orchestra. Due to an arm injury, he put his career as a musician to rest and studied law. He proceeded to practice law in the GDR, starting in 1976 until unification. His career as a politician did not begin until unification. Although he was a member of the East-German CDU since 1956, he did not assume an active role until he was appointed chair of the

CDU. Ultimately, he became the first democratically elected prime minister of the GDR (from April 1990 until the dissolution of the GDR on October 3, 1990).  

As previously mentioned in this chapter, De Maizière strongly desired to provide East Germans with a smooth transition into the new country, not only in financial matters but also culturally. Given that his cousin, Thomas De Maizière, was a politically active citizen in West Germany, he recognized the differences in thinking and behaving between East and West Germany and was sensitive to East-German needs that might arise from these differences. Furthermore, he understood the importance of symbolic gestures, which the West Germans were far too seldom willing to give. That De Maizière was nonetheless a crucial and fitting unification treaty negotiator, can be concluded, for instance, from his contemporaries’ assessment of his character.

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, for example, describes De Maizière as an “exceptionally cultured and very talented person.” Gorbachev stated that De Maizière’s factual and objective assessment of the past and the present help find fair solutions to problems. Furthermore, he argues that De Maizière is a “highly moral and honest person,” who at the same time is also “sensitive and considerate… always acting adherent to principles.” This was reflected in his election as the – first and last – democratically elected prime minister of the

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151 In 1989, Thomas De Maizière was press secretary of the CDU fraction in the Berlin House of Representatives. During the unification treaty negotiations, he served as critical advisor for his cousin Lothar De Maizière.
152 Mikhail Gorbachev, preface to Ich will, dass meine Kinder nicht mehr lügen müssen. Meine Geschichte der Deutschen Einheit, Lothar De Maizière (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder GmbH, 2010), 9-10.
153 Ibid.
GDR. Yearning for democracy, the moral compass of the candidate was of utmost importance for East Germans in casting their vote in these elections.¹⁵⁴

Yet, after unification his credentials and professional experiences were not accredited in the Federal Republic of Germany. He was not allowed to legally practice law until being admitted to the bar in West Germany. Although he had actively participated and negotiated the unification treaty, the Two Plus Four Agreement (Zwei-plus-Vier-Vertrag), and the Union of the Economy (Wirtschaftsunion), a lawyer who could have been his son instructed him on what he was and was not allowed to do in the new country.¹⁵⁵ This lawyer ended the inauguration with a handshake and the words, “I wish you good luck in your new job.”¹⁵⁶ However, the most severe consequence De Maizière faced after unification was the accusation of having worked for the Ministry for State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit MfS) or Stasi. This accusation was levelled at many public figures from the former GDR, and often resulted not only in public humiliation but ended their professional career. Whereas there was a certain degree of East-German – voluntarily or not – Stasi involvement, numerous East-German politicians were tarnished by unsubstantiated claims that continue to resurface until the present day.

The Stasi was the East-German secret police controlled solely by SED, the only East-German party until unification when a democratic system of multiple parties, such as the CDU and SPD was established shortly before the demise of the GDR. After its liquidation in June

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¹⁵⁵ The Vertrag über die abschließende Regelung in Bezug auf Deutschland (Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany) or Zwei-Plus-Vier-Vertrag (Two Plus Four Agreement) allowed Germany to be sovereign again. All four powers renounced all rights held in Germany. The Wirtschaftsunion was based on the free-market economy in West Germany.
¹⁵⁶ Oliver Georgi, “Die Kränkung sitzt bei vielen Ostdeutschen noch tief,” faz.net, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, last modified November 11, 2019, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/frueherer-ddr-ministerpraesident-lothar-de-maiziere-im-gespraech-16473001.html?GEPC=s3&premium=0x3de6596e0c86cfb39312e96349a88f3.
1990, citizens in a unified Germany came to realize the full extent of the Stasi’s crimes, such as the extreme surveillance of its citizens, psychological warfare techniques during interrogation, and the bullying and arrest of dissidents. In unified Germany, the Stasi became the new symbol of terror, dictatorship, and therefore, the oppression of a people.157

Stefan Wolle argues in his work about German commemorative culture that the ways in which the Stasi and its methods were exposed in the West after unification, and the resulting discourse of contemporary history and its representation, insulted many former East-German citizens.158 They felt betrayed as the dominant Stasi debate – in politics, arts, media, and any public sector – discredited their culture, identity, and everyday life in the GDR. It appeared as if the Stasi debate was a welcome replacement or distraction from the Nazi narrative and the question of guilt in the West that was never resolved after the Second World War.159

The obsession with the Stasi and the resulting pursuit of its former members dominated all German newspapers. In a noticeable article from July 1992, “Stasi comes, Nazi leaves?” (“Stasi kommt, Nazi geht?”) in the newspaper Die Zeit, Herbert Obenaus quotes historian Hans-Peter Schwarz claiming that the communist past will be the central topic of the younger generation for decades.160 Rolf Müller, then director of the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich, is quoted stating that the Nazi dictatorship will “lose significance in the collective memory of Europeans,” as the much longer lasting suffering of communist dictatorship would

159 To read about the West German attempt to “overcome” their NS past: Norbert Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit (München: C.H.Beck, 1996).
gain pre-eminence.\(^\text{161}\) Today, 18 years later, we know that these projections did not come to fruition and it seems peculiar that historians could assume that the atrocities committed by Nazis would ever “lose significance” in history. The idea that recently discovered crimes by a regime would simply reduce another evil seems either naïve or evasive and convenient.

An unnamed Die Zeit’s author then briefly surveys how each German country worked through their Nazi past pre-unification to then proceed to compare the Nazi dictatorship with the GDR regime in absurd fashion. He begins by pointing out that the Nazis had “more or less the approval of the masses,” which was not the case for the GDR’s regime in the “Ostzone” (the East zone).\(^\text{162}\) This, according to the author, was revealed through the frequent defections from the East to the West. He furthermore claims that since the GDR regime effectively censored, surveilled and oppressed not only those East Germans who escaped to the West, but West-German citizens, too.\(^\text{163}\)

The purpose of comparing two dictatorships seems peculiar. Furthermore, it is evident in this paragraph that the Nazi regime is depicted in a more favorable way than the GDR regime. Lastly, there is considerable research indicating that East Germans supported the socialist regime’s social welfare policies and wanted to reform the system’s weaknesses rather than abandon the system entirely. Examining sources that evaluate East-German citizen or peace movements, such as the Friedensbewegung that was one of the factors leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall, indicates that these groups did not see themselves as “opposition to the current system” but rather wanted to reform the GDR’s “real socialism.”\(^\text{164}\) Eckhard Jesse explains that

\(^{161}\) Ibid.  
\(^{162}\) Ibid.  
\(^{163}\) Ibid.  
“[w]hat the few opposition members wanted (to reform the GDR), they never accomplished; what they achieved with other groups (the end of the GDR), they did not want in that form.”165 Groups, such as the New Forum (Neues Forum), Democracy now (Demokratie Jetzt), or Democratic Construction (Demokratischer Aufbau), intended to reform the GDR.166 After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the peaceful demonstrations and the reforms did not abruptly end.167 Even in the Volkskammer was a large consensus that the GDR should remain sovereign.168 The former opposition of the SED state intended to reform the GDR from the inside.169

However, in the Die Zeit article, the author indicates that the fall of the GDR regime was considered a liberation, whereas the end of the Second World War was generally viewed as a defeat among all Germans and, although the magnitude of the crimes of the GDR regime was not as great as those of the Third Reich, the “bloody rule of Stalin” and the Soviet satellites’ regimes committed many crimes, such as shootings at the Berlin Wall, abductions, torture, forced adoptions, and citizens exiled. This vivid language is reserved for the GDR, as Hitler and his regime are never referred to as having exerted a “bloody rule,” overseeing a “system of hell” or similar jargon that he uses to describe the communists and socialists but simply as the “Third Reich” or “Nazi regime.” Moreover, the author quotes German philosopher Jürgen Habermas claiming that the GDR had always offered “deceptive hope for democracy,” just to counter that the Nazi regime never had such pretenses.

168 Ibid, 18.
In summary, the author combines a group of facts about the Nazi regime in a way that compares favorably to the “bloody rule” of the GDR. The author offers these facts: Hitler was voted into his office and, therefore, received the approval of the masses, even when the atrocities – if we consider the number of deaths – committed by the Nazis were greater than during the GDR regime, and lastly, the Nazis never pretended to create a system of democracy. However, the way he positions his argument, in a compare-and-contrast manner, does not offer any meaningful contribution and apprehension but rather creates an illusion of a winner versus loser evaluation. ¹⁷⁰

The purpose of comparing two dictatorships that started upon unification was the German desire to come to terms with the past, which is coined Vergangenheitsbewältigung in German. The word is a composition of Vergangenheit (the past) and Bewältigung (coming to terms), which figuratively describes the debate of overcoming traumatic historical events and guilt in the recent past. Although it does not stand for a specific past, until 1990, in Germany it was always referred to the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship. In the last part of the 1980s in West Germany, conservative and left-leaning academics and intellectuals engaged in a history dispute (Historikerstreit) that sought to find a consensus on how to historicize Nazi Germany and the Holocaust and whether Germans should accept the burden of guilt. ¹⁷¹

After 1990, Vergangenheitsbewältigung of the SED regime was exercised – to a smaller extend – by evaluating the Stasi files for example. However, many voices criticized the comparison of the two dictatorships and perceived it again as a West-German attempt to point fingers to the SED regime in order to distract from their own “wrongdoings” in the past. For

instance, Heinrich Senfft, attorney and journalist, who had defended clients accused of having worked for the Stasi, such as Gregor Gysi, said: “We will probably achieve to compare the real existing socialism with national socialism to the point where a total equalization will generally be accepted, and the 50 million deaths of the Second World War will disappear over the crimes of the SED regime.”

Senfft’s remark was exaggerated but it is crucial to point out the sentiment behind his sarcastic evaluation. A more nuanced approach to this debate offered historian Eckhard Jesse. He made a critical distinction in the comparison of the Nazi and the SED dictatorship: the Nazi dictatorship was supported from the inside and overthrown from the outside whereas the SED state was overthrown from the inside and supported from the outside. He explained that the Nazi dictatorship had German origins while the Soviet Union had extended and propagated its power in the East-German territory. This changes the argument insofar that the atrocities of the Nazis can be compared to the atrocities of Stalin’s Soviet Union, which takes away some agency from East Germans. Historian Richard J. Evans wondered how comparing these dictatorships could offer any further insights into the Vergangenheitsbewältigung debate. Like Jesse, he determined it more important to investigate whether these two dictatorships could be considered German in origin.

This act of comparing the GDR to the Nazis created a cloud over prominent East-German politicians, such as can be seen in the example of De Maizière. At the beginning of 1990, shortly

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before his election to prime minister of the GDR, rumors began to emerge that De Maizière allegedly worked for the Stasi as Unofficial Collaborator (*Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* or *IM*).  

This event was widely covered in the media, especially in *Der Spiegel*. *Der Spiegel* is a particularly important weekly magazine, as it is one of the most distributed and influential magazines in Germany with a record circulation of 1.2 million in 1991. During unification, *Der Spiegel* was highly regarded in Germany, as it has been credited with having contributed to the first viable freedom of the press after an “extreme anti-democratic nationalist” Alfred Hugenberg owned most of the press during the Weimar Republic and extreme censorship during the Third Reich. Even after the Nazi era, the “*Spiegel* Scandal of 1962,” when an article accused then secretary of defense Franz Josef Strauß of bribery, the press had been shackled. Abusing his power and later denying his involvement, Strauß ordered the responsible (chief) editors to be arrested, which resulted in large protests amongst students and other journalists and publishers to demonstrate solidarity. Due to the exposure of such critical political topics that have resulted in country-wide scandals, the editorial department housed a documentation division that supposedly verifies all reports meticulously.

Like many other media outlets, *Der Spiegel* provided extensive coverage on the alleged *Stasi* involvement of De Maizière, as well as other East-German political figures, often suggesting in their articles that these individuals were in some form involved in *Stasi* activity. However, these articles failed to include appropriate evidence. Instead of factually describing the

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175 Unofficial collaborator of the Stasi.
situation and supplying evidence, the language and tone were set to manipulate the reader into believing vague assumptions.

In the article “Everything has to come out” (“Es muss alles raus”) from March 26, 1990, Der Spiegel analyzed and determined the suitability of potential candidates for prime minister of the “second German state,” who would be elected at West-German Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s “mercy.” It is left unclear why Kohl had to give his “mercy” in search of the still existing autonomous East-German state. The fact that the West-German chancellor had to give his blessing to any East-German politicians demonstrates the superior attitude of the West and the profound distrust of East-German politicians among West-German politicians.

The unnamed author of the Spiegel article then proceeds to render the East-German politicians unfit because of their Stasi past—all of them. As far as providing evidence of Stasi involvement, the author either states that a candidate has “Stasi-Flecken (Stasi-stains),” without further explanation or refers to “Überläuferberichte (reports of former member of the Stasi that had denounced their former colleges),” also without offering further details. In De Maizière’s case, the article refers to two anonymous letters that due to the same use of language and typewriter, were likely written by the same person. For all five candidates mentioned, not a single concrete piece of evidence is presented to support these Stasi allegations, as the article merely presents anonymous hearsay.

Additionally, it is not only the lack of factual information and supporting documents that is disconcerting in the article, it is also the language used, as well as the tone set that is reason to

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179 Der Spiegel, “Es muss alles raus,” March 26, 1990, https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13499332.html; The title “Everything has to come out” is a quote by Wolfgang Ullmann, representative of the citizen movement for democracy under Hans Modrow, the last socialist leader of the GDR. He was quoted saying this in reference to people’s Stasi involvement. He was further paraphrased stating that he was against all form of forgetting and forgiving.
believe that the author intends to manipulate and steer the reader into thinking about East Germans in a certain way. The article particularly attacks De Maizière. In a condescending tone, the author first quotes De Maizière’s denial of all Stasi involvement, only to follow it up with an almost childish like response: “No?” The author then attempts to prove his Stasi involvement by concocting a mismatched quote from the two anonymous letters, in which Czerni (De Maizière’s alleged Stasi agent name) was seemingly given a gift for his Stasi work:

And did the 3-page informer letter not say: […] that after every important church conference respectively […] gathering of oppositional groups, in the […] attorney de Maizière participated, right away a […] “conspiratorial gathering between Major Hasse and Czerni […] occurred. The report of the gathering that was produced the next day […] was right away brought to the ministerium by personal messenger to […] the Normannstreet. For his extraordinary […] work guidance and levy of the […] star informant Czerni alias attorney L. de […] Maizière received from Major Hesse several awards and […] from the district administration leader a certificate of exception […] for a purchase of a Lada 2107 car.181

The next paragraph follows up this unpersuasive quotation by asserting without evidence that the “idiot” former Stasi member who may or may not have written the anonymous letter would have no reason to lie. Thus, the author takes this one anonymous source as a beyond-a-reasonable-doubt conviction that De Maizière was a Stasi operative or collaborator, that De Maizière is a liar without-a-doubt, and that his affiliation with the Stasi also makes him an idiot.

180 He is quoted saying “Ich habe mir nichts vorzuwerfen (I don’t have anything to blame myself for).”
Noteworthy is the language and metaphors used when referring to East and West Germany. The *Stasi* is referred to as “detested *Stasi,*” or “the octopus *Stasi,*” people’s *Stasi* past as “adverse winds,” former *Stasi* members are “light-in-the-head *Stasi* members,” whereas the system of government in West Germany is referred to as a “tender plant,” and as previously mentioned, Kohl’s approval, his tender “mercy.” While the crimes of the *Stasi* are well-documented, this wholesale condemnation of De Maizière looks more like an anonymous denunciation than an evidence-based report. As a critical reader, it is difficult to consider this factual and unbiased journalism, which Germans claim *Der Spiegel* represents.

In subsequent paragraphs, the author restated that De Maizière denied ever receiving monetary compensation from the *Stasi* and that contrary to Federal Intelligence Service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst*) reports, former *Stasi* members had confirmed this. Again, the reader is not provided with any detailed information on these sources. The author admits that, so far, all accusations are only based upon two anonymous letters.

The rest of the article contains additional accusations lacking supportive evidence and further mismatched quotations. It ends with the question whether the new democracy should forget (and forgive) an individual’s *Stasi* involvement or reprocess (and therefore, condemn) it. The article concludes with a quote by Ibrahim Böhme, another East-German politician accused of *Stasi* involvement, “Since December I know that all people of this transition period soon won’t be there anymore: neither Gysi, nor De Maizière or Böhme.”

The East-German newspaper *Neues Deutschland* also reported about De Maizière’s alleged *Stasi* involvement. In this one-page article, the allegations were disclosed and followed

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182 Ibid.
by a few paragraphs that contained more detailed, straightforward statements of the main complainant – a former Stasi office. Although it is stated in the article, that the believed file containing De Maizière’s alleged involvement was destroyed, the complainant claimed that a copy should definitely be available, thus, a “thorough search” should reveal the truth. The article did not include any slanted language and the topic was not turned into a sensationalized tale.\textsuperscript{184}

Globally, a myriad of articles reported on De Maizière and other East Germans’ alleged Stasi involvement and, as Böhme anticipated, De Maizière resigned, explaining that “I must recognize that in resolving the Stasi problem, the difficult situation has arisen that an accused must prove his innocence and that suspicion alone carries enormous weight.”\textsuperscript{185} In an interview conducted in 2019 by the \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung}, De Maizière admits that the accusations of the past had hurt his feelings tremendously. As proof of his innocence, he mentions that in 2008, the federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the former GDR (\textit{Bundesbehörde für Stasi Unterlagen} or \textit{BStU}) had to open a new inquiry on his involvement in the Stasi.\textsuperscript{186} It was conducted based upon the intent to reward an honorary pension to the last ministers of the GDR regime’s cabinet. However, this pension was proposed on the premise that each minister would display no former ties to the Stasi. For this, the De Maizière case was reevaluated and determined that collaboration with the Stasi could not be traced.\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} The Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security of the former German Democratic Republic.
\textsuperscript{187} Oliver Georgi, “Die Kränkung sitzt bei vielen Ostdeutschen noch tief,” faz.net, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, last modified November 11, 2019, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/frueherer-ddr-ministerpraesident-lothar-de-Maiziere-im-gespraech-16473001.html?GEP\textsubscript{C}=s3&premium=0x3de6596e0c86efb39312e96349a88f3.
De Maizière allowed his case to be reopened and upon evaluation of Stasi documents, it is apparent that he supported making Stasi files public. In November 1989, the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit was converted into the Office for National Security (Amt für Nationale Sicherheit or AfNS). From then on, the agency had to report to the prime minister and not to the SED. In an AfNS document deemed “top secret,” the turmoil in December 1989 was described. A crowed attempted to force its way into government agencies housing Stasi files in the Gera district, following rumors that files were being deliberately destroyed. De Maizière, then vice president of the Council of Ministers, is said to have assured the inquiring Pastor Morgenrot that access to the buildings would be granted if demolition of the files was suspected.\(^\text{188}\)

Since De Maizière resigned from all political offices after unification to work in his profession as a lawyer again, most public scrutiny and animosity towards him have vanished. This has not been the case for other East-German politicians, who decided to remain in office, even after Stasi accusations had come to the surface. The most prominent example is East-German attorney and politician Gregor Gysi. Gysi studied law at the Humboldt University in Berlin from 1966 to 1970 and graduated with a Juris Doctor degree in 1976. In 1967, he joined the SED party and actively engaged in efforts that would bring forth more democracy in the socialist state. Following Marxist-Leninist ideas, he – together with other famous critics of the regime, such as Christa Wolf – was actively engaged in protests or works in the hopes of engendering a reform of the system. He represented, for instance, Rudolf Bahro and Robert

Havemann, political opponents and dissidents in the GDR, who were put under house arrest and imprisoned for opposing the regime.¹⁸⁹

On November 4th, 1989 he participated in the largest protest in the history of the GDR, the Alexanderplatz Demonstration, when the demise of the GDR had yet to be decided. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent end of the GDR, at that point, was still unimaginable and the purpose of this protest was solely the democratization of the GDR.¹⁹⁰ Gysi’s speech called for new laws, a more nuanced constitution that expanded basic rights for its citizens, new voting rights, more attorneys to assist citizens, a phone line – not surveilled by anyone – for every household, and overall new relationships between politics, laws, and the truth.¹⁹¹

Examining his speech, it is obvious that he proposes to reform the GDR, not liquidate it. There is no evidence in his word choice that indicates the imminent failure of the East-German state. In fact, he ends his speech with the request to not only embrace anglicisms that have emerged from the West, but to celebrate Perestroika and Glasnost, which stood for transparency and openness, and a reform of politics and economy in Mikhail Gorbachev’s Soviet Union. Selecting these Russian terms, he tacitly signified to the audience his embrace of their socialist culture and Russian influence.

Gysi did not participate in the unification treaty negotiations, but he actively voiced his disapproval of it and spoke for the GDR’s sovereignty. Numerous East Germans in grassroots movements, such as the New Forum (Neues Forum), Initiative for Peace and Human Rights

¹⁸⁹ Harald Hurwitz, Robert Havemann Eine persönlich-politische Bioraphie (Berlin: Entenfuß Verlag, 2012) and Gunter Herzberg and Kurt Seifert, Rudolf Bahro – Glaube an das Veränderbare,” (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2002).
(Initiative für Frieden und Menschenrechte), and the Democracy Now (Demokratie Jetzt), that had participated in the peaceful protests that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall demanded a “self-determined, grassroot democratic socialism in East Germany and at best a gradually equal merging of both German states.”\textsuperscript{192} In a joint declaration (Gemeinsame Erklärung) of November 3, 1989, the movements asked to end the one-party system and democratically reform the GDR.\textsuperscript{193} The declaration is concluded with the request to all East-German citizens to support these demands with input and action.\textsuperscript{194}

Nevertheless, on August 25, 1990 the Volkskammer decided in a vote to join West Germany on October 3 of the same year. Gysi declared in his speech that those rushed conditions would bring forth the “demise of the GDR” and that “the GDR … was for every one of us … the hitherto existing life.”\textsuperscript{195} He claimed that the unification process had degraded the enterprise into an annexation of the GDR by West Germany and not a joining of both states.\textsuperscript{196} On October 4, once unification was officially signed into existence, he addressed the Bundestag with specific concerns about the treatment of East Germans in a unified Germany.\textsuperscript{197}

He first explained that the SED emerged from antifascist parties that later presumed a post-Stalinist system that many of the members and the citizens of the GDR did not want.\textsuperscript{198} Its undemocratic organization, according to Gysi, created great contradiction between the leaders

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} The German terms used were “Anschluss” (connection) and “Beitritt” (joining).
\textsuperscript{198} I discuss the opposition to the regime in more detail in the next chapter.
and its members. Gysi claimed that East Germans own their history and their responsibility; however, what he asked for is a “fair and differentiated evaluation of GDR history and its former citizens.” He stated that besides assessing the damaging aspects, such as criminal oppression of its citizens and an undemocratic system, the progressive accomplishments should be part of the narrative as well.

Anything that could undermine the self-confidence of the East Germans, according to Gysi, should be avoided, so that they do not feel like second-class citizens. Gestures, such as the appointing of five former GDR politicians as ministers, who were equally told that they did not have any functions, were dishonest and hollow. A delegate of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party interrupted the speech with the words, “You don’t have a function, either!” Without reacting to the interruption, he continued to refer to the five ministers and stated that the gesture had the veneer of importance but was in fact substantively meaningless. He was then again interrupted by the CDU, with “The PDS [Gysi’s party] is meaningless, too!”

In his speech, Gysi called for a modern society, where sections 175 and 218 did not have a place. He warned that both sides should meet as equals, and laws should not be used to divide and give people roles that could damage future developments. His last statement was that the parliament should represent the culture and dignity of the country and that the East Germans had hitherto (assuming in the unified country) behaved cultured and dignified, which was answered by a CDU member yelling, “Not for 40 years!” The aggressive interruptions to Gysi’s valid arguments and the labeling of East Germans as uncultured and undignified were not entirely

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199 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
201 The Party of Democratic Socialism (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus) was a democratic socialist party in the GDR and the successor of the SED. It was founded shortly before the demise of the GDR in December 1989 and merged into The Left party (Die Linke) in 2007, assuming the democratic socialist left philosophy. Gysi’s work helped in the transition from the SED to the PDS and he has remained loyal to his party to this day.
surprising, given the patronizing attitude of German elites. Having had no interaction with a people in 40 years, how could they evaluate an entire society’s degree of sophistication? Gysi’s advocacy of the integration and dignity of East Germans generated criticism among his colleagues and the press, with many going so far as to calling his agenda nonsense.\footnote{The Focus news magazine is one of the three largest weekly magazines in Germany, next to the Spiegel and Stern. Jan von Flocken, “Gysis Traum zerplatztte,” Online Focus, June 5, 2017, https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/zeitgeschichte-gysis-traum-zerplatztzte_aid_175051.html.}

Upon unification, Gysi, too, was accused of having worked with the \textit{Stasi}, but countless articles discussing his alleged involvement all failed to produce any tangible evidence.\footnote{Hinrich Kley-Olsen, a West German who took part in the \textit{Friedensbewegung} (Peace Movement) in the 1980s, has created a list of 89 articles that discuss Gysi’s alleged Stasi involvement in the German press. His list can be found under the following website: https://www.mauerfall-berlin.de/start/aktuell-2013/gysi; another article, not included in Kley-Olsen’s list is the following article that summarized the events in the last twenty years: Mechthild Küpper, “Die endlose Verdachtszone,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, February 25, 2013, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/gregor-gysi-die-endlose-verdachtszone-12092934.html.}

Still, Gysi decided to remain in the PDS and therefore, in the public eye. Throughout the years, from unification until the present day, Gysi repeatedly faced allegations that each time he had to deny and comment on. The latest occurred in 2013, when German prosecutors opened preliminary proceedings again.\footnote{Annika Breidhardt, “German’s Left party’s Gysi scrutinized for alleged Stasi ties,” Reuters, February 10, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-stasi-gysi-german-left-partys-gysi-scrutinised-for-alleged-stasi-ties-idUSBRE91905220130210.}

Every time, he claimed to not have knowingly worked for the \textit{Stasi}. He explained that he had conversations with them when defending his clients Bahro and Havemann.\footnote{Severin Weiland and Peter Wensierski, “Der mann im Schatten,” Der Spiegel, May 28, 2008, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/stasi-vorwuerfe-gegen-gysi-der-mann-im-schatten-a-556127.html.}

From unification until the present day, Gysi’s agenda and policies concerning East Germans have never changed. On October 3, 2019, the 30\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, he addressed the \textit{Bundestag} again. In this speech, he evaluated the SED regime more critically and received loud applause after stating that “all deaths there [in the GDR] are not
acceptable.”  

However, when addressing the lives of East Germans, for instance, that salaries and pensions were still not always equal to their counterparts in the West, and the fact that fewer East Germans held executive positions in the new unified state, the cheering silenced until a shouting and booing erupted at the end of his speech:

> It would have been reasonable to adopt specific measures from the GDR, such as the higher gender equality, the policlinics, the apprenticeships with a high school diploma, to transfer to a unified Germany instead of totally negating all East-German structures and partially even vilifying them. It would have strengthened the self-confidence of the East Germans and increased the quality of life for West Germans.  

Although no sufficient evidence, such as a *Stasi* file, has been presented to prove his *Stasi* involvement, Gysi has had the strength to stand up against the continual allegations over the years. The lack of evidence of his *Stasi* involvement did not appear to make a difference in the severity of judgment by the West-German media and West-German politicians. Some of Gysi’s colleagues were not as strong as him. For instance, the *Stasi* files of constitutional lawyer and former PDS delegate Professor Dr. Gerhard Riege proved an involvement with the *Stasi* from 1954 until 1960. However, the files also indicated that Dr. Riege’s actions did not cause any harm to anyone.  

Nonetheless, the media initiated a smear campaign that drove Riege into despair. In February of 1992, he decided to take his own life, leaving the following suicide note:

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207 Ibid.  
I do not have the strength to fight and to live. My life was taken from me in the new freedom. I am afraid of public opinion, how it is created by the media. I cannot defend myself against it. I am afraid of the hate that the Bundestag shows me through their words, stares, and the attitudes of people, who have no idea how immoral and merciless the system they have subscribed to is. They willfully relish their victory over us. Only the complete destruction of the opponent will allow them to rewrite history and to erase all brown and black spots.⁰⁹

One of the hateful experiences he referred to was during a speech he gave on March 13, 1991 in front of the Bundestag. Riege pleaded for the conservation of cultural programs of East Germany, such as choirs, orchestras, or cultural organizations in East-German universities for instance. During his description of the loss of this culture, he was continually heckled predominantly by the CDU/CSU. They booed him, laughed at him, and shouted for instance, “Now you defend the old regime! I would be ashamed if I were you!” or “You should not utter the word “justice”! It is embarrassing!” “What we have to listen to by such a Stasi-fool. Unbelievable!”ⁱ⁰ After the vice presidents asked everyone to calm down and stop the heckling, the CDU again shouted, “That’s a Stasi-brother. Such a Stasi-bigwig.”ⁱ¹ During his seven-minute speech, Riege was interrupted 29 times until he was cut off for going over his speaking time limit. As previously discussed in Gysi’s case, such disrespectful behavior is still exhibited in the Bundestag today.

⁰⁹ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid, 842.
At the present time, the Stasi involvement of former East-German citizens has continued to be an abundantly discussed topic, especially when a new “case” is alleged, such as in 2017. The former state secretary of housing in Berlin, Andrej Holm, was identified as a former Stasi member. The fact that Holm had been a mere 18 years old when he was only hired for an internship at the Stasi that concluded just a few months later with the demise of the GDR, did not spare him for being dismissed from his position.212

Another example is mentioned in the 2019 New York Times article, “Exposed as Stasi Spy, a Newspaper Owner Tries to Reclaim His Story.” Christopher F. Schuetze informs the reader about Silke and Holger Friedrich, who – in 2019 after purchasing the Berliner Zeitung – called for a rethinking and retelling of the story of East Germans. Shortly after, a competing newspaper accused Holger Friedrich of having worked for the Stasi.213 Mr. Friedrich, however, did not despair, took ownership, and explained how he was forced into working for the secret police. Unapologetically, he published his narrative in the Berliner Zeitung.

CONCLUSION
The unification of East and West Germany brought together all Germans. A physical separation was overcome through peaceful protests, negotiations, and working together within a brief period of time. However, the actions and rhetoric surrounding the unification of many West Germans, such as the leading conservative party CDU discussed in this chapter, have created a social and

cultural divide that still exists until the present day. In this chapter, I illustrated that West-German politicians who negotiated the unification treaty, refused to adopt cultural norms of the East and rejected symbols that would have allowed East Germans to transition to a new country and life easier. I moreover exemplified that it became also common practice to refuse to acknowledge East-German accomplishments and use divisive and condescending rhetoric when referring to East Germans and their culture.

The press contributed to this narrative with a Stasi witch-hunt against former East-German politicians without offering legitimate proof or without differentiating the level of involvement. Whereas there was a certain degree of East German – voluntarily or not – Stasi involvement, numerous East-German politicians were tarnished by unsubstantiated claims that continue to resurface today. These actions partly contributed to the East Germans’ feeling left behind. In a poll conducted in 2007, three-fourths of all East Germans still felt like second class citizens.\textsuperscript{214} Telling the story of East Germans today to counteract the biased narrative is crucial if society is to change the perception of the East Germans. Only when perceptions change will the statistics mentioned by Gysi—wage and executive disparity—appear more equitable.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GERMAN-GERMAN LITERATURE DISPUTE:

THE DELEGITIMIZING OF EAST-GERMAN IDENTITY

In the first chapter, I discussed how the unification treaty brought together all Germans on West-German terms, with West-German actions and rhetoric surrounding the unification creating a social and cultural divide. West Germans refused to adopt cultural norms of the East and failed to acknowledge any accomplishments of the East Germans. Whereas there was a certain degree of East German – voluntarily or not – Stasi involvement, numerous East-German politicians were tarnished by unsubstantiated claims that continue to resurface today. These actions partly contributed to the East Germans’ feelings of being treated unfairly and as second-class citizens.

In this chapter, I examine how West Germans used similar rhetoric to discredit East-German artists and intellectuals. First, I discuss the German-German Literature Dispute (Deutsch-deutscher Literaturstreit). I demonstrate how influential authorities, such as several leading West-German intellectuals, used cultural channels to undermine East-German identity and accomplishments. To do this, I discuss the Literature Dispute in 1990 that discredited literature produced by East-Germans writers during the Cold War, such as the novel What Remains (Was Bleibt) by Christa Wolf.
The dispute was initiated by the most influential German speaking literature critic, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, who was not only highly influential among critics, but also considered the “Pope of Literature” by the media; thus, he wielded significant power in influencing/steering public opinion. Reich-Ranicki and other fellow critics accused Wolf of political apathy in the GDR and debated whether art could be produced within an oppressive system.

In the second part of this chapter, I transition to film to examine how West-German filmmakers portrayed the conditions of East Germans in their everyday life, especially the ways in which they were treated and perceived by West Germans. For this, I conduct a close reading of two German films, *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Berlin is in Germany!* Those films, as cultural products, offer further insights into West-German society and its attitude and stereotypes of East Germans.

**IT IS ABOUT CHRISTA WOLF, PRECISELY: IT IS NOT ABOUT CHRISTA WOLF**

Just no fear. In that language, that I have in my ear, but not on my tongue yet, will I speak about it one day. Today, I knew that it would still be too early.

These are the opening sentences of Christa Wolf’s novel, *What Remains (Was bleibt)*, which broke her public silence in 1990. When Wolf wrote this novel in 1979, she was still living in East Germany and not yet ready to publish it. It took her 11 years. The resulting criticism by West-German literary critics was excessively harsh und unwarranted; one called her artistic and

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intellectual abilities “modest”\textsuperscript{218} and another described the publishing of her novel, “a sad case.”\textsuperscript{219}

By 1990, Wolf was recognized as an accomplished and acclaimed writer, even receiving praise in West Germany prior to unification. She excelled as an editor for multiple publications before embarking as a novelist. Although she had believed in the socialist state and supported the Socialist Unity Party, her works reflect increasing disapproval and disappointment with the socialist project and her rejection of the state’s artistic dogma of Socialist Realism (\textit{Sozialistischer Realismus}). Her support for the state was rooted in her perception of the regime’s benevolent treatment of the intelligentsia in the 1950s and 1960s, when they were living economically comfortable lives that were supported by the SED.

In 1949, Christa Wolf graduated high school and joined the SED party, to which she would remain loyal until unification. From 1949 until 1953, she studied German language and literature in at the universities of Leipzig and Jena. After college, she worked as a Scientific Associate (\textit{Wissenscha aftliche Mitarbeiterin}) for the German Writer Association, was editor-in-chief for the publisher \textit{Neues Leben} in Berlin, editor for the magazine \textit{Neue Deutsche Literatur}, as well as lector of the \textit{Mitteldeutscher Verlag}. After that, she decided to solely focus on her career as a freelance writer.

Published in 1963, her first novel, \textit{They Divided the Sky} (\textit{Der geteilte Himmel}), tells the story of Rita and Manfred, two lovers struggling with their relationship, who are finally separated by the Berlin Wall, after Manfred had previously left for West Berlin. As a chemist, he believed that he would not be supported in communist East Germany. Rita, however, is a loyal

supporter of the state and its politics. After visiting Manfred in West Germany and attempting to convince him to join her in the GDR, all the while questioning where her place should be, she decides to return to East Germany. The couple, just like the two states, is separated. Wolf never specifically mentions the construction of the Berlin Wall; however, she established the historical context in the first sentence of the book, when she wrote about the “August days of the year 1961,” when the actual Berlin Wall was built, and later stated: “We didn’t know then, none of us knew, what kind of year lay ahead: a year of the most exacting ordeals that were not easy to survive. A historic year, is what they will say later.”

When Manfred and Rita meet for the last time, he mentions that at least they did not divide the sky, but Rita begs to differ; Wolf writes: “The sky? This enormous vault of hope and yearning, love and sorrow? ‘Yes, they can,’ she said. ‘The sky is what divides first of all.'” Therefore, the sky mentioned in the title becomes a symbol of the divided countries. Rita’s struggle is palpable, but because of her unyielding loyalty to her country, she gains control over her life and emotions again. Wolf depicts neither Manfred nor Rita as hero or villain. But because Rita finds her place in society, the story offers the illusion of a happy ending.

Situating this novel in a historical context, a more nuanced reflection of Rita’s, and possible Wolf’s, conflict is evident. Having experienced the horror of the Nazi regime, Wolf joined the SED party at a young age because she believed that “democratic” socialism in the GDR would “develop a solidary society that could ensure peace and social justice, freedom of the individual, mobility for all, and the conservation of the environment.” This optimism was

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221 Ibid, 191.
not always shared by the people outside of the intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{223} William H. Rey described an ongoing alienation of the East-German intelligentsia and the citizens of the GDR.\textsuperscript{224} While Wolf thought that most of her readership was identifying with her socialist ideology, part of the society was demonstrating in the streets in protest against the regime that propagated this ideology, while violating its tenets in practice.\textsuperscript{225} Wolf’s misconception about the benevolence of the regime was rooted in a certain degree of privilege that she had enjoyed as an intellectual and artist in the GDR.

Wolf had seen the birth of the party and the state and had personally experienced its entire development: the SED was founded in 1946, the GDR in 1949. She had been a university student and had later begun her career during Walter Ulbricht’s leadership, which lasted from 1950 until 1971. After a period of de-Nazification, Ulbricht’s regime created a new intelligentsia, or new cultural elite, that consisted of students, faculty, artists, and anyone that could influence public opinion. The party diffused its ideology through an attempt to find new supporters: for example, peasants, who had been denied access to university during the Nazi regime, were now able to receive an education. The party created a form of dependency through a sort of spoils system, by giving away scholarships, stipends, and awards, and methodically forcing students to become loyal members. Likewise, faculty received disproportionately high salaries and other non-

\textsuperscript{223} The term intelligentsia was adopted from the Soviet Union, since the GDR was its satellite state. It originally referred to a social group of Russian intellectuals, specifically “men of letters” (writers, academics), the corollary to the West German Bildungsbürger (educated citizen). To read more about the birth of the intelligentsia: Vladimir C. Nahirny, The Russian Intelligentsia. From Torment to Silence (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1983).

monetary services, such as free taxi services to work.\(^{226}\) Members who showed any form of bourgeois notions, or signs of resistance, were repressed or pushed to the West.

While peasants, the intelligentsia, and the “technical” middle class received considerable benefits if they kept their loyalty to the party, as production rose, workers had to endure increasingly less desirable work conditions. When protestors gathered together to demonstrate against the new work norms on June 17, 1953, the intelligentsia did not support their cause. On the contrary, they either remained passive and loyal to the regime or actively supported the Soviets when their tanks rolled into Berlin. They believed the official SED account that the protest “was the work of paid Western agents and provocateurs.”\(^{227}\)

One prominent example of this facile trumpeting of the SED line was Berthold Brecht. Brecht, a committed supporter of communism and the SED, believed in a dialogue with the workers, but also thought that Nazis had infiltrated the protests; consequently, he welcomed the Soviet intervention and was one of the people waving at them upon their arrival. Brecht, whose role in the GDR has been highly contested, spent considerable time in exile after he fled Germany in 1933. Brecht, even more so than Wolf, had experienced the terrors of the Third Reich and believed that the bourgeois intellectuals during the Weimar Republic were directly responsible for its demise and the rise of the Nazis, which further motivated him to support the communist cause.\(^{228}\)

After the uprising of workers, he published a statement in the official newspaper *Neues Deutschland* to express his solidarity with the SED:

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On June 17, I directed a short letter to the SED, in which I exhibited the necessity for an extensive discussion with the workers. Only the last sentence of it was published. The SED has made mistakes that are very grave for a socialist party and these mistakes enraged the workers. I am not part of it. But I respect many of its historical achievements and I feel connected to it, when it was attacked – not for its mistakes but because of its merits – by the fascist and warmongering mob. I stood and I stand on its side in the battle against war and fascism.229

Just like Wolf’s fictional character Rita, Brecht realized that the state had committed errors, but the overarching goals, the fight against fascism and the creation of social justice and freedom, remained his priority and the reason why he justified the SED’s actions. Although twenty-one people died from the application of violence by the Soviet military forces during the protest, Ulbricht’s power increased.230 Wolf justified military action in the name of socialism, too. For example, she supported the Soviet invasion of the Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring in 1968.231

Although Wolf supported the system, increasing disapproval and discontent with the SED and her life in the GDR is noticeable in her succeeding work. Wolf’s second novel, Nachdenken über Christa T., (The Quest for Christa T.), more accurately translated Reflecting on Christa T., was published in 1968. A nameless narrator, who presents the story in the first-person perspective, reflects on the life of a friend called Christa T., a few years after she had died of

leukemia at the age of 35. The friends were from the same generation and shared a similar life story; both lived through the chaotic aftermath of the Second World War, went to the same school, attended the same college to study German, and later became teachers, wives, and mothers. Although they were friends, the narrator has little memory of Christa T.’s life and has to get to know her again and learn about her by reading Christa T.’s journals and the stories she had written. To understand Christa T. and construct a coherent picture of her and her life, the narrator projects her own ideas and experiences while evaluating the documents.

Although Wolf does not mention the GDR or communism, the story is about her generation, when the young adults’ enthusiasm and desire to build a new country was devastated by broken promises. What remained was only the “Mief der DDR” (“the stink of the GDR”), according to critic Reich-Ranicki. Compared to her first book, Wolf criticized the GDR more noticeably in this work. This change in tone and content did not go unnoticed by the party. *They Divided the Sky* was praised in the GDR, widely distributed in West Germany, and gained Wolf the *Heinrich Mann Preis*, an award issued by the former *Deutsche Akademie der Künste* in East Berlin, now *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin.

While there was significant debate whether this novel fell under the *Sozialistischer Realismus* umbrella, the party allowed it to be released for publication. Christine Cosentino describes *Sozialistischer Realismus* as an “art theory that under instructions of the party should develop a socialist awareness and the reflection of communism.” One of the attributes of such art was the optimistic and idealized hero in the story, who would advance Marxist-Leninist

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ideology. It can be debated whether the fictional character Rita is such a “positive” hero. Rita is burdened with significant doubt before remaining loyal to the GDR and choosing a life in the socialist society. Still, the happy ending, at least from the party’s perspective, allowed for the story to be published.

Whereas there are subtle signs of a break from the mold of *Sozialistischer Realismus* in *They Divided the Sky, Nachdenken über Christa T.* confirms Wolf’s departure from it. The central theme of this novel, thinking about Christa T.’s defeat of her personality because of the lack of honesty, enthusiasm, individuality, and her eventual death, is undoubtfully pessimistic and hopeless. Cosentino speaks of a “Sozialistischer Realismus literature that gives way to a literature depicting realistic socialism.”234 After a charade of evaluations that assessed whether or not the novel should be censored, the SED Central Committee (*Zentralkomitee, ZK*), which was its decision-making body, decided to allow its publication. Although Wolf did not exhibit a clear political position in the novel and therefore failed to meet the ZK’s central culture-political requirements, the publisher reminded the committee that censorship would be a difficult endeavor, since the West-German press had already been made aware of the book’s existence. Still, the ZK decided to reduce the number of copies from 20,000 to 4,000, and, prior to its publication, circulated a series of negative reviews of the work in an effort to criticize the book and discredit its author. These reviews, as political attacks, aimed to manipulate public opinion.235

Wolf’s reception in West Germany was more positive. Its harshest and most respected critic, the Polish-born German Marcel Reich-Ranicki was a larger-than-life literary critic who

would later be referred to as the *Pope of Literature* throughout Germany.\(^{236}\) In a lengthy *Die Zeit* article from May 1969, Reich-Ranicki evaluated Wolf’s work in a favorable way, even calling it a “highly pleasant case” (“*höchst erfreulicher Fall*”).\(^ {237}\) In his review, he claims that Wolf had developed from an unskilled writer – he calls *They Divided the Sky* an insignificant accomplishment – to one who had learned technical skills and new means of expression. Reich-Ranicki furthermore states that Wolf must have adopted the new skills from West-German writers. He also assesses the work’s worth based on Wolf’s evaluation of the GDR and her narrator’s and Christa T.’s struggle for “poetic justice of the individual” against the authorities.\(^ {238}\) A common tendency is already noticeable: Wolf’s art is measured according to Western standards and the content of her work, while the disapproval of the socialist system is pivotal to receiving a favorable recension in the West.

Wolf’s discontent about and objections against the regime were again noticeable during the German-German Literary Exile (*Deutsch-Deutscher Literaturexil*) in 1977, when East-German singer and songwriter Wolf Biermann was expatriated. During a show in Cologne – for which he had obtained a visa – the SED took away his citizenship so that he was forced to stay in West Germany. As previously discussed in this chapter, this action by the party was an effort to push dissidents or people who openly criticized the regime to the West. Biermann, like Wolf and many others, had criticized the GDR but nevertheless felt at home there. In an interview, Biermann stated that as a poet he wanted to remain in a country that he knew and where he knew


\(^{238}\) Ibid.
his friends and foes. Furthermore, he said, “As a person, who interfered with the conflicts of the world, I was dead [in West Germany].” Wolf and many authors and artists shared this feeling, and in an open letter to the party, requested for Biermann’s expatriation to be reconsidered.

The party did not reconsider the decision and furthermore exiled many other artists to West Germany. Wolf was not one of them. Until the end of the GDR, she believed in socialism and reforming the state. At a press conference on November 28, 1989, she delivered the plea, For our People (Für unser Land), for the continued existence of the GDR that she had composed with 31 other GDR citizens, a plea in which she admits to the weaknesses of the GDR and the necessity for reform. She stated that the people of the GDR had two choices: to either remain an independent country and work towards a socialist society, where peace, social justice, freedom of the individual, liberty for all, and the conservation of the environment are ensured, or accept the sellout of material and moral values of the GDR and later the assimilation of the GDR by West Germany. She pleads to remain an alternative to the FRG and to remember the antifascist and humanistic ideals from which they once built their state.

Her warning turned out to be prescient. The GDR was assimilated into West Germany, and the values, and even artistic talents, of East Germans were delegitimized by West Germans. To reiterate, Wolf was an accomplished editor and writer, praised by the harshest West-German critic, who processed her experiences, frustrations, and gradual disapproval with the regime

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240 Ibid.
through her literary work. From the beginning she had shown unyielding support for the main components of its ideology but, when the circumstances allowed it, she criticized the party. The opposition that West Germans demanded from her would have meant being exiled from her home and a system of government that she believed could be reformed. But her initial sentiment to create a society that was the opposite of the Nazi regime she endured as a child remained her artistic purpose.

After unification, on June 5, 1990, Wolf was finally able to talk about the most controversial side of her life in the GDR, her attitude toward the Stasi. On that date, What Remains (Was Bleibt), her novel about the Stasi (not so secretly) surveying the narrator – told in the first-person perspective – was published. A literary criticism battle against her book followed that was, while “about Christa Wolf, precisely… not about Christa Wolf,” as Wolf Biermann described it. What is referred to as the Deutsch-Deutscher Literaturstreit (German-German Literature Dispute) in 1990 occurred in several phases.

Before discussing the phases, it is necessary to mention an article published before unification. In 1987, Reich-Ranicki wrote an article in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), “Macht Verfolgung kreativ?” (“Does persecution make one creative?”),” as a response to Wolf’s speech during the Heinrich Kleist award ceremony for Thomas Brasch. In a shockingly malicious manner, Reich-Ranicki begins his argument by discrediting Wolf’s good reputation based on the supposed fact that East Germans simply had no appropriate choices of competent writers. For this, he used the metaphor, “Where there is a lack of wool and silk, one can do good

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245 Thomas Brasch was one of the East German writers who left the GDR after signing the resolution against the Wolf Biermann exile.
business with cotton and artificial silk.” He continues, “But that such writer, whose artistic and intellectual abilities are rather modest, is also praised in the West […] is less understandable.”

This concludes his opening paragraph. In this first paragraph, Reich-Ranicki had done two things: he criticized the GDR and furthermore discredited all East-German intellectuals or artists by suggesting that they did not measure up against – superior – West-German standards. Second, he claimed that Wolf was a dilettante.

In his ensuing paragraphs, he criticizes Wolf for her lack of character and courage to stand up against the injustices committed by the state. He especially condemns her support for the party and coins the term “GDR State Poet” (DDR-Staatsdichterin) for her. When he cites Wolf’s speech praising Thomas Brasch (“The GDR made Thomas Brasch creative”), he answers that this is cynicism, hypocrisy, or sheer effrontery. At that time, Reich-Ranicki was a highly regarded literature critic, having gained the earlier mentioned nickname, Pope of Literature (Literturpapst). His reviews were highly anticipated and highly regarded. Of all literature critics, it was his opinion that mattered most. It is puzzling why he attacked Wolf so blatantly, when, twenty years earlier, he had praised Nachdenken über Christa T. This article, however, was just the beginning of his quest to condemn Wolf, who stood for all artists and intellectuals in the GDR.

Two years later, on November 30, 1989, Reich-Ranicki raised the following question in his show Literarisches Quartett: “In Germany, a revolution took place. And whenever there is a revolution on this earth, the writers like to say that they had substantially contributed to it. How

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247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
is it then, did the writers in the GDR win or fail?²⁴⁹ The Literarisches Quartett was a show consisting of four literature critics reviewing books before a live audience. The already intense discussion among the critics was interrupted that evening when a spectator came forward to make a statement. The format of the show did not allow for the audience to ask questions or make statements, thus, Reich-Ranicki asked him in a rude and impatient manner to leave. However, the man stubbornly tried to make his statement but each time he was interrupted after, “I think it is not reasonable that the writers of the GDR...”²⁵⁰ Reich-Ranicki was not willing to listen to this man and called for a security guard to remove him. But the man stubbornly stayed and, after a long back and forth, was able to finish his sentence, “I think it is not reasonable that the writers of the GDR, who offered a ray of hope for the people who had worked towards revolution, are dragged through the dirt by you.”²⁵¹ His statement was not dignified with an answer and the guest was asked to leave.

The way in which this man was asked to remain silent and sent off stage was uncomfortable to the viewer. Although the format of the show did not include the live audience to participate in the discussion, it seemed unnecessarily rude not to at least listen if someone felt such a strong need to speak up, especially since the man appeared quiet and collected and showed no sign of aggressive behavior. Although it is not known whether this man was East German or not, it appears as if he was personally concerned and felt that he had to justify or stand up for East-German writers. Through this example, it becomes evident that the issue at hand was not just about Christa Wolf or the East-German regime; it was the GDR culture and

²⁵¹ Ibid.
identity that East Germans tried to defend. Nevertheless, during this show, Reich-Ranicki condemned East-German writers who supported a totalitarian regime after knowing about the crimes the state had committed and called for a new assessment of East-German literature in this light/from this perspective. ²⁵²

The first phase of the Literaturstreit then really began on June 1 and 2, 1990, when Ulrich Greiner (Die Zeit) and Frank Schirrmacher (FAZ) published “reviews” of Was Bleibt prior to the novel’s publication. ²⁵³ Greiner set the tone of his article, “Mangel an Feinfühligkeit“ (”Lack of Tactfulness”), in his first sentence: “That’s quite something: The secret police of the GDR surveilled the state poet of the GDR.” ²⁵⁴ The word choice and tone he used throughout the article were neither factual nor professional, and the recension appeared to be a personal attack against Wolf and her decisions in life. He referred to the Stasi as a “monstrous apparatus,” – the common tendency of West-German journalists described in chapter one – her decision to publish it after the fall of the Berlin Wall, “literary calculation,” the content, “literary dishonest,” and Wolf’s situation “a sad case.” ²⁵⁵

The main issue that Greiner condemned was the publication date. According to him, the book would have been relevant and honest, if she would have published prior to the demise of the GDR. In the unified Germany, she was safe from the East-German communist party’s retaliation. The fact that Wolf decided to not confront the SED when the GDR still existed was reason enough for Greiner to call the publication of the book “embarrassing.” ²⁵⁶ It seems that Wolf was representative of all East-German intellectuals who had decided to remain in the GDR

²⁵² Ibid.
²⁵³ It is noteworthy to mention that Reich-Ranicki had worked for Die Zeit and at that point, was working for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.
²⁵⁵ Ibid.
²⁵⁶ Ibid.
and whose art was now discredited for that reason. The debate whether art that was produced in an oppressive regime could be appreciated at all had been discussed in the past. Thomas Mann, for instance, had called for all books that were written in Germany between 1933 and 1945 to be destroyed.257

However, in her work Wolf clearly condemned the Stasi and its methods and depicted herself as one who suffered from it. The novel’s time of completion and Wolf’s publication timing lead to believe that she was either unable or afraid (or both) to publish it in the GDR. If we consider works, such as Gustaw Herling-Grudzinski’s A World Apart: A Memoir of the Gulag or Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956, that were written during a dictatorship and published when both writers were released and safe, as crucial, then Wolf’s work has merit. Again, this example does not aim to compare atrocities but to evaluate whether art and literature can be evaluated and legitimized on the basis of timing, since this was the main criticism that West Germans initially expressed.

In the second article that started the Literaturstreit, “Dem Druck des härteren, strengerer Lebens standhalten” (“To withstand the pressure of a harder, stricter life”), Schirrmacher also evaluated Wolf’s work based on her biography, rather than as a work of literature on its own.258 In his article, he showed no interest in her work but rather focused on her career in general. In a more subtle way than Greiner, he mainly criticized her unyielding loyalty to the party and the late publication date of What Remains.

Despite all this dismissive criticism of Wolf’s novel that had little to say about the actual novel, some West-German critics were able to assess her work in a professional manner. Volker

Hage’s (Die Zeit) article, “Artful Prose,” published on June 1, 1990, is helpful to recognize how polemical, aggressive, and unprofessional both Greiner’s, and Schirrmacher’s articles were. First and foremost, Hage referred to Wolf as a writer, not a “state poet.” In his well-structured article, he established the following points: Wolf’s fame came due to her many achievements in the GDR; writers should not be seen or treated as leaders in difficult circumstances and writers aren’t always heroes in life but should be judged according to their literary texts; Wolf’s What Remains is an exemplary work of prose; and the quality of a book is not measured by its publication date.

Around thirty “pro and contra Christa Wolf” – predominantly Western – newspapers and magazines articles followed. The main questions discussed were whether art could be produced in an oppressive regime; West Germans had the authority to judge East-German intellectual work (since they had not lived as subjects of this regime); art could be judged according to the moral compass of its author; and how to move forward in the future in a unified country. Although moral questions became the central point of the debate, critics still paid attention to and evaluated Wolf’s prose to some extent.

By the end of 1990, the discussion shifted, when intellectuals debated the Deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik (German attitude towards aesthetics). Surprisingly, the discussion completely broke away from Wolf’s text and took aim at all literature – East and West – produced after the Second World War. According to Greiner, all German post-war literature was never art for art’s sake but dependent on the author’s morals. Greiner claimed, “In Gesinnungsästhetik, and Christa Wolf is an excellent example, the work and person and morals

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260 Ibid.
are inseparable.”²⁶² He continued, “This is all in the past […] it all had its necessity, even if no
good literature came out of it.”²⁶³ Although he had initiated the dispute by criticizing Wolf’s
morals (or better: the lack thereof), in this article he called for the end of such
Gesinnungsästhetik.

Christa Wolf remained silent. In order to escape the media attention, she decided to move
to Santa Monica, California. After the heated controversy ceased for a while, it ignited again two
years later. In 1992, Wolf was accused of having been involved with the Stasi. This time, she
responded with an article in the Berliner Zeitung, in which she admitted that she had not only
been a victim of the Stasi but had also worked for them. A lengthy article in Der Spiegel, “Die
Ängstliche Margarete” (“The fearful Margarete”) replied to her confession in typical Spiegel
manner. The unknown author of the article first raised the question, whether Wolf was telling the
truth.²⁶⁴ Since she had admitted to her involvement, it was safe to say that she was telling the
truth. The next question raised was why she had waited so long to reply to the allegations.²⁶⁵
Because she was living in the USA, receiving the file via fax, working through it, and then
writing a confession, it took time. Because there was not much to add, the author then took the
time to retell the meetings that were described in the Stasi file in his or her own words,
embellishing them here and there to make it sound more interesting than it really was. For
instance, the “story” started with “The dark chapter of the world-famous author’s life
began…”²⁶⁶ When referring to Wolf speaking to Stasi members, the author referred to her

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²⁶² Ulrich Greiner, “Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik,” Zeit Online, November 2, 1990,
²⁶³ Ibid.
13680284.html.
²⁶⁵ Ibid.
²⁶⁶ Ibid.
“chatting away,” instead of the term “speaking.”\textsuperscript{267} At the end of the article, Wolf was again criticized for her lack of resistance in the GDR and her affirmation of fear. The \textit{Staatsdichterin der DDR} was referred to as \textit{Die ängstliche Margarete} (The fearful Margarete), as Margarete was her secret \textit{Stasi} name.

Comparing the language, tone, and content of the \textit{Spiegel} news coverage with other sources, a lack of professional reporting and a great amount of uncalled editorializing is noticeable. Wolf’s involvement with the \textit{Stasi}, described in 38 paragraphs in the \textit{Spiegel} article, is summarized in one paragraph by Christine Kanz:

Wolf’s long search for truth did not preclude self-deception and amnesia. Her short role as a Stasi informer, when she was a thirty-year-old enthusiastic but naïve socialist, consisted of a single handwritten note containing innocuous information on a writer colleague who acknowledged Wolf’s belated apology and [subsequently] publicly defended her against the media defamation. It also contained some irrelevant reports on her meetings with other colleagues, which were not written by her but by some Stasi agents.\textsuperscript{268}

The attacks against Christa Wolf were a “part of a campaign against everything that came out of East Germany,” as Günter Grass appropriately stated.\textsuperscript{269} Lothar De Maizière, Gregor Gysi, and Christa Wolf are just examples of the many East Germans who were publicly ridiculed and

\textsuperscript{267} Ibid.
had their work discredited. Another prominent example is the *Deutsch-deutscher Bilderstreit* (the German-German picture dispute) in the early 1990s, when West-German painters criticized the work of their East-German colleagues – Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, Willi Sitte, Werner Tübke – and even tried to prohibit the displaying of their art in the *Berliner Nationalgalerie*.²⁷⁰ Again and again, West Germans did not take East-German politicians and artists seriously. This criticism was widely displayed in the media. However, the everyday *Ossi* (slang for East German) was under attack, too, which is evident from the manner in which they were depicted in films about East Germany.

**EAST-GERMAN SEARCH FOR IDENTITY**

This section examines the everyday East German navigating through assimilation into West Germany and finding a new identify in the face of constant criticism from West Germans.²⁷¹ To suggest reasons explaining why their identity is contested by West Germans, as evident in the films *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Berlin is in Germany*, it is necessary to define the concept of identity. In a contemporary, relevant definition, cited in *Culture and Identity*, Simon Clarke explains:

> ...the notion of identity as shaped not just in relation to some other, but to the Other, to another culture. The notion of cultural identity becomes much

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stronger and firmer when we define our ‘selves’ in relation to a cultural Other. We start then to see ideas around ‘ways of life’, ‘us’ and ‘them.”

According to Clarke, identity is therefore defined by differences amongst people in relationship with one another; it does not focus primarily on an individual’s development of self in isolation. Through the lens of the Frankfurt School, and in particular supported by the work of Franz Fanon and Slavoj Zizek, Clarke further argues that identity is socially and psychologically constructed, citing that, “in constructing our cultural identity both socially and psychologically, we tend to construct, play with and destroy the identity of others.” What is most relevant is his argument that people’s constructions and perceptions (regardless of whether they are fiction or fact) of the way they imagine their world and the way others exist in it has actual effects in real life. The primary examples I use to illustrate this argument are the films Good Bye, Lenin! and Berlin is in Germany.

These films provide ideal examples of the ways in which identity is negotiated by East-German citizens as a result of West-German cultural biases and stereotyping. For instance, in similar scenes in both films – the dinner party – the ways in which the protagonists, Martin and Alex, are perceived and thus treated by others have specific repercussions for their agency and power. In both instances, the main characters’ physical inferiority, for instance, their clothing, “marks” them as less significant individuals, ultimately discrediting their participation with (acceptance by) others (in particular, West Germans). While fictional, these characters’ challenges – as East Germans who have seemingly become unwelcome foreigners in their own

273 Ibid, 525.
land – reflect the disorientation experienced by East-German citizens as inferior guests in their own home.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson’s argument about the concept of community supports the films’ illustrations of the identity crises experienced by East-German citizens, as they are attempting to navigate their once-familiar homeland. Anderson explains that a nation is a socially constructed and imagined community, in which people share affinities, such as language or behavior, but in fact never know every single member of the group or nation and are therefore engage with imagined relations. The implications of this theory are that a nation is perceived as a product of modernity – created as a means to political and economic ends. This suggests that a nation is not predetermined; it is flexible and constructed. More specifically, it is necessary to discuss the way in which nation-states establish and alter their identities in regard to policies, such as immigrants and migration.

If a person’s – and even a nation’s – identity can be defined by demonstrating differences amongst people, then the argument proposed in this chapter – that East Germans are identified as Other and also perceive of themselves as such both in contemporary film and in reality, has theoretical leverage. *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Berlin is in Germany* reveal patterns that explain the lingering disunity between East and West from an underrepresented lens: an East-German perspective. Both films confront the audience with a new East German who has to navigate a foreign terrain and is forced to adapt to this new culture. They imply that the East-German sentiment of longing for GDR culture and values is an attempt to maintain an East-German identity while being threatened by dominant West Germany. I argue that the constant and continual lack of respect and legitimizing of East-German accomplishments and identity caused

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275 Ibid, 6.
an even greater desire to maintain or claim their East-German identity; East-German writer Ingo Schulze asserted, “[o]nly in the 1990s did I become East German.”

Good Bye, Lenin! focuses on the period of time immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the hectic transition and reorientation involved in negotiating a new system and place. The pervasive theme of a “gesamtdeutsch” (all-German) future becomes ironic because of the exclusion and ostracization of East Germans. Berlin is in Germany, however, takes place eleven years after unification and focuses on contemporary East/West-German issues that, according to director Hannes Stöhr, depict the East German as the new foreigner and subsequent Other – as opposed to the West German – representing a much more negative interpretation of the unification process. The East Germans are not only depicted as the Other, but their social standing is compared to that of a Gastarbeiter (discussed later in this analysis).

In order to illuminate this unique cultural condition, I compare two scenes from each film, focusing my analysis on the specific markers, for instance, clothing and dialect, that identify East Germans’ otherness and thus stigmatize them as inferior to West Germans’ cultural practices. In both films, a dinner party scene is particularly rich with setting and dialogue that explicitly highlights the East-German protagonists as a minority within the majority culture. This particular cultural condition is unique because as a result of the fall of the Berlin Wall, East Germans – as German citizens in their own right – experience a deeply personal and profound disorientation: their homeland becomes physically different and culturally foreign, yet they are expected to immediately assimilate because of their shared identity with the West as German.

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BERLIN IS IN GERMANY

The first scene I analyze occurs in *Berlin is in Germany* when the main character, Martin (Jörg Schüttauf) joins, without invitation, a dinner party hosted by his ex-wife, Manuela (Julia Jäger), originally from East Germany. Also present are her new partner, Wolfgang, who is from West Germany and another couple, Pierre (from France) and Pierre’s girlfriend, from West Germany. This scene is particularly interesting because the director, Stöhr, infused his mise-en-scène with visual and narrative evidence to emphasize Martin’s differences in appearance, language, behavior, and way of life (thus culture) from the other party guests but also because it depicts a unified and harmonious Western relationship between West Germans and French and a divided Eastern Europe. The way in which Stöhr works to contrast Martin with the other guests leads his audience to think that, due to Martin’s differences, he is inferior to the West Germans present.

For instance, when Martin enters the frame and dining room setting, all of the guests are already sitting at the table.

During a formal introduction via handshake, it is immediately noticeable that Martin is dressed in an inferior, informal way as compared with the other four guests: he is wearing white sneakers, blue jeans, a white shirt, and a blue jeans jacket. This attire is clearly a fashion statement more suitable to the 1980s than the present. The other members of the party wear contemporary fashion, such as dress shirts in dark colors and discreet patterns. When Pierre, the only real foreigner, introduces himself, Martin pauses for a short while and repeats his name twice, giving the audience the impression that he has never heard that (ostensibly exotic) name before. The camera’s focus on Martin, as he pauses to comprehend Pierre’s name, reveals to the audience that Martin is not only different in his appearance, but is also differentiated – othered – by his intellect and naïveté.
A few moments later, at the dinner table, each couple is seated facing one another and Martin, in contrast, is located at the end of the table with the consequence that he is further disconnected – again, physically – from the group. He has no partner and nobody across the table to look at; therefore, he seems to be the proverbial fifth wheel and is arguably odd both because of his cultural difference and because he is lacking a better half; while the couples appear as harmonious sets, he is set off by his singleness. Additionally, the viewer is immediately informed about Martin’s status as an outsider because he is framed in the very center of a wide/straight-on shot that implies he is under special scrutiny (which also extends to his status among the guest who treat him like an animal in a zoo). The position of Pierre and Wolfgang – as both are sitting vis-à-vis at the table, slightly turned towards Martin so that the audience can only see their backs – further reinforces that Martin is not only the focus of attention because of his physical otherness, but also the object of scrutiny and the stranger or Other to be inspected.

After being seated, Martin is asked whether he wants to eat dinner: “Paella. Das isst man so in Spanien” (“Paella. That’s what one eats in Spain”), says Manuela. At this moment, it is interesting that she has to explain to him that paella is a Spanish dish, which suggests that Martin is not as culturally sophisticated as she is. The notion of cultural superiority is further reinforced when Martin answers in a strong Berliner dialect: “Joa, schmeckt jut. Schmeckt echt jut.” (“Yes, tastes good. Tastes really good”). At this point, Martin is not only physically othered by his clothing and lack of a partner but additionally because of his dialect. His use of dialect serves as an aesthetic and intellectual marker of inferiority: aesthetically, he sounds unrefined, and consequently, appears less intelligent. Recent linguistic scholarship reinforces this argument, citing Germans’ contemporary opinions about dialects: “Dialects are dated and make a person

\(^{277}\) Berlin is in Germany, directed by Hannes Stöhr (2001; Berlin, Germany: Good Movies/Piffl/Indigo, 2013), DVD.
sound uneducated. Whoever wants to achieve something, needs to speak High German - according to widespread opinion [in Germany]).

Martin is therefore shown not only as the Other physically, but intellectually as well. In addition to undermining Martin’s dialect, Martin also quotes the Russian writer Alexander Pushkin at another point during the dinner, which underscores that Martin grew up in East Germany and in an educational system that valued a Russocentric view of the world.

After 1945, West Germans were reared to speak English as a second language and focused on Western literature and philosophy, whereas East Germans were instructed in Russian and steeped in the Russian as well as Soviet classics. Russian had been a requirement in East-German schools from fifth to at least tenth grade from 1948 until unification, when Russian language education became a Randprogramm (side show). After unification, an “Anti-Russian-Trend” began and almost all students living in the East decided to take English to be more competitive in the job market, since all West Germans were educated in English and participated in the global capitalist market. Furthermore, the Russian language became a scapegoat for criticism of the former socialist educational system, which was accused of imposing its ideology onto students. In light of this contextual information, the implications of this scene, as well as the Pushkin quote in Berlin is in Germany, can be appreciated for their symbolic significance.

In addition to Martin’s performative otherness and the cinematic tools employed, such as the camera’s positioning and focus, affect the viewer’s understanding of Martin as a symbolic character. When Martin quotes: “Wo der Tisch voll Speisen war, dort steht ein Sarg” (“Where

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280 Ibid.
there used to be a table full of food, a coffin now stands”), the camera’s position changes from a medium shot to a close-up of Martin’s face. This close-up shot makes it possible for the viewer to see that as he is saying the word “Sarg” (coffin), he is also turning to Wolfgang. Stöhr then cuts to a close up of Wolfgang’s frowning face replete with pinched lips and pierced glance. The direction of Wolfgang’s gaze indicates to the audience that he is looking back at Martin and understanding that this remark was aimed specifically at him. When Martin proceeds to mention the poet’s name, Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin, Stöhr cuts to a close up of Manuela, who quickly follows up Martin’s quotation with a wry smile and a toast, suggesting that she is uncomfortable with Martin’s odd comment as it reveals his alien East-German identity or culture, implying that it is something that would generate embarrassment. Contrary to Martin and Wolfgang, who are gazing at their opponent, the close up of Manuela suggests that she is avoiding her guests’ gaze; she looks at her wine glass instead. Manuela is depicted as feeling ashamed for Martin and perhaps she believes that she, too, is negatively implicated because of her former association with him and the GDR. Instead of feeling guilty about the party’s treatment of a fellow German and defending her former husband, she is turned into a guilty bystander.

Stöhr reinforces Martin’s isolation in this scene through Martin’s inappropriate behavior during dinner: while the four Western guests display impeccable table manners, sitting with straight backs at the table and occasionally sipping their wine, Martin sits hunched forward, leaning on his elbows, and speaking with his mouth full. The scene concludes the way it started: a medium shot shows Martin framed in the center, all guests slightly turned towards him with their backs to the audience, continuing their observations until the conclusion of the gathering. Martin is never able to penetrate their closed circle and remains firmly at the periphery. As a
final act, Martin loses all dignity and while answering a question about his specific location during the fall of the Berlin Wall, he stands up, intoxicated, and concludes his account by screaming out loud that he rose up against the GDR regime but, as if to undermine his own account of defiance, falls onto the floor.

Manuela is the only one to react – she gets up to assist him immediately; however, the other three guests do not move. Pierre and his wife stare with disbelief in Martin’s direction and Wolfgang turns his head away from Martin’s position on the floor. At this point in the film, Martin is no longer visible in the frame, as he is lying on the floor behind the table. The lack of a reaction from the West Germans and Martin’s absence from the frame visually suggest the guests’ indifference toward Martin’s existence and well-being and confirm his isolation from the group; whether he is present or absent does not appear to matter. Reconsidering Martin’s Russian quote, “Where there used to be a table full of food, a coffin now stands,” it becomes clear that the protagonist has fallen into this proverbial coffin; not only has the Russian and Soviet cultural legacy been extinguished in the newly united Germany but also the East German has been destroyed, too.

If one considers Anderson’s concept of a nation as a socially constructed community in which its members appreciate shared interests, despite a lack of acquaintance with individual members it becomes clear that Stöhr’s film suggests an extra-national relationship between East and West Germans as opposed to the relationship of French and West Germans, founders of postwar European unity. In the duration of this scene, the audience is shown that despite public declarations of each other’s support, East and West Germans do not share affinities that could form the basis of a unified Germany, due to more than 40 years of separation and the
development of different cultural values; thus the film highlights that assumptions of shared interests, language, and behavior simply because of a shared space are naïve and even false.

The concept of nation as constructed predates Anderson’s shared community and is illustrated in Ernest Renan’s 1882 essay *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* (“What is a nation?”). He describes a nation as:

>a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which are really one, constitute this soul and spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other, the present. One is the possession in common of a rich trove of memories; the other is actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the undivided, shared heritage […] To have had glorious moments in common in the past, a common will in the present, to have done great things together and to wish to do more, those are the essential conditions for a people. We love the nation in proportion to the sacrifices to which we consented, the harms that we suffered.281

In *Berlin is in Germany*, the “glorious pasts” that East and West Germany may have had in common appear as too far in the past to be tapped in the present. Furthermore, judging by the film’s depiction of the ignorant way Martin is treated, it is not foreseeable that a “common will in the present” to do great things in the future is possible.

Comparing the behavior, and specifically the table manners, of the East and West Germans in this scene, the 1960s term *Positivismusstreit* (the dispute about methods and value

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judgments of the social sciences, primarily in West Germany) and the resulting concept of 
Sekundärtugend ("secondary virtues") are immediately useful for understanding traditional East 
and West-German ways of raising and educating children and young adults.

These secondary virtues were understood to be character traits implemented for the 
practical handling of everyday life. However, these virtues are often criticized for lacking ethical 
merit. In “Contemporary Ideas in a Traditional Mind-Set,” Astrid Mignon Kirchhof suggests that 
these secondary virtues were implemented as “social rehabilitation [from the horrors of the 
Second World War].”

Originally borrowed from the catalog of Prussian virtues, some of these 
virtues are politeness, restraint, and orderliness, which are still esteemed in contemporary 
Germany, and are especially obvious with regard to table manners.

Since the East German in this film is depicted as behaving like a peasant who is unaware 
of the most basic social skills, it is necessary to elaborate about potential reasons explaining 
Stöhr’s decision to depict this character in this unfortunate light. Rather than suggesting that 
Stöhr purposefully cast Martin as a character who represents the uncivilized Ossi, it is possible 
that as a West German, Stöhr may have allowed his own prejudices to interfere with what is 
otherwise a portrayal of an affable protagonist. In support of this suggestion, there is evidence 
that potentially contradicts Stöhr’s suggestion that in the East a less refined attitude toward 
etiquette was part of the social norm. For instance, in an article in Die Zeit, Susanne Gaschke 
explains that in the former GDR behavior, effort, collaboration, and tidiness were mercilessly 
graded within the classroom, unlike in Western educational institutions, which had given up

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teaching and acknowledging secondary virtues in schools in the 1970s. In addition, another lengthy 1990 Der Spiegel article titled “Bald brennt die Luft” (“Soon the air will burn”) lists many examples supporting that East Germans demanded stricter manners than West Germans. Noteworthy is also the first sentence of the article: “According to Stephanie Heim, 19 [years old], GDR citizens are ‘somehow different’.” Heim was referring to the more formal manners of East Germans, for instance, when her host family would greet her with a formal handshake every morning; a custom she was not used to in West Germany.

In Berlin is in Germany, however, this difference is depicted in exactly the opposite way. Filmmaker Stöhr’s West-German identity might lie at the core of this depiction; however, in addition to reinforcing stereotypes, the depiction of the East German as the Other or specifically the loser, in this story, also has ideological implications. If the East German is portrayed as a misbehaving brute, then it becomes more reasonable to demand that the East Germans behave like the sophisticated West Germans and adopt West-German values.

In “Ossis sind Türken” (“East Germans are Turks”), Toralf Staud explores the reasons justifying why it makes sense to compare East Germans to immigrants and how this comparison helps dissolve most East/West-German conflicts. He claims that the majority of East and West disputes can be explained as issues of West Germans’ demand (as the majority of the population) for East Germans’ assimilation and conversely, the East-German “immigrants” asking permission to preserve, at the very least, some of their historical identity.

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285 Ibid.
This comparison perfectly characterizes the scene analyzed above. Martin, the immigrant, displays his unrefined socialist and Russian-infused culture. It was common practice in the German press to depict Russians as drunk, and associate them with “messiness, uncleanliness, and chaos.” Martin ends up defeated and degraded on the ground. Manuela, on the other hand, has assimilated into her new West-German surroundings, and is subsequently trying to distance herself from Martin, implying that his cultural identity is inappropriate and unwelcome in her new place.

GOOD BYE, LENIN!

The negative portrayal of East Germans is similarly evident throughout another post-Wende film and one that enjoyed great popularity in German cinemas: *Good Bye, Lenin!* by director Wolfgang Becker. A particular scene in *Good Bye, Lenin!* proves a similar pattern in the portrayal of East Germans in post-unification German cinema. Toward the end of the film, Alex (Daniel Brühl), the main protagonist, is shown in a taxi in East Berlin, giving the driver the destination *Wannsee*. It is noteworthy that the driver in this scene looks like the former East-German astronaut and Alex’s childhood hero, Sigmund Jähn. Jähn appears in other scenes of the film, in a series of flashbacks that were shot using video equipment of the past (colors are faded, edges are rounded). These flashbacks provoke nostalgic sentiments and possibly even insinuate glorification of the GDR, as they are, within the narrative, used to show the good old days of Alex’s happy childhood in the GDR.

The film leaves to the viewers’ discretion whether the taxi driver is indeed the cosmonaut or whether he merely looks like him. What is important, however, is the fact that it is absolutely

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287 Roswitha Loew and Anke Pfeiffer, *Wie wir die Fremden sehen, Russen-, Rumänien- und Polenbilder im aktuellen deutschen Pressediskurs* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač, 2001), 35.
plausible that even a cultural icon like Jähn could now be reduced to a mere taxi driver. Within the taxi, the audience sees the former GDR hero driving “ein kleines stinkiges Lada Taxi” ("a tiny, smelly Lada taxi") as Alex narrates it, clearly indicating that his idol has been relegated as a “ghost of [his] past,” an icon not venerated in the newly unified nation. This scene also reinforces the sentiment evidenced within Berlin is in Germany, that the GDR and West Germany experienced different pasts that cannot be magically merged or disregarded because of unification. The more practical purpose of the taxi ride is for Alex to visit his estranged father, who had supposedly abandoned his family in East Berlin to live a new life in Wannsee, an affluent district in West Berlin. During the ride, Alex’s voiceover comments on the experience and alludes to the cosmonaut driver: “[a]nd so we flew through the night as if gliding through outer space, light years from our solar system. We passed strange galaxies harboring unknown life forms and landed in Wannsee.”\textsuperscript{288}

The content of this narration, inspired by the presence of Alex’s childhood hero, is not merely a nostalgic way of describing the drive from East to West Berlin, it is Alex’s recapitulation of the feelings he has about his estranged father and the perceived spatial and cultural disconnection that exists between them. It pinpoints Alex’s central concern of the West “harboring unknown life forms” that are “light years” away from his part of the city.

This cultural and spatial separation of East and West Berliner neighborhoods is cleverly depicted in the scene in which Alex first enters his father’s house. Similar to Martin in Berlin is in Germany, Alex also enters a West-German household, uninvited. Here, too, a dinner party is in progress. What is immediately noticeable when comparing the scenes within these two films is the similar mise-en-scène and more specifically, the similarities between the main characters’

\textsuperscript{288} Good Bye, Lenin!, directed by Wolfgang Becker (2003; Berlin, Germany: X-Filme Creative Pool, Warner Bros., 2003), DVD.
wardrobe. Alex, like Martin, also wears blue jeans and a blue jeans jacket, the outfit of choice for young people in the 70s and 80s, but a relic of the past in the new millennium. Considering now that both filmmakers chose blue jeans to represent the East Germans, it is useful to evaluate this significant symbolism: what does the characters’ clothing insinuate about their cultural otherness?

Besides representing fashion trends of particular decades, the potential symbolism of blue jeans is an issue wrought with contention among scholars: while some literature suggests that Germans’ choice to wear denim reflected their political rebellion against the “political paternalism of the state,” other scholars disagree, contending that wearing denim represents the desire to blend in, to become less conspicuous.\(^\text{289}\) In that historical context it plays an inherently persuasive role in determining personal and national identity – and in this case, for explaining the significance of East Germans’ choice to wear blue jeans before and after unification.

In “Jeans und Pop in der DDR,” Rebecca Menzel explains that in the 1970s, blue jeans were considered a product of the Western ideological enemy of the GDR; therefore, they were typically worn by the youth to rebel against the political paternalism of the state.\(^\text{290}\) So while West Germans might have worn jeans to revolt against parental authority and regulation, against the Nazi generation, for East Germans – on the other hand – there was more at stake than generational conflict: during the existence of the Berlin Wall, according to Menzel, wearing jeans signaled opposition to a totalitarian socialist system. However, this rebellious attitude changed after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the socialist regime in the East. After unification, wearing jeans no longer seemed to be an act of defiance but rather a desire to blend


\(^{290}\) Ibid.
in and an attempt at being comfortable in one’s skin. This is reflected in anthropologists Daniel Miller’s article, “Anthropology in blue jeans,” in which he evaluates the various reasons for why people decide to wear blue jeans.\(^{291}\) In order to determine these reasons, he conducted an ethnographic experiment within two streets of London, where immigrants are the primary population. His research specifically focuses on the population wearing inexpensive denim, as designer jeans denote expressions of class and represent a minority of the denim worn by this population. The study concludes with the following observation:

> Migrants use jeans to become ordinary in the same way that nonmigrants use them to become ordinary. To avoid status competition at school in the absence of a uniform, parents encourage their children to wear jeans. In college, when students wish to become part of a community without being marked, they wear jeans. When coming from work to relax, our participants wear jeans. Jeans can be dressed up without being too dressy but also dressed down. They resolve contradictions and deflect offense or argument. They allow people to relax into a comfortable state of ordinariness, which is not to be denigrated as a failure to become special but is an achievement in its own right.\(^{292}\)

As I argue that cultural and ideological differences between East and West Germans and the take-over of West Germans included forcing Western values and concepts upon the new citizens, the treatment of migrants and immigrants can be compared to the treatment of East


\(^{292}\) Ibid, 424.
Germans, in the sense that both groups have to navigate a non-familiar culture, one that is foreign to their previous experience.

East Germans’ choice to wear blue jeans could be motivated by the desire to be ordinary, to feel comfortable, and thus to blend in. But in the scene in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, discussed above, it becomes clear that Alex, like Martin, does not blend in. In *Good Bye, Lenin!*, the Caribbean-themed party that is in progress consists of a live band playing inconspicuous Caribbean music, with numerous guests dressed in suits, ties and evening gowns, holding nicely decorated cocktail glasses, and greeting each other with a polite “*Guten Abend*” (Good evening). Alex responds with a “*Guten Tach,*” speaking with a dialect that makes him appear ignorant and out of place. In proper, high German, it should be “*Guten Tag,*” with a soft “g.” Upon entering through the front door and asking where Herr Kerner is, he is immediately told, “the buffet is outside,” rather than given a coherent answer, indicating that the guests assume that Alex is attending the party only for the food. The Caribbean theme and the foreign word “buffet” not only illustrate a West-German penchant for exotic and foreign cultures, but also their finesse and insight into other cultures’ traditions and foods. It also highlights the urge to display this inter-cultural sophistication.

The camera follows Alex on his way from the front door to the living room, as he searches for his father. The camera continuously alternates from his point of view to the point of view of the other guests. Due to these shot/reaction shots, the audience is able to see the guests standing in groups and comfortably chatting and laughing with each other. On the other hand, Alex, who is visibly walking uncomfortably through the gathering, is visually and literally isolated.
When Alex pauses for a moment to look around the room, an off-screen sound of the German children show “Sandmännchen” interrupts his search. This show is of particular cultural and metaphorical significance as its development parallels the East-West division and unification. In 1959, this children’s show and its basic storyline was shown as separate productions on West and East-German television. In 1989 the East-German version continued to be shown on TV in a united Germany and a new generation of Germans experienced it as a program for all Germans. Upon hearing the Sandmännchen tune and drawn to this familiar sound, Alex enters the TV room and finds his two younger half-siblings watching the show. Suddenly, Alex is not the outsider anymore and his newfound comfort is visible on his relaxed facial expressions. After his half-sister asks him to sit next to them, all three are framed in a medium shot sitting closely and harmoniously next to each other and watching what seems to be a cultural production they share, since all are familiar with this version of the Sandmännchen.

The tranquility of the scene is interrupted, however, when Alex’s half-brother mentions that there is an astronaut in the picture. Alex answers that where he comes from, an astronaut is called a cosmonaut. When his half-brother then inquires further about his origins, Alex responds that he is “from another country.” Alex’s attempt to assert his cultural difference and his alterity of language exemplify Staud’s argument that the immigrant continues to strive to maintain his different identity within the dominant culture.

For various reasons, Sandmännchen provides a boundary object, representing the complicated ideological tension in the East/West conflict. “Boundary objects” are things – in this case, a television show – that represent different meanings in different social worlds, despite the

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293 The East German term “Kosmonaut,” adopted from the Soviet Union, originates from the Greek words, “kosmos” (order/world) and “-naut” (voyager); the West German word, “Astronaut” means “astro” (relating to the stars).
fact that they share the same shape/form.\textsuperscript{294} The theoretical concept of the boundary object works well here as a way of explaining how Sandmännchen works as a symbol of East/West differences and the implications of unification; the East Germans’ struggle for social currency and credibility. For instance, “Sandmännchen in Ost und West. Wir müssen die gegnerische Sendung treffen” (“Sandman in East and West. We must hit the Opponent’s show”), Heike Hupertz recollects how East and West Germany engaged in a race to possess the rights to this object and to broadcast the show first.\textsuperscript{295} The show, as Hupertz explains, even alters the different appearance of the Sandman figure and features different stage props, in order to convey political-ideological meaning, for instance, the East used important rockets symbolizing the pride accompanying Sigmund Jähn as the first German in space.\textsuperscript{296} The key term opponent, in the title of the article, clearly reflects the mindset of East and West Germans in 1959 and exemplifies once more how these two “nations-in-development” competed against each other. Hupertz concludes the article by suggesting that the East-Sandmännchen is one of the very few Wendegewinner (winners after unification).\textsuperscript{297}

Here again, it is important to emphasize the language that is used in the article: the author refers to winners, reinforcing again the perception of a competition between the two nations. In “Negotiating Nostalgia: The GDR Past in Berlin is in Germany and Good Bye, Lenin!,” Jennifer Kapczynski argues that the Sandmännchen scene described above is “Ostalgie,” [the longing for the GDR culture, products, or GDR past in general] as a gesamtdeutsch phenomenon” because

\textsuperscript{296} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{297} Ibid.
“both East and West “consume” the GDR past; on one hand as nostalgia of the East German and on the other, as a “product of Western, capitalist marketing strategies.”

In this scene, Alex’s Otherness is again reinforced when his father enters the room and sits down on the sofa with his three children. The two half-siblings immediately surround their father: one is sitting on his lap and the other closely next to him, while Alex sits alone on the other side of the sofa. The camera then contrasts close-up shots of the father with his two children with a close up of Alex, further emphasizing that both parties are separate and do not belong together, despite their inhabitance of the same space and their biological connection.

When father and son reunite in the TV room after the father delivers a speech to his guests, they are sitting on a sofa facing the audience. Framed at a medium distance, which emphasizes their contrasting clothing, another parallel to Berlin is in Germany emerges: Alex is dressed in jeans clothing from head to toe, whereas his father is wearing an elegant black suit, a black shirt, as well as an expensive watch on his wrist. What might be a depiction of an emotional reunion between a young son and his older father becomes the juxtaposition of the sloppy East-German intruder and furthermore, the naïve person who would disrupt a dinner party for which he is obviously not appropriately dressed.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that both films’ protagonists, Martin and Alex, seek refuge in children’s company at some point during the evening. In Berlin is in Germany, Martin asks to see his son Rocco immediately after being asked a question about his profession, seemingly as to avoid being asked further questions and thus escaping judgment. Similarly, Alex is drawn to his

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young siblings when he recognizes the music of the *Sandmännchen*, after wandering lost and forlorn, searching for his father through the unfamiliar house.

Alex and his father, Robert, are also shown in contrasting postures in the TV room. Robert is sitting upright, with a straight back, and Alex is shown leaning against the sofa and somewhat hunched over. During their short conversation, they remain in this position, occasionally looking at each other but more often avoiding each other’s gaze; their alignment appears forced and the two figures resemble strangers, sitting neutrally side-by-side in a waiting room. Both Alex and Martin face well-postured West Germans in these similar scenes in which Germans – as outsiders and insiders – confront one another.

These particular scenes represent poignant moments in which the main characters try but ultimately fail to maintain their individual identities and battle the conceptions of West Germans’ biases against them. In these films, the protagonists try to make sense of a unified Germany where East-German culture was delegitimized, based on erroneous assumptions of what constitutes national identity and how it is constructed. Whereas individual identities can collaboratively make up a nation, identity, and concomitantly national identity, is constructed in a far more complicated and multi-layered process. National identity cannot be conjured up at will to serve a political purpose; it is tied to the ways in which cultural and ideological differences among individual groups influence one another. It goes beyond a shared geographic space and language to encompass a larger range of issues. Moreover, national identity is constantly in flux because of the historical contexts that are defining and re-defining it. For a post-unification German context, then, West Germans’ presumed authority and superiority, based on economic strength and reinforced by cinematic representations of post-unity difference, negatively affects and precludes both sides’ perception and acceptance of German national unity.
Although these films did not dwell on a Stasi narrative, such as films like The Lives of Others, the Stasi is omnipresent and ultimately greatly contributed to each character’s sorrow – and even failure – in life. Alex’s father fled the Stasi and was able to build a new life in the West. His mother’s fear prevented her to join him later, which resulted in the family’s ultimate separation; an event that traumatized Alex and his sister until adulthood. Martin’s family was separated because of the Stasi, too. His resistance against the Stasi caused his incarceration, and the inability to see his son grow up. Numerous post-Wende films that illustrate issues pertaining to East Germany or East Germans have a similarity: the Stasi content. Lives of Other (2006), Barbara (2012), Wir wollten aufs Meer (2012), Westen (2013), Wie Feuer und Flamme (2001), Der Tunnel (2001), and the most recent Balloon (2018), are just a few amongst many films that depict the oppressive SED regime.

CONCLUSION

The Stasi-laden content and the often-biased portrayal of East Germans in film and the discrediting of the intelligentsia haves created a negative stigma that East Germans still face today. In this chapter I provided evidence that East-German artists were not always assessed on their merit but on their level of opposition of the SED regime. Artists, such as Christa Wolf, who had supported the socialist ideology and stood for a reforming of the failed system, were publicly humiliated so much so that she felt the need to “exile” to the United States. Furthermore, her level of Stasi involvement that was proven to not have caused any harm, was disproportionately criticized.

In this chapter I illustrated that East Germans, the artists and intellectuals, were disrespected and their work, once again, delegitimized based on certain West-German standards.
that were only applied to the East Germans. East-German art was not evaluated for its merit or as art for art’s sake, but by the “righteousness” that West Germans assigned to the artist/intellectual. The West German was once again not able to see an accomplishment through the eyes of the East German.

I would like to end his chapter with a few words about the East-German astronaut Sigmund Jähn. On August 26, 1978, Jähn was the first East German in space and became the official “hero of the GDR.” ²⁹⁹ A day later, the Neues Deutschland newspaper proudly called him the “first German in space.” Yet, after unification, he did not become a gesamt-deutscher Held (pan-German hero). In fact, many West Germans don’t even know the first German in space. Sociologist Rai Kollmorgen explained that “Sigmund Jähn disappeared in the Hades of the marginalized GDR.”³⁰⁰ The journalist Gerhard Kowalski, amongst others, addressed the Bundesregierung for the 40th anniversary of Jähn’s space flight and later again for his 80th birthday; he pleaded for an official meaningful recognition of Jähn’s accomplishments. Still, the Bundesregierung remained indifferent. During a press conference in 2019, when this topic was brought up again, a group of representatives of the Bundesregierung claimed that he was honored; they referred to two “Tweets” that were posted for the 40th anniversary of his flight (from two personal accounts, not an official Twitter account of the Bundesregierung).³⁰¹

The cultural impact that Jähn left on East Germans’ lives that West Germans consistently and continually refuse to acknowledge can be seen in the following note that my East-German friend Tilo Braun-Wangrin wrote in the condolence book of the late cosmonaut Sigmund Jähn:

³⁰⁰ Ibid.
Dear Sigmund Jähn, every human being leaves footprints on earth. You even left them in space. And in many hearts of people. Besides Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, you were the hero of my childhood. All the children of my generation in the perished GDR knew your name. As someone who moved to Strausberg, I was proud to live in the same city as you. I have great respect for your strong character, your courage, your humbleness and affection. Nowadays, the greatest attributes for a hero. In eternal memory of the hero of my life.\textsuperscript{302}

\textsuperscript{302} Sent by Tilo Braun Wangrin in an e-mail to the author.
CHAPTER THREE
THE DEMOLITION OF THE PALACE OF THE REPUBLIC:
THE FORCED REMAKING OF EAST GERMANY

In chapter two, I discussed the Literaturstreit, when Christa Wolf’s intellect and work were harshly criticized by West Germans. In a country-wide dispute, in which Wolf did not take part, the merit of her work was evaluated and discussed and finally discredited when Stasi allegations arose. Wolf, as many of her colleagues assessed, was just a scapegoat for all East Germans. The hostility against her was aimed to devalue all things East German. The arrogant West-German attitude against East-German art and politicians was not the only conflict that was fought after unification. East-German architecture and entire cities had to change or completely disappear, too, in order for the socialist past to disappear from the face of the world, at least, the German world.

In this chapter I focus on how East Germany, specifically East Berlin, physically changed after unification and how West Germans pushed through these changes, often over the objections of East Germans. I discuss how the destruction of the Palace of the Republic (Palast der Republik), which housed the East-German Volkskammer, divided the nation again. The palace represents the most famous example of the destruction of East-German historical architectural heritage. The Palast der Republik was a beloved building amongst many East Germans because it largely housed spaces for cultural events and entertainment. It, therefore, gained a positive
connotation amongst most East Germans. The destruction of it, in 2003, was widely protested, especially because the city of Berlin lacked funds and no alternative plan had been proposed. The destruction, therefore, was considered yet another affront against East-Germany culture and another faux pas in the process of coming to terms with Germany’s past.

In the second part of this chapter, I analyze effective scenes in the previously discussed films Good bye, Lenin! and Berlin is in Germany, as they expose spatial transformations in East Berlin that resulted in either unsettled ground or in a disorientation of the East Germans’ sense of place and home. Architecture represents an important element of the story of unification, as it relates to national identity and historical memory. These spaces were central to East-German everyday life and their demolition “wiped out the cultural memory of the German Democratic Republic, which had been stored there as a potent symbol of collective identity.” 303 Cultural heritage scholar Veysel Apaydin claimed,

The meaning and values embodied in heritage and material culture store memories for different groups, and have varied meanings and values for different groups and communities. While some groups and communities may not value a given specific aspect of heritage, it might be crucially important for other who consider that specific heritage to be linked to their collective identity and whose memories may be linked to a specific place. 304


THE PEOPLE’S PALACE

The Schloßplatz, where the East-German Palast der Republik once stood, has caused much controversy amongst Germans. In order to discuss the history of the Palast der Republik and the dispute about its demolition after unification, it is necessary to examine the conditions of the square prior to the formation of the GDR and to the present day.

The construction of the Berliner Schloß (Berliner Castle) on the Schloßplatz (Castel Square) in Berlin began in 1443. The baroque castle underwent multiple architectural changes until its completion in 1894. It mainly served as the residence of the House of Hohenzollern, with its final inhabitant William II, the King of Prussia and last German Emperor, who remained there until his abdication in 1918. It was in the Lustgarten, the garden in front of the castle, where Karl Liebknecht proclaimed the “free socialist republic of Germany” in the afternoon on November 9, 1918, which was one of the events that ultimately concluded the highly contested monarchy in Germany. During the Weimar Republic, from 1918 until 1933, the castle served as a museum. When the Nazis took power, the regime was more interested in the Lustgarten for its military parades. Later, the bombings during the Second World War, especially during the final Battle of Berlin, partially destroyed the castle and only the facades, the supporting walls, and a few sections remained.

After the Second World War, the city then organized several exhibitions in the castle until the magistrate of East Berlin controlled by the SED prohibited it. After the division of East and West Germany in 1948, the remnants of the castle were located in East Berlin. Although experts considered the remaining body to be restorable, the GDR regime decided to demolish it

in September of 1950. Walter Ulbricht officially explained during the third-party meeting of the SED: “[t]he center of our capital, the Lustgarten and the area of the castle ruins, has to become a large site for rallies, where the willingness for battle and reconstruction of our nation can be expressed.”

This decision was contested especially by West Germans who wanted to keep the building as a reminder of history. West-German architect Hans Scharoun, who had created the Kollektivplan, a plan to rebuild Berlin after the Second World War, voiced his opinion against the demolition of the castle, stating that the conservation could be justified for historical reasons. Although Germans might have had a negative perception of the castle as a symbol of a militaristic and oppressive monarchy from the then most recent past, Scharoun argues that the castle also reminded people of the brandenburgisch-preußische past around 1700, when the attempt was made to build a Kulturstaat rather than a military state.

Nonetheless the East-German regime demolished the castle and in 1951 renamed the square Marx-Engels-Platz, after Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. For over twenty years, until 1976, the square stood empty and was only used for parades and political rallies because the party could not agree on an appropriate building. The change of leadership from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker on May 3, 1971 was responsible for the introduction of new policies, somewhat out of necessity. Honecker presented a Five-year Plan (Fünfjahresplan) that should offer “an increased material and cultural living standard for the people based on a high speed of development in socialist production…” This new concept of consume socialism

308 Ibid, 447.
309 Moritz Holfelder, Palast der Republik. Aufstieg und Fall eines symbolischen Gebäudes (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2008), 25.
(Konsumsozialismus) was initiated partially because of the increasing debt or shortage of foreign obligations the GDR was facing. In an effort to reduce its national debt, the government relaxed previous trade restrictions to increase exports through boosted manufacturing. West-German loans were also granted and used to finance Honecker’s Konsumsozialismus.\textsuperscript{311} Beginning in 1969, West-German chancellor and leader of the SPD Willy Brandt’s détente – Ospolitik – allowed closer economic relations and normalization of diplomatic interactions between East and West Germany. It was under these new conditions that a grand project, such as the Palast der Republik, could be realized.

The golden years of socialism and Honecker’s “liberation” called for an appropriate symbolic representation of the nation.\textsuperscript{312} The GDR regime, then trying to compete with its neighbor, decided to construct a building that would serve two purposes: the outside had to reflect an image of a glorious, grand GDR, whereas the inside should offer space for government meetings but also for the people, the working class, to gather for cultural events and other entertainment; the building should offer the illusion of freedom.\textsuperscript{313} The government wanted to create a new image that would show a modern GDR and replace the grey and boring socialist state that was seen, for instance, at the Alexanderplatz. But what kind of building could meet these expectations? Erich Honecker called for a House of the People (Haus des Volkes or Kulturhaus) that was also part of Soviet culture, where the Palace of the Soviets (that was

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\textsuperscript{312} Moritz Holfelder, Palast der Republik. Aufstieg und Fall eines symbolischen Gebäudes (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2008), 28.
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planned to be built in Moscow but never realized), was supposed to be “bigger and more spectacular than all the other [Soviet Houses of Culture].”

It is necessary to elaborate what *Volkshaus/Kulturhaus* means historically to better appreciate the design, purpose, and functionality of the palace. In 1925, Heinrich Peus, writer and politician in the city of Dessau and member of the *Social Democratic Party* (SPD), advocated for the working-class’ right to its own culture and demands with regard to housing. Peus believed that the *Bauhaus* style could architecturally represent his political ideology. Bauhaus was a German art school that operated from 1919 to 1933, during the Weimar Republic. The design sought to combine aesthetics and functionalism through mass production. Peus’ idea of mass-producing homes in factories that could be assembled on-site would allow the working-class access to affordable housing. This became realizable because of the modern technology and modern architecture of *Bauhaus*. Although Preus worked with architect Walter Gropius, the founder of *Bauhaus*, he believed that *Bauhaus’* basic principles were a part of modernism that everyone could realize. After all, the goal was the application of concrete, glass, and steel and the rejection of ornamental features. This style called *New Objectivity* or *Neues Bauen* (modern architecture) sought simple forms, functionality, and aesthetics, realized through mass-production.

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Peus also strongly advocated *Volkshäuser*. *Volkshäuser* were buildings constructed for the labor movement in Europe starting around 1890.\(^\text{318}\) These houses offered accommodations for political and cultural gatherings and entertainment, as the new workers’ class was struggling to find appropriate loggings. Workers, who supported the Social Democracy, considered themselves to be part of a “cultural movement,” that sought to unite their desire for “solidarity” and “community” in such buildings.\(^\text{319}\) Peus described the function and design of *Volkshäuser* as follow:

> The Volkshaus of the future will be the most beautiful house of the city or village. It has to be nicer than the church of the past. [...] The Volkshaus will be the church of the future. Its exterior structure should be grand, as its high purpose demands. Its halls should be an archetype of solidarity and elegance. Every picture that adorns the walls should be a beautiful work of art. One should not tolerate ugly posters, especially not those relating to business. The Volkshaus should at all times convey the ideals of human community living to its visitors.\(^\text{320}\)

The *Volkshäuser* became a symbol of the political left and, therefore, highly contested during the Second World War. The Nazi regime detested the *Bauhaus* style, anything modern and avant-garde, the communists, and Social Democrats. In an attempt to break-up the worker movement, the *Schutzstaffel* and *Sturmabteilung* (the SS and SA were paramilitary organization under Hitler) systematically looted and destroyed the *Volkshäuser* under the pretense to

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\(^{318}\) Anke Hoffsten, *Das Volkshaus der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2017), 9.
\(^{319}\) Ibid, 29, 30.
\(^{320}\) Ibid,158.
undercover illegal weapons and misappropriate funds. After 1945, because of Germany’s division, it was juridically difficult to distribute restitutions to former parties or associations that used Volkshäuser so that new foundations of such parties or associations did not occur. From then on buildings that functioned as cultural everyday gathering place for the people were called Kulturhaus in the GDR and Dorfgemeinschaftshaus in the West Germany.

The Volkshaus became the archetype of the Palast der Republik. With this historical content in mind, Honecker’s decision to have a Kulturhaus built, fit into the GDR narrative of a peasant/worker society that deserved its own culture, especially in the new era of Konsumsozialismus. The Haus des Volkes, which is what Honecker called the palace during a celebration when he put down the first foundation stone, was completed and open to the public on April 25, 1976, after only three years of construction.

Heinz Graffunder, the architect of the palace, had studied in West Berlin but chose to live in East Berlin and remained in the GDR after the divide. When commissioned to design the palace, he received instructions on the necessary functions needed in the building, but he had artistic freedom in the choice of design. By 1970, the architectural style in the GDR was the DDR Moderne. It was no longer oriented towards the soviet Sozialistischer Klassizismus (socialist classicism) architecture that went out of style after Stalin’s death. Sozialistischer Klassizismus had been characterized by monumental palace-like structures with towers, columns, and numerous adornments. Examples of this monumental architecture are still present today, for

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322 Ibid, 76.
323 Ibid, 30.
324 Moritz Holfelder, Palast der Republik. Aufstieg und Fall eines symbolischen Gebäudes (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2008), 32.
instance, on the Karl-Marx-Allee in the east of Berlin. These are the buildings that are often associated with GDR architecture. However, this monumental style was quite the opposite of the succeeding DDR Moderne.

Graffunder chose a DDR Moderne architecture style for the palace that strongly resembled Bauhaus. The Dessau-Bauhaus, for instance, looks very similar in shape and design. Both buildings are rectangular, have a glass facade, and lack any kind of ornamental features. Their designs are simple and functional. Graffunder chose a modern and transparent glass facade that reflected the neighboring monuments, for example the Deutsche Dom. He stated that such an enterprise would have never been allowed during the strict Ulbricht regime. The transparent glass facade, according to Graffunder, embodied the visions of architects at the beginning of the century, who sought to build luminous Volkshäuser that would allow the self-expression of the workers. Graffunder had materialized Peus’ “grand exterior structure” of the Volkshaus; he created a five-story tall, rectangular building with a transparent facade that would allow visitors to see the beautiful skyline of East and West Berlin from inside and a beautiful reflection of other monuments from the outside.

The inside of the palace was grand and luxurious and more adorned than the outside would suggest. Upon entering the building from the Marx-Engels Platz, visitors walked through the main entrance that became notorious because of the large “socialist heraldry” – the national emblem of East Germany that consisted of a hammer and a compass surrounded by a ring of rye hanging above the door. Once entered, visitors walked up a large light granite staircase to the


328 Moritz Holfelder, Palast der Republik. Aufstieg und Fall eines symbolischen Gebäudes (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2008), 36.
first floor, where they discovered a luxurious white marble main lobby with an open ceiling that reached up to the third floor. The lobby was adorned with marble columns and the Gallery of the Palace (Galerie des Palastes), a gallery that showcased paintings of renowned GDR artists, such as Werner Tübke and Willi Sitte. The theme of the exhibition was “Are communists allowed to dream?”

The foyer became famous for its round-shaped Gläserne Blume (glass flower) in its center – with the aim to convey the transparency of the building – and the lighting system hanging off the ceiling. An abundance of ball-shaped lamps hung off the ceiling that eventually gave the palace the endearing nickname Erich’s Lampenladen (Erich’s Lamp Shop). The nickname, according to Christian van Lessen, was evidence of “mocking high respect.” He claimed that Honecker had achieved a building with which most East Germans could identify.

Whereas the ground floor accommodated a post office, or cloak rooms, the first floor provided the service area, such as the famous Mokkabar (coffee shop), an information desk, amongst other services. The flooring was covered in green, light pink, and grey marble that had been imported from Sweden, Bulgaria, and former Yugoslavia. Besides the marble in the foyer,
the floors of the five-story building were cleverly marked with different colored carpet, so that the visitors would recognize the floor number.335

The main attraction of the building was the third floor. Here, the visitor found the Plenarsaal – where the Volkskammer met – conference rooms, a gallery, a bar, and the Große Saal. The Große Saal was a spectacular high-tech room that within minutes could transform into a ball hall with dance floor, a TV show station, or a seating area for over 4,000 people watching a show on stage. The stage and the seating areas were all hydraulically moveable, allowing the space to change for a specific purpose within minutes. The multifunctional room was used for political meetings, banquets, concerts, shows, ballets, and conventions.

A total of thirteen restaurants, a discotheque, a bowling alley, a wine and beer bar were amongst the entertainment choices that the palace offered. Noteworthy were also the meticulously organized and crafted details, such as the modern uniforms for the staff that were made just for the palace, the little souvenirs that depicted the palace that were given to the guests in the bathrooms, the variety of silverware in the restaurants – a total of 120,000 – and the palace stamps in the post office. The visitor’s enjoyable experience was well thought-out and orchestrated.

Peus’ previously addressed assessment of the Volkshaus not only corresponded with the outside of the palace but especially the inside. The marble made the halls elegant and the beautiful artwork was present throughout the palace. The amount of entertainment made the building suitable for community life. The palace offered events and art throughout the year and was therefore more considered a Kulturhaus than a government building, as the government only

met two to three times a year. Architect Bruno Flierl commented that because East Germans esteemed the palace so much, the building became more significant for the public than for the state functionaries.

**TEARS FOR THE LOST PALACE**

However, after unification and per instructions of the Hygiene Department in Berlin (*Bezirkshygieneinspektion Berlin*), the *Volkskammer* had the palace’s doors closed on September 19, 1990, because of asbestos contamination. Between 1965 and 1980, asbestos was commonly used in East and West Germany, and was finally banned in 1993. In the *Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg* (rbb) documentary called *Ein Palast und seine Republik, So schön kann Sozialismus sein* (“A Palace and its Republic, Socialism can be so nice”), the audience witnesses a female employee of the palace who has to lock the doors for the last time. The woman is crying and can barely utter the words, “When you have to lock the doors today for the last time, it is…” the rest of the sentence is incomprehensible. Still, the newspaper *Berliner Zeitung* – an East-German publisher that was bought by the Hamburger *Gruner+Jahr* after unification – declared: “[t]he Palace of the Republic [*Palast der Republik*] makes off … Erich’s lamp shop

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340 Ibid.
ends on the garbage dump of history [...] Nobody is shedding a tear." Since unification, the nickname Erich’s Lamp Shop no longer reflected “mocking high respect,” but was rather used in an insulting way that demonstrated ignorance towards East-German culture and the arrogant attitude from West Germans. This arrogance was expressed in many ways.

After the palace was closed, the socialist heraldry symbol was removed, followed by the renaming of the Marx-Engels-Platz to Schloßplatz in 1994. The palace architect Graffunder, like other East-German architects, was subject to public ridicule and their work, too, was discredited. In the architecture newspaper Arch+, architect Hoffmann-Axthelm writes about East-German architects the following withering evaluation:

Instead of the architects and construction manager acquiring qualifications and quality in 40 years, whatever they had was destroyed and entire generations had the opportunity of self-fulfillment taken away. The current architects, city planners, and skilled workers learned too little and only gained bad experience because they could not do what they wanted. They practically have to start at zero.  

Other West-German voices claimed, “almost all [East-German] architects are busy finally becoming architects,” or “we should take their favorite toys away: the production catalogue, the Plattenwerke, the tower cranes, and bobtails.”

343 Ibid.
However, as previously stated, Graffunder and his team did not receive specific instructions on the design of the palace, so they were able to apply their creativity as they wished when they designed the building. Although Graffunder’s palace did not have the Bauhaus “seal,” the building showed characteristics of Bauhaus. Referring back to Peus’ statement, anyone could build Bauhaus-like structures by simply following the design and the function and purpose of the building. Today, Bauhaus is a highly regarded architectural style and can be found as far away as Tel Aviv, where visitors can embark on Bauhaus Tours. Furthermore, the Bauhaus site in Tel Aviv is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Graffunder was confident about the quality of his work and fought against the dismantling of the palace. As an alternative to the demolition, Graffunder and two other architects, Arzt and Gericke, suggested to rebuilding the Stadtschloß next to the palace and connect them. The architects sought to create public buildings and keep the Kulturhaus concept. Their project called Berliner Forum was supposed to stand as a symbol of German unity: uniting East and West Germans. It would have also allowed the coming to terms with the contested past and seeing both German cultures as equal. Historian Martin Sabrow states that the palace was demolished because it did not support the preferred collective memory of an Unrechtstaat (Unethical/Unjust State) and because the connotation was too positive.

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346 Moritz Holfelder, Palast der Republik. Aufstieg und Fall eines symbolischen Gebäudes (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2008), 92.
East-German architect Bruno Flierl considered the demolition a form of *Geschichtssäuberung* – a cleansing/purge of history.\(^{348}\)

The palace remained intact but vacant until 1998. During the asbestos removal in November 1997 and in fear that the entire palace would be dismantled, Gregor Gysi went on the roof to display a large banner, “Stop the palace demolition.” For that, he was ridiculed, his protest called an “illegal climbing tour,” and the construction company even claimed to sue him for 200,000 Deutsche Mark for their three-hour “forced break.”\(^{349}\) Throughout the years, many associations, individuals, parties, organizations, groups, and artists demonstrated against the demolition. One of the largest protests was in 1993, when the PDS, Gysi’s party, organized a protest walk (*Protestspaziergang*) that was attended by around 10,000 people.\(^{350}\)

In April of 2002, the Historical Center of Berlin (*Internationale Expertenkommission of the Historische Mitte Berlin*) published a final report in which it recommended the demolition of the palace and the rebuilding of the *Stadtschloß*, an idea that some citizen initiatives had advocated for since early 1990.\(^{351}\) By 2003 the entire interior decoration of the palace was dismantled and stored in a warehouse, where it still sits today. The asbestos was removed, and the shell of the building opened to the public. Pop-up exhibitions, such as the showcasing of the *Terracotta Army* from China, tours, even by boat in the flooded cellar, and art shows were appreciated by tourists and Berliners. In 2005, shortly before its demolition, artist Lars Ø

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Ramberg decorated the roof with large illuminated letters that spelled the word Zweifel (doubt), which accurately depicted the different opinions and disputes that divided the nation once again.

Just as Scharoun had advocated for the Berliner Castle to be saved due to its roots in the Prussian-Brandenburger state’s intention for it to be symbolizing a Kulturstaat in 170 rather than a militaristic regime, it is undeniable that culture was also celebrated in the palace. Even West-German artists, such as the famous Udo Lindenberg, performed in the palace.352

Members of the Volkskammer met there infrequently and, furthermore, undeniably positive and progressive politics for the people were decided and announced in the palace, too, such as the first democratic elections, and the approval of the unification treaty (the joining of the GDR to the FRG), the Zwei-plus-Vier-Vertrag, and the Währungsunion (the contract of the adoption of the Deutsche Mark in the GDR).353 Recollecting his experiences, De Maizière stated that the palace was integrated into the everyday life of many East Germans and the fun and especially affordable activities made the palace so successful.354 Yet, for West Germans, the palace remained “an unpleasant relic of the East-German unjust state.”355

Another crucial fact to consider is the palace’s landmark status. Although the palace had not been officially registered as landmark in the GDR, after unification, many experts offered an appraisal of the palace of it as such. For instance, Anke Kuhrmann, an expert on landmark decisions who also volunteered at the Landesdenkmalamt Berlin (“Office of the Preservation of Historic Sites”) between 2004-2006 stated:

352 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uTpYfah8Lc
354 Ibid, 46.
The Palace of the Republic played an important role for the history of architecture and city construction. Because of its place and function, the palace was the most prominent example of public architecture in the GDR between 1971 and 1989. It had the same status as the nowadays landmarked Karl-Marx-Allee […]

The Berlin State Historic Preservation Office (*Berliner Denkmalamt*) published a document that strongly supported the landmark status of the palace. The document stated that the palace would exemplify to future generation a past that they did not experience. Furthermore, the committee “insisted” on the preservation of the palace.

However, all efforts to protest its demolition turned out to be in vain. In 2006, the *Bundestag* finally decided on the demolition of the palace, after years of irresolution and the continuous effort to shift the decision to another generation. In the article “*Zwischen Bauhaus und Barock: Zur Ästhetik des Palastes der Republik,*” Ulrich Hartung eloquently states in his conclusion:

> It is almost a joke of history that those who want to re-erect the destroyed structures of the Berliner Castle would extinguish the real witness to history of this place, not only the foundations of the castle that are still in the ground but also the testimonial

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358 Ibid.
of a past sovereignty that was also German. Currently it is not a dismantling of a precious ruin [the skeleton of the palace] but a destroying of an intact building, ignorant of [the fact that it denies] the functional and aesthetic merits of the Palast der Republik.359

Although polls indicated that two-thirds of all Germans were against the reconstruction of the castle, the consensus of politicians, left and right, was for the rebuilding.360 That the “old” West Germans are still not ready to acknowledge East-German culture today is illustrated by the numerous relics of the palace that are still rotting away in a warehouse.

The Humboldt Forum, which is the museum inside of the Stadtschloss, published a brochure called “Palast der Republik – Ein Erinnerungsort neu diskutiert” (“PdR – A place of memory recently discussed”) in 2017. In this brochure, several experts discuss the commemoration of the palace; they especially debate the integration of the relics (and whether an integration at all). Numerous times, experts express the possibility of integrating the Gläserne Blume into the new Humboldt Forum museum. The Gläserne Blume is of such importance because it is considered the representation of the palace, as it stood in the center of the foyer, where everyone met.361 However, on December 4th, 2019, the Humboldt Forum announced that for “functional, technical, and conceptional reasons,” the piece of art could not be included in the new museum.362 The artwork is 5.20 meters high and allegedly weights a few tons. However,

360 Ibid, 42.
using its size and weight appear to be a poor excuse, given that a replica of a 1443 castle was built, while a work of art, such as the *Gläserne Blume*, could not be accommodated.

De Maizière made a crucial point in the discussion of the relics. He was not necessarily interested in the memorialization of any items, but rather thought it important to remember what had been accomplished at the palace, such as, for instance, the agreement of the unification treaty. He furthermore stated that some of the items could simply be used in the castle restaurant, not because they are East German, but because they are beautiful. This, however, would require West Germans to admit that not everything in or from the GDR was bad. But a recent event has illustrated that Germans might still not be ready.

In 2019, Dr. Thomas Oberender, director and manager of the Berliner Festspiele, organized for the house of the Festspiele to be decoratively transformed into the *Palast der Republik*, since the buildings’s shape and look resembles the former palace. During this three-day event, “Palast der Republik – Kunst, Diskurs & Parlament (PdR – Art, Discourse, Parliament), artists and researchers presented their work around East-German history. As mentioned in my introduction, Dr. Oberender did not intend to glorify the GDR with this exhibition but to retell the story of his past in a form that is not all disavowing. The *Spiegel* responded to this event in a typical scoffing manner calling the debate building *Palast-Ufo* and the debate a “palaver,” which translates to “endless wordy, mostly unnecessary chitchat.”

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364 Ibid.


I was in the original Palast der Republik only once to see the Chinese Terracotta Army exhibition in 2004. At that point, the building had been removed of the asbestos and stripped to its bones. Only the skeleton of the building was left. It was a wonderful exhibition, but I remember thinking how ugly the building was. Growing up in West Germany, I had always heard how atrocious looking this building was and seeing it in this shape only reinforced it. When I started my research about the palace, and specifically when I saw the Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg (rbb) documentary (discussed above) that showed the beautiful interior when it was fully functioning, I was utterly shocked and quite sad. It showed me the palace in a new light and changed my mind: I had never seen the palace so beautiful. The interior was exquisite and modern. What I saw was an elegantly designed Bauhaus-like building. As a German, I felt that its demolition robbed me of this experience and it dawned upon me that it could and should have been part of my culture, as well. The fact that the palace was demolished and replaced by a castle that now hosts an exhibition of the palace is incomprehensible.

The Palast der Republik represents the most famous example of the destruction of East-German cultural heritage by West Germans. The palace symbolized the aspirations and pride of the GDR, where everyday people could enjoy fun, communal activities in a beautiful setting and it was a roaring success, if measured by the total of 70 million East Germans visited it during its short 15-year existence.367 West Germans decided to take that culturally significant and functional building away from not only East Germans but all Germans. They proceeded to replace it by a castle to house a museum, when Berlin already has 170 museums.368

demolition of the palace was just one of countless examples that “cancelled their culture” and left a void in many East Germans’ everyday life.

The ways in which East Berlin, and East Germany in general, rapidly changed, and the loss of orientation East Germans felt, has also been illustrated in the two films discussed in chapter two. While I elaborated on identity in the previous chapter, I here want to examine how these films depicted East Germans who had to adapt to constant physical changes in a new Germany, especially changes they were not able to influence. Moreover, as I have argued, these changes in the landscape of East Berlin deeply affected residents of the city. By destroying their lived space and cultural heritage, the unification process disrespected the history and memory of East-German citizens and thereby undermined the construction of a shared German identity.

NAVIGATING IN A NEW WORLD

Whereas chapter two discusses East-German otherness, as exemplified in post-unification German cinema by means of the East-German characters’ distinctive speech, dated clothing, and odd behavior, this chapter focuses on how German unification, or rather the West-German Take-Over, brought forth a spatial transformation that resulted in either unsettled ground or in a disorientation of the East Germans’ sense of (home) place. More specifically, within this chapter I illustrate how East Germans not only had to integrate into a German society that was foreign to them, but also how their once familiar country and family homes became suddenly unfamiliar. In “Ossis sind Türken,” Strauf explains the phenomenon of East Germans’ sudden

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de-familiarization with their country and abrupt displacement into a newly nationalized German state:

However, in reality East Germans [...] came from a completely different country. They left their home country behind, came into a pre-conceived state, into a demure society that had not waited for them, to which they were not able to contribute, but rather had to adapt to [...] what is remarkable about their migration status is that they migrated without having moved. The new country had come to them, not vice versa.370

*Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Berlin is in Germany* depict all East Germans almost identically in terms of their appearance, speech, and way of life. Furthermore, both films address their sense of disorientation similarly. In both films, the audience is confronted with the male East-German protagonist who is wrestling to continue his existence after the disappearance of his home country, in a world that has become unknown to him. Both films make strong references to everyday reality as presented by mass media, specifically television. During a substantial portion of *Berlin is in Germany*, Martin carries a TV and frequently explains that “*Det kenn ick nur aus ’m Fernsehn*” (“I only know that from TV”), suggesting that East Germans are trying to make sense of the new, progressive world through the medium of television. However, this concept becomes complicated because throughout the film, Martin’s TV screen often remains blank, implying that ultimately, he is on his own and needs to discover the new world without any mediation. What is perhaps even more symbolic, though, is that whenever Martin turns on his TV, the coverage depicts current events or topics that are completely unfamiliar to Martin;

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therefore, he is confronted with a mediated new reality without the benefit of physical interaction. This becomes especially apparent in a scene that depicts Martin in a toy store shopping for an item he had seen on TV for his young son. When the sales associate asks Martin if the item he wants to buy is a Game Boy, he replies: “[n]o, but not a Tamagotchi. I have seen a TV report about it. I find it totally absurd. I think feeding an electronic pet is perverted. No, it’s a thing that you have to use with two hands. But maybe I should just simply buy a soccer ball, right?371

It becomes clear to the audience that Martin does not understand what the sales associate is suggesting and furthermore, that he did not fully comprehend the toy commercial he had seen on TV, either. Martin cannot properly articulate the name of the item, nor what its purpose is. He only remembers how to use it and imitates it to the sales associate by using another toy’s controller. His idea of buying a soccer ball seems to be his way of surrendering after so much confusion and complication about the more technologically advanced toy.

It is possible that Stöhr may be alluding to his personal opinion here, considering that the “good old soccer ball” is a toy that is more universal and pedagogically useful, as it is, in the majority of cases, used by a group of children/adults, thereby promoting social interaction. The Game Boy, on the other hand, is for an individual person’s solitary enjoyment. Additionally, the Tamagotchi and the Game Boy are both Japanese products, drawing viewers’ attention to the implications of globalization and the inundation of domestic markets with foreign products. The many different versions of the Tamagotchi and the Game Boy available on the market suggest that capitalism stops at nothing – not even children. Since capitalism is a product of the West, Martin expresses yet another moment of alienation and disenfranchisement.

371 Berlin is in Germany, directed by Hannes Stöhr (2001; Berlin, Germany: Good Movies/Piffl/Indigo, 2013), DVD.
The implicit suggestion that Western ideology and capitalism are taking over is visually reinforced when Martin is in the center of the frame of a medium shot, standing in front of a robotic dog that is visible only from its back and side. Its head, with an open mouth and jagged teeth, is pointing towards Martin’s throat. Because of the camera angle, the robotic dog (which is actually rather small in reality; sitting on top of a shelf) appears to be the size of Martin’s upper body, giving the impression that it is about to attack him. Martin, on the other hand, is standing partly hidden by the toy dog with uncombed hair and a partially unbuttoned shirt, seeming confused, lost, and about to be taken over by the toy dog, the beast of capitalism.

Overall, the TV helps and hinders Martin at the same time. He is able to access shows about current events or commercials about the newest products on the market, but this information gives him no currency for navigating through this new country. The TV, along with other modes of technology (such as the airplane that frequently flies overhead) reminds him that in theory, he has newfound possibilities; however, in reality, he is disoriented or displaced and remains an outsider or a spectator, as he is without means for pursuing those possibilities. From Martin’s perspective, the new possibilities seem like nagging reminders that he is the Other and the baggage of this social stigma hinders his opportunity to attain work, hence, restricting him from moving freely wherever he wants to. As Jennifer Kapczynski explains, because a Western ideology is permeating the country, East Germans find themselves polarized, in a sense, between nostalgia and nowhere: they are “going nowhere and with nowhere to go the old days of the GDR travel restrictions seem suddenly appealing.”

The television also plays a symbolic role in Good Bye, Lenin!, as Alex, the protagonist, uses the TV to create false newscasts which are meant to trick his mother into thinking that the

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Berlin Wall is still standing. What inadvertently happens, however, is that he constructs a fictional GDR, a “DDR, die ich mich gewünscht hätte” (“GDR that I had wished for”), as Alex’s voice-over comments at the end of the film. Within this voice-over narration, the audience learns about Alex’s relationship with his mother, who has since died, and the GDR, “[a] country that in reality had never existed in this way. A country that in my memory I will always associate with my mother.” By equating his mother with the GDR and her death with the disappearance of the GDR, Alex seems to suggest an extremely close relationship between an individual and her/his home country or nation, implying that the loss of this nation brings forth emotional trauma.

Stöhr’s and Becker’s films accomplish two different things by using TV or media within their films: In Berlin is in Germany, the TV (the device itself as well as the shows it features while it is on) evokes current issues related to unification rather than reconstructing a GDR past. Additionally, the TV is a metaphor for a new world that communicates its ideas, products, and ways of life more anonymously. Through this new, anonymous network, Martin also gains access to a world that has become more complicated: the good old soccer ball is replaced by a Tamagotchi, an electronic “pet” that needs to be fed and taken care of in an artificial, cyber-world. On the other hand, in Good Bye, Lenin!, Becker uses the TV as a medium that encourages the audience to understand that allegiance to one’s nation (or homeland) is part of a complex relationship and the memories of this relationship will accompany the citizen far beyond the dissolution of this construct. Becker uses this strategy frequently by inserting flashbacks via home movie footage of Alex’s childhood. As a result, the audience sees how Alex is trying to make sense of the end of his home country and to make the transition to a unified nation. Alex

373 Good Bye, Lenin!, directed by Wolfgang Becker (2003; Berlin, Germany: X-Filme Creative Pool, Warner Bros., 2003), DVD.
acts out this transition by creating fake broadcasts for his mother; symbolic of the nostalgic longing for his childhood home. Both films, however, share a conclusion: the audience is told where Alex and Martin come from, but where they are going is unknown, leaving the audience – as the protagonists – in an unsettled and displaced state.

The themes of disorientation and displacement are also depicted in the filmmakers’ attention to the physical changes within the city of Berlin following unification, changes which contribute to the disconnection of both protagonists with their once familiar surroundings. No longer at home and not welcome in the newly unified country, the Ossi has become the Zoni (one who lived in the Zone, a derogatory term that is used to describe the former GDR area as part of a continued Russian occupation), whose social standing is lower even than the foreigner, according to Stöhr’s film. This becomes evident in one scene, when Peter, Martin’s best friend, talks about his hardship in gaining employment in a unified Germany. He explains that anyone else, even a foreigner, would be considered ahead of him.

Throughout Berlin is in Germany, Stöhr shows the audience specifically how Martin has become a foreigner in his own country. The effects of this inferiority are apparent immediately, at the beginning of the film, when Martin is released from prison. In the beginning of this scene, an officer hands him the three items he had owned before unification: his ID, his driver’s license, and his wallet. Now, fourteen years later, all of these items are somehow useless pieces of paper.

The ID of the GDR was valid until December 31, 1995. After that date, citizens of the former GDR were required to obtain new IDs – the same ones citizens of West Germany had already been using – alluding once again to the presumption that the rule of West Germany and its constitution (Grundgesetz) assumed dominance over the new members of the unified Germany, instead of establishing new laws and documents for all citizens.
The second item that is returned to Martin on the day of his release, his wallet, contains GDR Marks, a currency which became invalid on June 30, 1990. It is important to note that once this change was initiated, former GDR citizens were required to exchange their money for Deutsche Marks within a strict deadline and with a diminished value (2 to 1). In fact, both films illustrate the process of exchanging currency after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. In *Berlin is in Germany*, we see Martin making little paper planes with it; since he was released from prison after 1990, he did not have the chance to exchange his money, rendering it useless. In *Good Bye, Lenin!*, Alex’s family hides their money in his apartment but when they decide to exchange it, his mother cannot remember where she had hid it. After remembering the hiding place, only mere days after the exchange deadline had expired, the bank teller refuses an exchange, leaving Alex angrily throwing their money onto the street.

The last item that Martin receives upon his release is his GDR driver’s license. However, when Martin attempts to take a taxi driver certification, having lived in Berlin his whole life and therefore, knowing the city, he now struggles to find his way around, as most of the streets in East Berlin have been renamed. In a recently published article in *Die Welt*, titled “Wie die Deutschen ihre Vergangenheit entsorgen” (“How Germans dispose of their past”), Alan Posener discusses Germans’ compulsion to rename streets and squares after every historical change, in order to replace the signs, both physical and metaphorical, of the past: “[o]ne can live with the past. Or dispose of it like stinking trash. In Germany ... one has always favored the second option.”

Posener elaborates that every political system in Germany, for instance, that of the Nazi regime or the East Germany’s government, imposed their ruling personages symbolically onto

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their people via street-naming and notes that all of these street names disappeared (and replaced with endorsements of the newest leadership) after the extinction of their political control. Posener concludes: “[t]he German renaming-furor is not a sign of a democratic disposition. It simply proves the desire to live with no history. This wish however, is – as George Orwell has shown in “1984” – totalitarian at its core.”

It would be difficult to prove whether most East Germans were for or against the renaming of the streets in East Berlin; however, considering that, “each street name wants to bear a specific remembrance” the renaming of most East-German streets could be seen as an attack on/a rejection of the socialist system.376 But rather than reading Germany’s ever-changing street names as an ideological maneuver, or attempting to determine whether the re-naming was in the spirit of popular demand, I argue that the change of the physical landscape of the former East Germany had an impact on how its citizens coped with loss and displacement as a result of West Germany’s dominance.

In a relevant environmental psychological study, Gerda Speller, Evanthia Lyons, and Claire Twigger-Ross argue that people’s constant identification with a certain place or home is imperative to the individual, as they define themselves and determine who they are in the world. In the six-year-long study, they research the place-identity relationship in a community that was forcibly relocated to a nearby town. Noting that the residents first supported the town relocation, as the community was hoping that facilities as well as quality of life would improve as a result, the sense of community was ultimately destroyed due to the solidarity (collectiveness) of the old town’s replacement by an “individual distinctiveness” attitude of competitiveness, where

375 Ibid.
“everyone wants to outdo their neighbors.” The most significant finding of this study is that place can shape identity, arguing that peoples’ bonds with places (in the present or the past) can account for a positive or a negative sense of self. In her conclusion, they recollect: “[the town of Old Arkwright’s] physical structure had embodied many symbols which were invested with social meanings and importance. The loss of these represented a discontinuity for the residents, the loss of tangible connections to their identity.”

This insight underscores the nostalgic sentiments in the films. Specifically, Berlin is in Germany evokes this discontinuity when the narrative highlights that many East Berlin streets have been renamed and, on a larger scale, the entire city seems transformed. For instance, when Martin returns to Berlin for the first time after imprisonment, he is sitting on a train next to a window and looking outside. The audience is afforded his perspective in a point-of-view-shot as he first enters the city. In the first shot of Berlin, the TV tower, which formerly represented the pride and greatness of East Germany, is framed in the center of an extreme long shot, as a reminder that Martin is arriving home.

In fact, the TV tower perpetually appears during the film and is one of the very few identifying shots of East Germany that Stöhr offers, confirming that the area Martin is roaming is East Berlin, but where, specifically, remains unknown. The TV tower in this first establishing shot, however, is barely visible due to heavy clouds hiding it. In the forefront we see a tremendous construction site with seven tower cranes pointing in all directions. Buildings and people are not visible; the construction site dominates and hides the entire city. This continuous shot lasts for six seconds, in which, through Martin’s point of view, an entire landscape of

construction is visible, thus making the part of the city that Martin is traveling through entirely unrecognizable.

The film then cuts to a six-second medium long shot, showing Martin sitting in the rail car, closely observing the new sight. A cut again to a long shot shows further construction sites from a closer distance, which allows the audience to see scaffoldings, building materials, more tower cranes, and entire buildings being erected, but there are still no people shown within the frame. This shot lasts for another 19 seconds, for a total of 31 seconds of construction images, a lengthy sequence that emphasizes the dramatic changes the city is going through and foreshadows the drastic adjustments Martin will have to endure. The dramatic, nondiegetic music of piercing string instruments and the dark fog over the city implies an unwelcoming environment for Martin’s arrival home. In light of Speller/Lyon/Twigger-Ross’s argument about how physical structures hold social meanings that have implications for an individual’s identity, the implications of this scene – which depicts tremendous physical transformation – are rife with symbolic significance and lead to the conclusion that Martin can never go home again.

Following the construction sequence, an abrupt cut shows a long shot of Martin in the center of the frame, walking in a public square full of people, carrying his TV. Three different off-screen sounds of cell phone rings occur; like Martin, the audience automatically tries to identify the origin of the sound and expects the cell phone owner to pick up, but no cell phone is visible, thus adding to Martin’s confusion and even fear of the unknown and undetectable. The sound of the cell phones, which in reality should disappear in the midst of the big city sounds such as people chatting or passing trains, is exceptionally loud, implying that Stöhr wants to emphasize the new, stressful and hectic ways of a technologically adept Berlin.
The abrupt cuts from the construction shots to the view from inside the train to Martin walking in the city holding his TV is a pattern that Stöhr constantly follows: the audience never knows where Martin is going and most of the time it is unclear where he is coming from, resulting in a confusion that not only leaves the viewer unsettled but also indicates Martin’s confusion and dispossession. Kapczynski comments on this pattern:

Stöhr’s editing disrupts all sense of spatial continuity, with the result that Martin seems entirely disconnected from the urban space through which he moves. Following the lead character on his numerous travels through the landscape of Berlin, the film cuts from one journey to another with no clear indication of progression, fostering an impression of directionlessness and detachment.379

Although Martin is constantly in transit – either in a car, train, trolley, subway, or by foot – he never seems to arrive anywhere, literally and figuratively. Whenever there is a glimpse of hope for the amelioration of his situation, his hopes are trampled. For instance, in the scene in which he inquires about getting a taxi driver certification, he is told that ex-cons are not allowed to take the driving test, leaving him relegated to being a perpetual passenger, with dashed hopes for a new beginning, and a sense of helplessness because he cannot take control of his life/situation. Martin’s situation is akin to that of his former home, because as a nation, East Germany is also relegated to the passenger seat, perpetually playing a passive rather than an active position, object rather than subject.

Alex, the protagonist in Good Bye, Lenin!, is seemingly in constant transit as well. In his case, however, it is apparent that he is moving back and forth between the East and West side of

Berlin in an endless struggle to “unify” East and West Germans; for instance, his West-German father, Robert, with his own identity as an East German, and East and West Germany (places/space). Subconsciously, he seems to be attempting to “unify” both parts of Germany in his mind. In the scene analyzed in chapter two in which Alex takes a taxi from the hospital in the East, where his mother is staying, to the West Berliner neighborhood Wannsee, where his father lives, it becomes apparent that the spatial separation of a once-married couple from the GDR brought forth both ideological and cultural differences that resulted in entirely separate ways of life. Robert’s extravagant lifestyle – with his mansion in Wannsee (a very expensive Berliner neighborhood), his fancy clothing and elegant jewelry, and exotic, Caribbean-themed dinner parties is a sharp juxtaposition to the lifestyle of Alex’s mother, who lives in a small flat, which is decorated with 1970s wallpaper, in the “Plattenbau area” (the “concrete-jungle” of Berlin). These contrasts exemplify how his once-familiar and cohesive family is now so foreign and detached that his own identity – as a son and as a citizen – deconstructs and causes the type of alienation he experiences, for instance, when visiting the West and taking refuge next to the children in the TV room.

This sense of pervasive alienation is also depicted in Berlin is in Germany, although Martin seems to be navigating solely through East Berlin (in which the TV tower is a constant reminder) his former Heimat. After arriving in Berlin via train and failing to get on the subway because he fails to purchase a ticket from the machine, he ends up in a tram. Thus far, the audience has seen Martin in constant transit: from a train, to a tram, and then walking aimlessly, with no idea as to what his final destination is. One of the most significant shots illustrating this “homelessness” and disorientation is a scene in which a glass door with big black letters, which read “Hotel,” indicates that Martin resides in a place where nobody knows him, a place that
signifies the opposite of home. The hotel location also makes it clear that Martin does not have a home to go to. Throughout the film, he resides in this same hotel room, suggesting that he is a guest, not a resident, a visitor to a new and unfamiliar place.

The scene following Martin’s entry into the hotel then cuts to a shot of the inside of his room. In this frame, the TV he has been carrying with him now sits askew on top of towels and wash cloths, in the very center of a nicely made bed, suggesting that it takes on the role of Martin’s companion. However, due to the way in which the TV has been uncomfortably placed, it doesn’t seem to be intended as a suitable replacement for a human being. The film then cuts to a close-up of Martin as he is looking out of an open window, to a point-of-view-shot of the TV tower, and back to Martin’s face. Martin has a smile on his face, which insinuates that he is happy to see the familiar sight of the TV tower and perhaps content that some things are still the same. This short, pleasant moment of nostalgia is quickly interrupted, as the following shot reveals the *Plattenbau* building he is residing in, with its big letters spelling *Hotel* on top of its roof.\(^{380}\) Looking closely, the audience can see Martin in one of many windows that is right under the hotel letters, suggesting that he is alienated from his former home and now in a place of constant transit, where strangers come and go. The hotel sign reappears multiple times throughout the film as a reminder that, despite Martin’s effort to live a prosperous life (as all of the commercials and, on a larger scale, Western capitalism, have promised) he will remain a foreigner and at best, a guest in his own country.

This idea is further reinforced in the next shot in which the audience sees a close-up of GDR Marks on the table and Martin’s hands making little paper planes with them. These images strongly imply that his home has become so unrecognizable that even the once-valuable tools

\(^{380}\) *Plattenbau* is a building made out of prefabricated concrete slabs.
that provided him with the power to navigate through it have now become useless. It is important to mention a subsequent scene in which Martin receives his new West-German passport. This scene correlates with the previous shot of Martin making paper money airplanes because both suggest that valuable social tools must now be obtained through a new system and that East Germans can literally bring no value into the new system without “conversion” (conversion of money and power and conversion of ideology).

In the scene, in which Martin receives his new passport, the camera cuts to a close-up of a green passport of the Bundesrepublik Deutschland, which implies the beginning of a new life with a new gesamtdeutscher [pan-German] identity. In the following shot, however, Martin is framed on the left, sitting on a chair across his parole officer, who is seated to his right. In the center of the frame are two big windows that provide a view of the outside. Not surprisingly, we see the East-German TV tower, once again, alluding to Martin’s allegiance to his East-German identity, which he is not willing to relinquish even though he is now bearing a passport of the “new” Germany.

Shortly after this scene, Manuela (Martin’s ex-wife) visits his parole officer in the same office. Manuela sits on the chair that Martin had been sitting on before and the officer is now seated across from her. They are sitting in the same way, in which the previous shot of Martin was framed, however, the camera positioning, and specifically the angle, has changed. The framing of Martin and the officer is straight-on, which allows the audience to see the TV tower in the center – a symbolic division between them. In the scene featuring Manuela, the camera is positioned slightly to the left, giving the effect that the TV tower is not in the frame.

Reflecting on the scenes in which Manuela has been depicted thus far – including her new relationship with a West German, speaking High German, dressing neatly in suits and
hosting dinner parties for West Germans, it becomes clear that she is consciously rejecting her East-German roots and trying to assimilate into the new, Western lifestyle (and perhaps succeeding). On the contrary, however, a more critical analysis of her behavior and dress might suggest that Manuela represents Stöhr’s approach to depicting different “kinds” of East Germans, implying that stereotypes or generalizations about East Germans who cannot assimilate should be avoided.

Alternatively, it could also be argued that she represents the East German who appears to have negotiated a new identity, out of necessity, but still internally longs for aspects of her former life. I argue that this latter interpretation is more plausible, due to the continued affection for and support she bestows on Martin. We first see this affection when she caresses his face after he had passed out drunk on the floor.

Later in the film, she even chooses Martin over Wolfgang, which clearly indicates that she still values parts of her former life. After all, Martin’s imprisonment meant that he had been taken away from her by force and not by choice and the affection for him did not die over the years. This close relationship between Manuela and Martin can be compared to the relationship between Alex and his mother that I have discussed earlier. Both relationships ended involuntarily, resulting in physical and emotional trauma, which called for negotiations of a new and unfamiliar situation. This is comparable with the alienation East Germans felt, when the Berlin Wall was dismantled, and a completely new hometown/city was erected.

Daphne Berdahl elaborates on the idea of East Germans negotiating a new identity in her monograph *Where the World Ended*. She specifically explores how residents of a former East-German border town negotiated their identity after the political/economic system collapsed
What makes her work interesting and valuable for my project is that, as an anthropologist, Berdahl focuses on writing about the stories and memories of East Germans, which allows the reader to understand post-unification changes from an underrepresented lens. Her ethnographic approach reconstructs the past through the experiences of the individuals affected, which allows the reader a better understanding of how physical borders generate cultural implications or seemingly trivial daily rituals that resonate even after their political agenda has vanished.

This is illustrated in *Good Bye, Lenin!* when Alex’s mother, despite her potentially deadly illness, insists on having her *Spreewald Gurken* (pickles from the Spreewald region). The happiness she experiences when eating the pickles suggests that regardless of the terrible situation she finds herself in, her routine, which is specifically tied to her *Heimat*, offers comfort.

Furthermore, Berdahl investigates how the disappearance of these borders (or traditions and boundary objects) can cause destabilization. This destabilization, in a figurative sense, is depicted in *Berlin is in Germany* when Martin comes under scrutiny at the dinner table. Suddenly, he not only has to “compete” against another German but also against the French. His fall then symbolizes his defeat and the boundaries that still exist between West and East Germans. Berdahl defines boundaries, which is an imperative concept for this project, as follows:

> Boundaries – cultural, geographical, and territorial – identify people; they define who is inside and who is outside. The simple crossing of a border is a “territorial

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“passage” that may alter spatiotemporal experience ... indeed, it is an act of definition and a declaration of identity, transforming one, in an instant, from a citizen into a foreigner.\textsuperscript{382}

The main part of her work concentrates on the consequences of dismantling the East-German borders and the dramatic changes it brings forth. The changes people had to go through, according to Berdahl, were mostly felt by East Germans. She lists many examples that expose implicit notions of West-German dominance by means of economic affluence and material abundance. Furthermore, she notes that, “It was clearly up to East Germans to catch up with, adapt to, and later simply adopt this system.”\textsuperscript{383}

Berdahl’s definition of boundaries and her argument about the implications of breaching boundaries can be seen in the film scenes analyzed in this chapter. It becomes apparent that with the disappearance of the Berlin Wall, East-German culture and their homes had become memories of their past. The notion of transit and, especially in Martin’s case, the idea of never progressing or “getting somewhere” may symbolize the disorder and fiasco of the German unification process.

In the second section of this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate the specific ways in which the transformation and ultimately the dispossession of East Germans’ homeland affected East-German citizens’ identity. I also pointed out how their \textit{tools} of identity to navigate through their former home had been taken away from them, according to post-unification German cinema. In \textit{Berlin is in Germany}, this results in a message of skepticism about German unity, as Stöhr depicts East and West Germans as disconnected entities and, moreover, the East German as the new foreigner. \textit{Good Bye, Lenin!}, on the contrary, alludes to the issues of unification but

\textsuperscript{382} Ibid, 4.
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid, 159.
generally seems more positive towards a “gesamtdeutsche Zukunft” (“all-German future”), as Alex continually attempts to symbolically and figuratively unify both parts of his identity. Ultimately, however, it remains unclear in both films whether his project will succeed or fail.

CONCLUSION

*Good bye, Lenin!* and *Berlin is in Germany* reflect developments in real life; the East-German struggle to come to terms and navigate through a new space that is in constant flux, often against their wish. In this chapter, I discussed the most prominent and contested example of physical change in the city of Berlin: the *Palast der Republik*. Its demolition illustrates how a beloved cultural center of East Germans, which they considered an important historical site, was cast away by West Germans. In its place, the *Bundestag* decided to revive a German history that is linked to a detested and overthrown monarchy in the form of the old Prussian castle that had been largely destroyed during the Second World War. This top-down decision demonstrates that “economic and political power aim at changing the natural process of accumulation and development of cultural memory and heritage” to cause a “raptured history” and reinforced its “ideology of [the] current German political power.” The irony of destroying a palace to rebuild an old castle to house an exhibition of the palace is absurd. The evidence provided in this chapter again prove how East-German accomplishments have been delegitimized.

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Figure 3: The National Emblem of the GDR (above the entrance of the Palast der Republik)\textsuperscript{385}

Figure 4: The Dismantling of the Palace

\textsuperscript{385} Figures 3, 4, and 5 are private photos of the author.
Figure 5: The City Castle (Stadtschloß)
CHAPTER FOUR
THE ROSTOCK-LICHTENHAGEN RIOTS:
THE HOPELESSNESS OF THE NEW EAST

In the previous chapters, I illustrated the marginalization of East Germans in different areas of life, such as in politics, the arts, and entertainment. However, the alienation and marginalization brought about by unification was felt by a broad cross section of society in East Germany. The post-unification experience of disruption, discrimination and nostalgia was not limited to ethnic Germans. Non-Germans in the East shared similar experiences. Not only were East-German citizens left behind, but the GDR’s international relationships were abandoned as well. Many of these close ties were forged across vast distances. In this chapter, I focus on Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR, who struggled to gain legal status and acceptance in unified Germany. The challenges Vietnamese contract workers experienced after unification were similar to the ones East Germans faced and demonstrate the global ramification of the hasty and flawed unification process.

While exploring Central Vietnam in May 2016, my German-speaking tour guide, Mr. Nguyen, introduced me to the cities of Hoi An and Hue. His German pronunciation was excellent, and I noticed that whenever we would meet, he would always arrive early, waiting for me. From what I had been told about Vietnamese behavior, such exhibition of punctuality was highly unusual. One time, when we were taking a break from the heat on a bridge in the

386 I have replaced all names of individuals described in this chapter with pseudonyms to protect their identity.
countryside of Hue, I asked him where he had learned to speak German so well. What he then described surprised me and made me consider another group left behind after unification.

In the 1980s, young Mr. Nguyen came to the GDR as a contract worker (*Vertragsarbeiter*). He spoke very fondly about his time in the GDR and how much he enjoyed living in East Germany. He claimed that, if he had been given the opportunity to stay after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he would have stayed. Mr. Nguyen, in a way strangely relevant, even called Germany his *Heimat*. When Mr. Nguyen went back to Vietnam, he continued to study German and eventually became a German-speaking tour guide. When I asked him if he ever went back to Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he explained with deep regret that he had not been able to afford to go back. However, he proudly shared that his son was now studying German. He added that it was very important to him that his son knew German and traveled to Germany, as it was the only way for him to learn about his father’s past and identity.

Mr. Nguyen’s story was not only moving and melancholic, but also highly significant for my research. Up until then, I had neither considered the Vietnamese contract workers as part of the GDRs’ past, nor how their lives had been interrupted after unification and the ramifications their presence had – and still has – on present-day Germany and Vietnam. Significant literature exists that discusses their lives in East Germany during the SED regime. Mr. Nguyen’s experience in the GDR clearly had a lasting impact on his life and, ultimately, on that of others.

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*Heimat* is a German term that denotes a place where one was born and/or grew up, but it also represents a place where one feels at home; a place of comfort and belonging.

He proudly admitted to me that the reason he was always early to our meetings was because promptness was a habit he had learned in Germany. He not only conveyed his fascination with, and love for, Germany and its culture and language to me through his stories and actions, but also conveyed these sentiments to his own son, who might soon experience present-day Germany for himself.

After being introduced to a citizen from a different culture, who not only identified as German but also held fond memories of his time in the GDR, the question of identity in the GDR was more complex than it often appeared. Of course, in an odd way Mr. Nguyen’s life echoed or mirrored that of the West-German Gastarbeiter, who also arrived as contract-laborers from the 1950s onward, but more often than not—for a variety of reasons—decided to remain in Germany rather than return home to the Maghreb, Yugoslavia, Spain, or Turkey where they had been born. Different from Mr. Nguyen, of course, they had been allowed to stay in the FRG, even if they had not always been welcomed there, nor could acquire full German citizenship until the 2000.

As a result of this poignant experience, I decided to dedicate one chapter to another group that was left behind after unification: the Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR. Although the GDR hosted contract workers from other socialist countries, such as Cuba, China, or Mozambique, I chose to illustrate the conditions of the Vietnamese contract workers for two reasons: Vietnamese were amongst the first who arrived in the GDR in the 1950s and stayed until the demise of the GDR, and, with more than 70,000 workers, the Vietnamese were the largest group of contract workers in the GDR.

Second, the Vietnamese in Germany after unification suffered similar coethnic challenges as the East Germans: whereas the “anti-communist” and mostly southern Vietnamese “Boat People”, who had fled after the Vietnam War in 1975, found refuge in West Germany and had
become respected citizens, the mostly northern Vietnamese contract workers in East Germany struggled to be allowed to reside and work in unified Germany. Furthermore, their reputation amongst the Vietnamese in West Germany was tarnished, as they were seen as the communists who had come to the GDR voluntarily and – in large part and rather unfairly – earned notoriety for participating in small crime business activities to support their families in Vietnam.

In this chapter, I first address when the contract workers in the East Germany and the “Boat People” in the West Germany arrived and how each government and the German population received them. Furthermore, I discuss the challenges the contract workers faced after unification. In the final section, I provide a brief analysis of the 2014 German film, *We are Young. We are Strong (Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark)*, an account of East-German adolescents’ violence against Vietnamese contract workers that is based on the *Rostock-Lichtenhagen Riots* of 1992, when a building called *Sonnenblumenhaus* accommodating Vietnamese contract workers was set on fire.389

This film provides a unique opportunity to probe elements of East Germans’ identity as they emerged from the Communist era, and which groups were left behind after the demise of the GDR. My goal is to describe the paradoxes of East-German identity (as experienced by East Germans and the Vietnamese) in order to better understand the challenges of German unification in forging a common identity and generate a collective sense of belonging among those who previously lived in the GDR.390 I argue that the euphoria of unification experienced by the majority of Germans and contract workers rapidly vanished among the residents of the *Neue Lichtenhagen* is a neighborhood in the East German city Rostock. A photo of the *Sonnenblumenhaus* is exhibited at the end of this chapter.

389 The film *We are Young. We are Strong (Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark)* depicts a fictional account of a group of young East German adolescents and their participation in the infamous Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots against a Vietnamese contract worker residential building on August 24, 1992.
The often hasty process of unification resulted in not only the desolation and desertion of native East Germans but also the contract workers who had moved there.

The experiences and patterns I describe in this chapter are based on archival documents pertaining to contract worker laws, regulations, and even propaganda between the Ministry of Labor in the GDR and the administration of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), which were obtained from the federal German archive located in Berlin. Furthermore, I interviewed Dr. Wolfgang Richter, who was the foreign representative (*Auslandsbeauftragter*) in Rostock and happened to be inside of the *Sonnenblumenhaus* on the night of the xenophobic attacks. In the interview, he was able to provide detailed information on the political and social disruption leading to the escalation of the situation. I was also fortunate to interview Burhan Qurbani, the director of *We are Young. We are Strong*, who offered insightful commentary about his reasoning to tell the story of East Germans and their contract workers.

**VIETNAMESE CONTRACT WORKERS IN THE GDR**

Vietnamese history has been significantly determined by Chinese and French colonization projects, triggering a resistance that ultimately led to its decolonization and the establishment of the leading Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). For the purpose of my argument, I discuss the condition of Vietnamese after the First Indochina War – a battle between the communist Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, and the French – that lasted from 1946 until 1954 and resulted in the departure of the French through the negotiations conducted at the Geneva conference. At this conference, the participating diplomats decided to temporarily divide Vietnam in two zones: the

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391 New federal states in Germany, *Neue Bundesländer*, denotes all the states that formerly belonged to the GDR whereas *Alte Bundesländer* are the states that belonged to the FRG.
Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north and the State of Vietnam in the south.\textsuperscript{392} It was agreed that a general election in 1956 should reunite the country. This did not occur, however, and in 1955 the Second Indochina War (the Vietnam War, or as the Vietnamese and many Germans call it, the American War even if the US only became heavily involved after 1960) ignited between North and South Vietnam and their pro- and anti-communist allies, eventually ending in 1975 with the fall of Saigon and the reunification of the country under communist rule.

In this section, I elaborate on the three waves of Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR, paying especially close attention to the third wave that occurred because of the April 1980 \textit{Contract Worker} agreement, as it represents the greatest influx of foreign workers in the GDR. I demonstrate that although by law Vietnamese contract workers had the same labor and social security rights as East Germans, everyday life turned out to be more challenging for them. While in many instances Vietnamese identified as German and considered the GDR as their \textit{Heimat}, they were not always welcomed by its indigenous citizenry. This frequently harsh opposition to share space and place with foreigners was often rooted in language barriers and differences in cultural background.

Already in the 1950s the East-German administration collaborated with the North Vietnamese regime for the first time, by inviting Vietnamese students to East Germany and, later, by inviting a Vietnamese work force to East Germany. In 1955, the North Vietnamese government – with the active participation of its leader Ho Chi Minh – sent a group of approximately 350 children from North Vietnam between the ages of 9 and 15 to the East-German city Moritzburg; although some later went to Dresden as well, they were known as the \textit{Moritzburger}. The GDR authorities were given the impression that these children were war

\textsuperscript{392} The participating diplomats represented France, the U.S., the United Kingdom, the USSR, the PRC, and the Viet Minh.
orphans, who should receive a proper education in East Germany and then be sent back to Vietnam.\textsuperscript{393} It turned out, however, that these children’s parents were war cadets, privileged communist cadres, who had successfully fought and resisted the French during the First Indochina War.\textsuperscript{394}

In the 2015 \textit{Spiegel} article, “\textit{Als ‘Onkel Ho’ seine Kinder schickte}” (“\textit{When ‘Uncle Ho’ Sent his Children}”), Maximilian Kalkhof uses oral history of several Moritzburger Vietnamese still residing in Berlin today to demonstrate that the children considered East Germany paradise until the fall of the Berlin Wall.\textsuperscript{395} Children of the ruling elite, they lived with their German and Vietnamese teachers. Mingling with locals was discouraged, as the goal was to send them back to Vietnam upon completion of the program. Kalkhof interviewed a Vietnamese girl, Vo Cam Trang, who arrived in the GDR when she was 12 years old. She explained how East Germany represented paradise for her and the other students, because they were able to go to school and study. She also stated that, while in Germany, she felt like she belonged to a big family where everyone cared for each other. According to the Vietnamese students’ testimony, their experiences were positive.\textsuperscript{396}

In 1959, this student agreement was terminated, and these young people were forced to return to Vietnam. Le Duc Duong, one of Kalkhof’s interviewees, did not want to leave the GDR because, as a 17-year-old, he strongly felt as though he could not cope with his native Vietnamese culture anymore. The newly acquired identity that Le Duc Duong describes that he had acquired is the sort of experience my tour guide in Vietnam described to me as well.

\textsuperscript{393} Oliver Raendchen, \textit{Vietnamesen in der DDR: Ein Rückblick} (Berlin: SEACOM, 2000), 4.
\textsuperscript{395} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid.
However, in contrast to my tour guide, Le Duc Duong was able to return to Germany three years later to start an apprenticeship in the East-German city of Jena, through a program that allowed 150 former Moritzburger Vietnamese to return to the GDR to learn a profession.

This was one of several agreements in the 1960s that allowed Vietnamese students and later student apprentices to study or begin internships in the GDR. All students were required to stay in boarding school-like accommodations that allowed the GDR administration continuous surveillance, which was desired by both sides. This paternalistic behavior towards the Vietnamese can be seen throughout their stay in the GDR. 397

There were such programs elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, one of which was the Lumumba University in Moscow that planned on expanding by 4,000 students in 1966 in an effort to create “an atmosphere conductive to [Marxists-Leninist] indoctrination and instilling discipline.” 398 Although there were numerous reports of conflicts between applicants and the respective authorities, for instance, complains about dire living conditions, these programs were still pursued and seen as great opportunity. 399

The two Moritzburger Le Duc Duong and his friend Vo Cam Trang matriculated at local universities. However, upon graduation, because of issues related to their residence permits, they both had to leave East Germany, once again against their will. It was not until about 10 years later, through the contract worker agreement of April 1980, that both were able to return, resume positions in the GDR, and eventually stay. Many of these transient Vietnamese citizens found

399 Ibid, 47.
themselves adopting two identities simultaneously. Vo Cam Trang, for example, described
herself as a “German-Vietnamese-In-Between-Thing.”

What makes these stories remarkable is the degree to which Vietnamese contract
workers, who lived as foreign laborers in the GDR, identified as East-German citizens. It is
therefore pertinent here to briefly elaborate on questions of identity. In his chapter “Culture and
Identity,” Simon Clarke addresses the question of whether we choose our identity or if it is
outside our control. He claims that cultural identity is not fixed but undergoes constant
transformation; it is not only about “being” but also “becoming” in a certain “context.”

If we consider space as the “context,” then this place can shape identity.

Furthermore, the environmental psychological study conducted in 1992 by Gerda Speller
et alia – discussed in chapter three – confirms that “physical structures … embodied many
symbols, which [are] invested with social meanings and importance” and that people constantly
identify with certain places as a means of defining themselves and where they stand in the
world.

Taking these concepts into consideration, it becomes evident that some Vietnamese, after
living in East Germany for an extended period of time and getting accustomed to German habits
(such as my tour guide Mr. Nguyen, who according to him, acquired the habit of punctuality),

400 Maximilian Kalkhof, “Vietnamesen in der DDR, Als ‘Onkel Ho’ seine Kinder schickte,” Der Spiegel, November
1060680.html.
15, 2019, https://studysites.sagepub.com/healeyregc6e/study/chapter/encyarticles/ch01/CLARKE--1.PDF.
402 In their six-year-long study referred to as “Arkwright,” Speller and Lyons research the space-identity relationship
in a community that was forcibly displaced. Gerda Speller and Evanthia Lyons, see chapter three.
spatial change and identity processes,” in Social Psychological Review 4, no.2 (2002): 5,
http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/2114/1/RevisedSPR.pdf.
identified as Germans, too, and considered the GDR their *Heimat*, the place where they felt (most) at home.

Le Duc Duong and Vo Cam Trang were part of all of the three waves of Vietnamese people that were invited to the GDR and had therefore spent a substantial amount in East Germany, first as part of the *Moritzburger* in 1955 and, subsequently, as part of a contract signed on October 22, 1973 (which remained in effect until 1983), which allowed 10,000 Vietnamese to complete their apprenticeships in the GDR.\(^{403}\) This agreement, however, did not allow for the Vietnamese to remain in the GDR upon completion of their apprenticeships or course of studies at university, so they were forced to return to Vietnam.

The third wave of – mostly north-Vietnamese came to the GDR due to the contract worker agreement.\(^ {404}\) These Vietnamese were selected from poor households, without any advanced prior education. In order for the program to run smoothly and to ensure all workers would return to Vietnam and use their acquired skills to rebuild the country, the regime chose a sort of worker who had not illustrated any political resistance prior to the departure and had exhibited loyalty to the communist regime in Vietnam.\(^ {405}\) On April 11, 1980, the administrations of the Ministry of Labor and Public Affairs of the GDR (*Ministerium für Arbeit und Soziales*) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the SRV signed an agreement “led by the wish of strengthening brotherly collaboration” between the two countries that would allow the temporary


\(^{404}\) The Agreement between the GDR and the SRV for the temporary employment and qualification Vietnamese contract workers in factories of the GDR (*Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der SRV über die zeitweilige Beschäftigung und Qualifizierung vietnamesischer Werktätiger in der Betrieben der DDR*).

employment and qualification of Vietnamese contract workers between the ages of 18 and 35 for up to four years.  

In the same file that contains the agreement and other documents pertaining to laws and regulations of contract workers in the archives in Berlin is a pamphlet that offers educational information about Vietnam and its people, translated from Vietnamese. It introduces Vietnam, its population and people, culture, geography, history, and politics. It was filed among other official documents of the GDR, which suggests that it was sent by administrators of the SVR in an attempt to educate GDR officials and assure a smooth cultural transition for the guest workers.

This pamphlet reveals how the SRV administration described particular events and used persuasive language to convey its political agenda, and furthermore how it attempted to persuade the East Germans of the necessity of this new enterprise. The concept of “brotherly” duties towards a devastated country could have been an effort to persuade East-German authorities to collaborate with their new foreign colleagues.

The East Germans, however, concluded the work force agreements for a more practical reason, that of labor shortages. As Karin Weiss argues in a book chapter, “Migration und Integration in den Neuen Bundesländern,” the reasons and purpose for employing contract workers were never openly announced to the general public. Doing so would have meant that the GDR administration would have to admit to persistent labor shortages and, therefore, economic difficulties. The concealment of information imposed upon the GDR citizens had been such an integrated practice of the SED’s political strategies that even when Gorbachev suggested glasnost (transparency) and perestroika (restructuring/reforming) in the 1980s in the Soviet

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406 The original German reads as follows: “…geleitet vom Wunsch zur Vertiefung der brüderlichen Zusammenarbeit.”

Union, the East-German Politburo rejected such measures.\footnote{Renée de Nevers, \textit{Comrades No More, The Seeds of Change in Eastern Europe} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 166.} When citizens started a movement for such reforms, the SED even prohibited the press from mentioning \textit{perestroika}.\footnote{Laura Bradley, \textit{Brecht and Political Theatre, The Mother on Stage} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 178.} Kurt Hager, chief ideologist of the SED and member of the Politburo, commented on Gorbachev’s new strategy, “If your neighbor puts up new wallpaper in his apartment, would you feel obligated to put up new wallpaper in your apartment, too?”\footnote{Theo Sommer, “Er mauert wieder, SED Honecker will nichts von Perestrojka wissen,” Zeit Online, November 25, 1988, https://www.zeit.de/1988/48/er-mauert-wieder.} What this concealment of information meant for the collaboration between contract workers and East Germans will be discussed further in this chapter.

The Vietnamese pamphlet explains in depth why there was a dire need of the Vietnamese people to acquire either an education or technical skills that would help rebuild the economy and country. It reveals communist/socialist thinking patterns and worldviews that are still propagated today. The pamphlet begins with a section \textit{Short Historical Overview}.\footnote{Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, BArch, DQ 3/860, pag. 3-7, Regierung der DDR und Regierung der SR Vietnam geleitet vom Wunsch zur Vertiefung der brüderlichen Zusammenarbeit.} This brief history mainly describes the events and patterns involved in the exploitation of the Vietnamese people and the destruction of its land by other countries. The pamphlet traces Vietnam’s history of exploitation and begins with the arrival of the French marine and the subsequent bombing of Da Nang in 1847, followed by the colonial conquest of Imperialist France in 1858 that ended with the Treaty of Saigon in 1862 (Saigon and three southern provinces, Cochinchina, became French protectorates) and the 1884 Patenôtre Treaty, which resulted in the absolute subjugation to the French. Then, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, Imperial Japan invaded French Indochina in an effort to impede China from receiving French support. The Japanese army remained there until the Japanese coup d’état in the spring of 1945 that was launched in anticipation of an
uprising of the French army after the end of the Second World War. The brochure then refers to
the French colonial war that started in 1946, after the signing of the Franco-Vietnamese
Agreement of March 6, 1946 when the French government accepted the Republic of Vietnam as
a free state.\textsuperscript{412} There is also an allusion to the Vietnamese opposition, which resulted in
organized resistance, such as Ho Chi Minh’s \textit{Revolutionary Youth League} that spread Marxist
ideas among the intellectual and working class and finally ends with Ho Chi Minh’s declaration.
On September 2, 1945, he declared the independence of Vietnam from France by founding the
Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam).

It is apparent that the purpose of the text was, in part, to demonstrate that Vietnamese
workers had appropriate Marxist credentials, having experienced exploitation at the hands of the
capitalists and imperialists. The document, for instance, explains that in violation of the signed
agreements between France and the DRV, France continued its “dirty colonial war” from 1946
until the Geneva Accords were signed in 1954.\textsuperscript{413} The word choice clearly indicates the
administration’s communist political stance, which is further demonstrated in its description of
the subsequent reconstruction of the North and its description of South Vietnam, which is
deemed a puppet regime (established with the help of the U.S.), the conflict with which escalated
with the American “bombing terror” in 1965. There is further mention of alleged 1977 and 1979
aggression by the Democratic Kampuchean Pol-Pot regime and, finally, the large-scale
aggression of the Chinese government that failed due to the determined resistance of the
Vietnamese people. The pamphlet’s brief history ends with a closer look at the 1976 unification
of the South and the North and the establishment of a unified SRV. The tone and word choice in

\textsuperscript{412} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{413} The original German reads as follows: „Unter Bruch der mit der DRV abgeschlossenen Verträge, in denen
Frankreich die DRV anerkannte, begann 1946 der schmutzige Kolonialkrieg Frankreichts“.
this section underscores the regime’s opposition to French and American culture (or Western culture, in general), and is steeped in classical communist rhetoric. This anti-Western stance in the text becomes even more apparent in the “Foreign Policy” section, which is discussed shortly.

The segment titled, “About the Development of the SRV,” again outlines three decades of imperial exploitation through aggressive wars that intellectually, culturally, and materially devastated Vietnam and its people. It likewise mentions natural disasters, such as flooding and typhoons, in 1977, 1978, and 1980 as other causes of extensive destruction to Vietnamese citizens’ lives. It is worth mentioning that the administration suggests that the SRV’s inability to meet industrial production goals was explained as an outcome of trade embargos from capitalistic countries and that the “socialistic brother countries need to show extensive international solidarity to ban hunger from the Vietnamese people and secure their living conditions.”

This statement, in particular, is evidence of the fragility of the system. On one hand, independence from capitalist societies is the ultimate goal of the Vietnamese iteration of Marxism-Leninism, but on the other, it remains a theoretical idea the realization of which seems faraway. Section Six, “Foreign Policies” of the SRV, more directly criticizes the U.S. and its foreign policies. It indicates how “the SRV renders a worthy contribution in the battle against the China-USA relations,” and furthermore stands “against the dangerous and adventurous politics of the Reagan administration.” Which kinds of “adventurous politics” are being referred to are not clarified, but this was a welcome statement about Vietnamese foreign policy wholly in line with that of the Eastern Bloc, not least the Soviet Union. By underlining the sentence, the

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415 The original German reads as follows: „Die SRV leistet einen würdigen Beitrag im Kampf gegen das Komplott China-USA... gegen die gefährliche und abenteuerliche Politik der Reagan-Administration.“
document emphasizes that the SRV maintained diplomatic relations with all capitalistic industrial countries – with the exception of the U.S. To justify this, the document states that all efforts to “normalize” the relationship with the U.S. in the past have failed due to the Carter administration’s “discriminatory political provisions” toward the SRV. What the author of this pamphlet refers to as “discriminatory political provisions” is not further explained.

In conclusion, the pamphlet was not only designed to introduce Vietnam and its citizenry to the GDR administration, but also to depict Vietnam and its people as victims of continuous Western aggression and exploitation and that, as a result, the country was in desperate need of assistance against their mutual enemy. Clearly, Vietnam was not innocent of its own aggressive moves in establishing itself as a regional power in South-East Asia. And that is no surprise, given its history and its Marxist-Leninist ideology. But it is more opaque why it felt necessitated to portray itself as an eternal victim to a friendly fellow communist state and its people. Obviously, Vietnam could use any sort of aid to rebuild after the devastating and incessant wars in which the country had been involved for decades. But the pamphlet’s rhetoric seems to play at the campaign (which in some ways went back to the early 1950s in the Soviet Union) that depicted the Eastern Bloc countries as champions a peace movement, selflessly working to a more equitable world, in which the exploitation of human beings for any reason was a thing of the past. To show that this druzhba narodov (Friendship of the Peoples) writ large was not mere rhetoric, the communist governments of East-Central Europe were sensitive to pleas by “developing” countries, especially if they were declared communists, for support.416

416 Druzhba narodov was a national policy in the 1930s. It aimed to put the socialist state in the center of Soviet everyday life and offer a communal experience that would its citizen together; Jeff Sahadeo, Voices from the Soviet Edge, Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).
Vietnam certainly faced tremendous economic hardship after the Vietnam War. The unemployment rate was rising sharply due to demobilized soldiers who were returning to the workforce of an underdeveloped, still largely agricultural country. By sending Vietnamese workers to East Germany, the SRV government hoped that these individuals would not only support their families in Vietnam, but also acquire valuable qualifications, such as work skills and German language proficiency. The contract worker program would also enable Vietnamese workers to become familiar with European or Western cultural norms, such as patterns of thinking and working, skills they could then employ in Vietnam upon return.\footnote{Oliver Raendchen, \textit{Vietnamesen in der DDR: Ein Rückblick} (Berlin: SEACOM, 2000), 4.}

In line with this perspective, the GDR consequently justified the employment of Vietnamese workers as an act of altruistic, brotherly foreign aid after decades of war, destruction, intellectual/spiritual/cultural exploitation, and unforeseen natural disasters. Although the GDR genuinely intended to help its anti-imperialist socialist comrades in the fight against the Western threat, the GDR’s main motive was nonetheless its own pressing need to overcome labor shortages in all areas of the East-German economy, especially in its industries such as iron and steel mills, electrical machine building sites, optical plants, shoe, leather and sewing machine factories, and cement plants. These were often multi-shift operated factories that were lacking sufficient numbers of East-German workers to work all the shifts.

The 1983 \textit{Spiegel} article “DDR Meistens zu spät. Chronischer Mangel an Arbeitsplätzen zwingt DDR-Betriebe zur Rationalisierung "("GDR Often-too-late: Chronic Labor Shortage Forces GDR Factories to Rationalize") describes the creative ways in which companies were recruiting new workers and even enticing them away from competitors; many factories had boards placed in their entrances indicating that “all kinds of” workers were appreciated, even the
“non-working population” (by which they most likely meant stay-at-home mothers). The article furthermore states that enticing workers away by means of offering vacations at the Baltic Sea or free company housing was forbidden, implying that this had been the practice at some point.

According to this article, labor shortages occurred because of people’s flight before the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, and subsequent departures for the West. Another reason was the stagnation regarding technological developments in the GDR; capital for investing in competitive technologies (in which manual labor was replaced by that of machinery) was lacking, therefore, physical labor in the form of guest workers had to replace this deficit. Previous measures taken against shortages were the mobilization of women into the workforce or the employment of the elderly, but the yield of such strategies was limited.

These resources were eventually exhausted, and other actions were taken, such as the employment of contract workers. This was why the East Germans and SRV decided upon the contract-workers' agreement as mutually beneficial. As previously mentioned, in communist/socialist countries it was common practice to refrain from confessing to shortages in any form. In 1977, however, Honecker explicitly admitted to labor shortage but only when visiting Vietnam during a secret meeting with Le Duan, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), not as a public announcement to the general public of the GDR. Nonetheless, enlisting foreign workers under the pretense of helping a socialist fraternal nation in need provided a convenient and effective “way out,” that avoided having to give any public

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explanation. This illustrates how the GDR obfuscated its objectives from the public, so it could realize the contract-worker enterprise without disclosing any flaws in its (economic) system. On the other side of the agreement, the devastating economic situation of the Vietnamese suggests that their need to work and live in the GDR was pressing.

As previously mentioned, a total of ten countries sent contract workers to the GDR. However, the Vietnamese population in the GDR between 1980 and 1990, totaling approximately 70,000 contract workers, represented the largest foreign ethnic group amongst all contract workers in the country. According to a protocol from January 29, 1980, signed by the Vietnamese and East-German administrations, Vietnamese contract workers had the same labor and social security rights as East Germans, and the GDR administration generally seemed to honor the equality of their contract workers.\textsuperscript{421} They were ensured the same pay, appropriate housing, and annual vacation by law, and in factories they had the same contracts, and health insurance as East-German workers.

In everyday life, however, the living situation turned out to be more contentious. Administration officials exhibited a patronizing attitude, for instance, by prohibiting any spouses to unite with their significant others. Until 1987, pregnant women were invariably deported, while after 1987, a somewhat stark choice was offered of abortion assistance or the choice to be sent back to Vietnam. Since it was considered dishonorable to be forced to go back to Vietnam, most women chose abortion. Furthermore, when Vietnamese workers violated the terms of their contract, the employer had the authority to terminate the working relationship; this, however, was not a two-way right, for Vietnamese workers could not leave in search of another job.\textsuperscript{422}

\textsuperscript{421} Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, BArch, DQ 3 862, pag. 30-31, Hinweise zur Beschäftigung vietnamesischer Facharbeiter im Anschluß an die Berufsausbildung in Betrieben der DDR.
Since the aim was to send contract workers back to Vietnam after four or five years, “incorporation into the host society was neither expected, nor desired,” which meant that intensive language or cultural courses that would help the Vietnamese to adjust to a new environment were not provided.\textsuperscript{423} Marriages and even friendships between Vietnamese and Germans were frowned upon. Moreover, all contract workers were accommodated in special housing separate from East Germans, which further alienated them from the citizens.

Vietnamese workers mostly followed the rules, though, fraternized with mainly their own kind and ascribed to a rigid work ethic in order to send as much money to their families in Vietnam as possible. Disputes, especially of violent nature, were quite rare amongst the Vietnamese. However, when after some time numerous contract workers intended to ameliorate their economic situation by engaging in small crime activities, such as illegally selling cigarettes or buying scarce goods that they would trade on the black markets, xenophobic sentiments amongst East Germans increased.\textsuperscript{424} While some xenophobia also existed in the West against the Vietnamese there, it never escalated into violent attacks, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

VIETNAMESE “BOAT PEOPLE” IN WEST GERMANY

In her essay, “Kubanische Vertragsarbeiter. Leben in einer anderen sozialistischen Realität” (“Cuban Contract Workers: Life in a Different Socialistic Reality”), Sandra Gruner-Domic outlines the problematic background of migration policies in both East and West Germany.\textsuperscript{425} She suggests that in order to avoid any parallels with Nazi forced labor practices, both states

were recruiting workers from countries whose economy would benefit to some degree from sending their workers to Germany. One argument, for instance, was that sending workers to other countries could help the country’s unemployment rate. Whereas the GDR claimed its foreign aid initiative was motivated by “socialistic brotherhood,” West Germany, according to Gruner-Domic, described its migration policies as part of its “liberal and cosmopolitan stance.”

In other words, both Germanies suggested that hiring foreign workers was a sort of developmental aid, which would help the countries of origin of the Gastarbeiter or contract workers.

However, West Germany also suffered from acute labor shortages after the Second World War. In the 1960s, the West-German Bundesregierung invited guest workers (Gastarbeiter) from other European countries, such as Turkey, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, and more. As the name suggests, the West-German administration had planned that the temporary guest workers would eventually return to their home country once their contracts were fulfilled. This concept proved challenging in practice, which is readily apparent today with the large Turkish and Italian populations in Germany. The government had initially not taken into consideration that those guest workers would put down roots in Germany and would be reluctant – or refuse – to return to their home country.

The Vietnamese “Boat People” who arrived in Germany after the Second Indochina War in 1978 were not considered temporary migrants and their return to Vietnam was not anticipated, however, as they were fleeing the communist Vietnamese regime, after the US, the leading nation in NATO, had lost the war against it and had withdrawn their troops. The German

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426 Ibid.
government was initially reluctant to accept refugees, but since the US and France accepted them in great numbers – most likely out of guilt – they first decided to offer at least monetary assistance.\(^{428}\) Eventually, the US as well as states (Länder) in Germany in which Christian-Democratic Party (CDU/CSU) was the largest party in the government started pressuring the Bundesregierung into accepting “Boat People” into West Germany.

A new and unique circumstance had pressured the government into accepting more people: thetelevising of the Second Indochina War and the events at its very end in 1975, such as the arrival of the Vietnamese on the Hai Hong, the cargo ship that was used to flee Vietnam. The visualization of these atrocious events and the resulting media coverage mobilized many Germans to exhibit solidarity, which then put even further pressure on the government.\(^{429}\) For instance, one Spiegel article, “Große Gefahr” (“Great Danger”) dramatically started with the following paragraph:

\begin{quote}
A stinky cloud of urine, feces, and sweat surround the ship. People relieve themselves on the railing, others lay motionless on the rusted iron deck of the deteriorated cargo ship. Everyone is emaciated and has red, feverish glossy eyes. The children have rashes and scabs all over the body.\(^{430}\)
\end{quote}

A total of sixteen paragraphs discuss the “Odyssee” in a typical he said, she said Spiegel fashion. The article concludes with a fragment of US Republican Senator Edward M. Kennedy’s


\(^{429}\) Ibid, 19.

quotation criticizing the “wait-and-see attitude” of West Germany that made him “seriously question [their] human rights policies.” The news coverage and solidarity did not stop there; the publishers of Die Zeit sent their journalists to the Malaysian island Pulau Bidong to report on the overcrowded conditions of the countless “Boat People”. Upon reporting, the publisher organized for 250 refugees to come to Germany, which the FRG government allowed in the summer of 1979. Moreover, during the UN Indochina Conference in July 1979 in Geneva, West Germany was pressured into taking 10,000 refugees.

The extensive media coverage informed West Germans about the Vietnamese suffering and the conditions in their country, which then started solidary acts in different forms; not only monetary aid was collected but jobs, adoptions, or sponsorships were offered. Compared to East Germans, who were not informed of the reasons why contract workers were invited and therefore developed hostile feelings towards them, West Germans were overall more welcoming and accepting of the situation. Still, this welcoming attitude provides a rather shrill contrast with the far less friendly behavior of many Western Germans toward the Gastarbeiter.

Over the years, the West-German government relaxed its policies and by 1990 around 45,000 Indochinese refugees were living in Germany. The refugees came to Germany under the protective umbrella of the decisions made at the Geneva conference in 1954, when participating nations defined rights of refugees. In practice this meant the offer of temporary residence with the option of naturalization, and the right to education and work, among other

431 Ibid.
things. However, since the “Boat People” were refugee in the sense that their lives and freedom were put in danger, but they were not individually persecuted in their home country, their status as de-facto refugee was not entirely clear. In West Germany, the “Kontingentflüchtling” (“quota refugee”) – as the “Boat People” were termed because of the specific quota restriction – did not have a clear legal status until the federal passed the “Program of the Federal Republic for foreign refugees” that gave them the legal status of an asylum seeker on August 29, 1979.

This clear political definition resulted in a more efficient and stronger integration into Germany’s every-day life and culture than the North-Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR. The economic situation of the West Germany’s “Boat People” was therefore more stable. This became especially noticeable after unification, when contract workers not only struggled to remain in Germany but also fought prejudice from both East Germans and their fellow Vietnamese in the former West Germany.

AFTER UNIFICATION: WHAT NOW, MR. R?

The federal archives in Berlin house a few documents that perfectly reflected the chaotic and uncertain state of affairs in the GDR after the fall of the Berlin Wall. A ruling decided by the GDR and SRV administrations on January 25, 1990, determined the following changes of the contract worker agreement from April 11, 1980: henceforth, enterprises would have to determine the number of contract workers they want to hire in their facilities, while all the resulting costs for this enterprise were to be absorbed by the companies (here an exact translation is interesting:


“all costs associated with the commitment of the contract worker employment are to be generated additionally by businesses”); the responsibility and organization of flights for the contract workers (specifically mentioning the vacation and return flights) were to be realized by the businesses/factories and the costs were to be assumed by either the guest worker or the foreign country whose nationals they were; contract workers had the right to transfer to other companies if both parties agreed; and lastly, the agreement was limited to four years with the option of extension.437

How can this action taken towards the conservation and continuance of the agreement after the fall of the Berlin Wall be interpreted? The GDR administration realized the impracticality of maintaining its responsibility of the agreement, for example, covering all of its high costs, considering the turmoil and diffuse situation during the unification process. The administration undoubtedly anticipated that the enterprise would not be sustainable in the future. By May of 1990 extensive meetings took place in Hanoi between both administrations to limit the contract workers’ agreement to December 31, 1990. The new protocol signed on May 13, 1990, sought to lessen the financial burden imposed by contract workers upon the businesses that were causing great distress and frustration among business/factory owners.438

In a lengthy exchange of letters that spanned over several months between Mr. Meichsner, director of the textile factory VK Intex Chemnitz, Mrs. Klinke, sales representative of the airline company Region Charter, and Mr. Schröder, GDR Ministry of Labor, a dispute erupted over who was responsible for covering the flight costs of 2,000 Vietnamese contract workers who were vacationing and then stuck in Vietnam and waiting for their return flights to the GDR to be scheduled and paid – a quite pressing situation for everyone involved, especially

438 Ibid, 28-37.
the Vietnamese. All parties were eager to evade their responsibility in the matter. In the final
telex, dated June 19, 1990, Mr. Meichsner informed Mr. Schröder and Mrs. Klinke that the VK
Intex Chemnitz textile company would not exist any longer after July 1, 1990, and that therefore
all coordination of the contract workers’ flights will be concluded. On this telex is a handwritten
note, “What now Mr. R?”439 This question is particularly poignant, as it indubitably sums up the
chaos and ambiguity of the situation and also the overall debacle and perplexity the GDR, its
citizens, and its contract workers were experiencing. What now? Nobody knew the answer.

In the years since unification, a number of German journalists have examined
Vietnamese contract workers’ reflections on their time in East Germany. What many of these
accounts have in common is the Vietnamese contract workers’ nostalgia, admiration, and
affection for Germany, which stands in stark contrast to the West-German master narrative of the
GDR as a highly oppressive socialist country. One vivid illustration of the contract workers’
fondness for their host country was a 2008 Berlin exhibition called Bruderland ist abgebrannt
(“Fraternal Country has burned down”).440 Sponsored by the Amadeus Antonio Foundation (an
“initiative for civil rights and democratic culture”), this exhibition, for the first time, displayed
the lives of Vietnamese in the GDR as well as after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when their
fraternal country disappeared and they struggled to remain in (and part of) their new Heimat. The
purpose of this exhibition was to educate and inform the German people about the Vietnamese
presence in the GDR in the 1980s and why there was still a sizable Vietnamese population in
East Germany. The Amadeus Antonio Foundation introduced the content of the exhibition on
their website with the header: “An unknown chapter of the GDR is uncovered.”441

439 Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, BArch, DQ 3 2136, Brief von Herrn Meichsner and Herrn Schroeder.
441 Ibid.
Despite their desire to remain part of German culture, the Vietnamese contract workers faced many difficulties following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. For instance, the struggles of Vietnamese contract workers in maintaining employment and securing new positions multiplied. According to data from the Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (“Institute for Labor Market and Employment Research”), two-and-a-half million East Germans lost their jobs between 1989 and 1991, mainly due to the privatization and subsequent closing of approximately 4,000 out of 14,000 East-German factories and businesses.\footnote{Melanie Booth, “Die Entwicklung der Arbeitslosigkeit in Deutschland,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, March 30, 2010, https://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-einheit/lange-wege-der-deutschen-einheit/47242/arbeitslosigkeit.}

What were formerly small crime activities, such as the selling of cigarettes, spiraled out of control and a “cigarette mafia,” as newspapers called it, ignited and would terrorize parts of Berlin by the mid-1990s. In 2017, Philipp Wurm published the article, Berlins Vietnamkrieg (“Berlin’s Vietnam War”) in the Spiegel, recollecting the events of the day when six Vietnamese were shot to death by an opposing Vietnamese gang in an effort to monopolize a certain area in East Berlin.\footnote{Philipp Wurm, “Zigarettenmafia in den Neunziger, Berlins Vietnamkrieg,” Der Spiegel, May 4, 2017, https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/berlin-der-90er-die-vietnamesische-zigaretten-mafia-a-1144733.html.}

The negative news coverage and the depiction of the unemployed workers tarnished the reputation of the northern/communist Vietnamese among their compatriots in Germany. In “‘There’s No Solidarity’: Nationalism and Belonging among Vietnamese Refugees and Immigrants in Berlin,” Phi Hong Su described the tensions between the “Boat People” and former contract workers.\footnote{Phi Hong Su, “‘There’s No Solidarity’: Nationalism and Belonging among Vietnamese Refugees and Immigrants in Berlin,” Journal of Vietnamese Studies 12, no. 1 (2017).} One of her Vietnamese interviewees claimed that “Germany has reunified, but north and south [Vietnam] haven’t reunified.”\footnote{Ibid, 82.} Vietnamese in West Germany
considered their behavior and culture to be more sophisticated and nuanced than the culture of northern people, which strongly resembles the East and West conflicts about German identity, specifically discussed in chapter two. According to Phi Hong Su, southern Vietnamese complained about northern food and deemed it “boring,” whereas northern Vietnamese explained that food scarcity and restricted resources in the north compared to the south were reasons for the lack of variety in the dishes, which reflected the privilege of the south.446

THE NEW FACE OF EAST GERMANY
The lack of their compatriots’ support, as well as the collapse of their every-day infrastructure because of the lack of political leadership, were not the only challenges the former contract workers were facing in unified Germany. Hostility against foreigners increased in the Neue Bundesländer of the former GDR. This was most likely due to the anger, frustration, and disillusionment felt by East-German citizens as a result of social disruption and widespread unemployment. It ultimately reached its peak because East Germans became ever more clearly victims of the hasty unification progress, and perceiving foreigners as scapegoats was a convenient, certainly predominantly unconscious, way of deviating aggression towards a system that had exposed itself as dominant and uncompromising.

Nonetheless, hostilities against foreigners occurred in West Germany, as well. Only two years after the extensive “Boat People” solidarity movement, xenophobic sentiments crept up in Germany society and a “The boat is full” (“Das Boot ist voll”) rhetoric succeeded. Three specific reasons fueled this anger: the economic crisis of the 1980s and the resulting increase of unemployment, the realization that many Gastarbeiter had remained in Germany and had started

446 Ibid, 84.

After unification, attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers occurred on both sides and a general debate on what makes a nation and democracy arose.\footnote{Cornelia Wilhelm, Migration, Memory, and Diversity, Germany from 1945 to the Present (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 157.} However, the media particularly focused on the Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots on August 24, 1992, as it represented one of the worst post-Second World War attacks against foreigners in Germany. The 2014 German film Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark (We are Young. We are Strong), directed by German filmmaker Burhan Qurbani, gave an account of the the Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots and the specific events leading to the escalation, when a large crowd of East Germans attacked the housing of Vietnamese contract. Although the account is fictional, Qurbani aimed to recollect the riots as true to the actual event as possible. While Qurbani was born and reared in Germany by Afghani parents, he is nonetheless considered a “German with migration background” in Germany. This description is specifically because of Qurbani’s parents’ migration status.\footnote{Even when a person’s grandparents are foreigners, the description “German with migration background” would apply.} This illustrates that the question of what makes one “German” is complex.

When I interviewed Qurbani in 2017, he stated that he intended to visually illustrate the “emotionale Überforderung” (“emotional feeling of exhaustion”) of East Germans.\footnote{Burhan Qurbani (German filmmaker) in discussion with the author, June 2017.} He furthermore claimed that he and his co-author Martin Behnke determined that if they would have been in East Germans’ shoes, they could have reacted the same way. This concept that East Germans acted out of desperation is depicted throughout the film. In several instances, Qurbani
alludes to the fact that East Germans, in general, are not xenophobic but use foreigners as scapegoats for the German government’s failure to take care of their citizens and their resulting misfortunes. The audience witnesses this in a straightforward manner, for instance, when Peter, the only politician taking action against the riots, leaves a voice message to a colleague stating, “We really are odd creatures. If things go well, they are the merry gypsies. If things go badly, they are suddenly the filthy foreigners.”451 This is further reinstated during the climax of the film, when the crowd of East Germans is assembling in front of the building and preparing to attack. A group of protesters also gather, holding signs that say, “Foreigners are the scapegoats of the East.”

Furthermore, Qurbani indicates in many ways that East-German adolescents contributed to the riots out of sheer desperation and frustration and not from a firm ideological conviction. This becomes evident when main actor Stefan, who will later take parts in the riots, gets agitated when asked whether he is politically “left or right-wing?” to which he replies with a raised voice, “I am normal… Can I just be normal?”452 Qurbani continually demonstrates how these adolescents are confronted with challenges that are difficult to overcome not only because of their immaturity but are even for adults impossible to solve. Qurbani referred to this as ”the economic, political, and social crash after unification” (“ökonomischer, politischer, sozialer Bruch nach der Wende”).453 In a scene when Stefan’s father first meets his son’s friend Robbie and asks where they know each other from, Robbie replies that they met at the youth club that has meanwhile closed its doors. “Now,” claims Robbie, “we are doing our own program,” which

451 The politician is referring to the Sinti and Roma (Gypsies) asylum seekers that are also depicted as seeking refuge; Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark, directed by Burhan Qurbani (2014; Hamburg: Indigo Musikproduktion, 2015), DVD.
452 Ibid.
453 Burhan Qurbani (German filmmaker) in discussion with the author, June 2017.
suggests that the youth is solely seeking entertainment as a distraction from an unfulfilling life.\textsuperscript{454}

The politicians who could have avoided the attacks are not depicted as being against the Vietnamese but rather as pursuing their own agendas. The audience is introduced to three different characters: Martin, who is sympathetic to the Vietnamese but ultimately lacks the backbone to stand up for them, as he is afraid that it might hurt his career. Multiple times Martin is seen training on an indoor rowing machine. He is rowing and rowing but not going anywhere, which stands for his political efforts in real life. Peter is actively standing up for them, trying to convince the media, people on the streets, and bystanders to stop their enterprise. And lastly Jürgen, who lacks any sympathy, thinks that the protection of the Vietnamese should be the police’s responsibility.

Qurbani suggests in numerous occasions that East Germans did not act out of sheer hatred and xenophobia but out of desolation and despair. The audience witnesses various instances when East Germans demonstrate kindness towards the contract workers and disapproval of the radical East Germans’ behavior. This, however, does not change the fact that a group of East Germans attacked the Sonnenblumenhaus, and, consequently, the Vietnamese contract workers felt unwelcome in unified Germany.

The first fictional portion of the film leading up to the riots was shot in 16:9 ratio, black and white, and mono sound, which makes the part more abstract. Qurbani then decided to change into color, CinemaScope, and Dolby Surround once the riots start, in order for the viewer to experience the film as “gelebte Realität” (“lived reality”).\textsuperscript{455} Qurbani claimed that this choice

\textsuperscript{454} \textit{Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark}, directed by Burhan Qurbani (2014; Hamburg: Indigo Musikproduktion, 2015), DVD.

\textsuperscript{455} Burhan Qurbani (German filmmaker) in discussion with the author, June 2017.
would make the audience feel as if they were participating in the event. He also made the actors speak into the camera, therefore breaking the fourth wall. According to Qurbani, this choice was made because he wanted to let the East Germans make a specific visual statement, “Look at us!,” “Notice us!,” “We have something to say, too!,” or “We want to be heard!”

Whereas the first part of the film was fiction, the second part that depicts the aggressions on the lawn and the Sonnenblumenhaus were researched and a timetable of the real events was meticulously followed, which made it seem like a documentary. Comparing Qurbani’s account with live footage of the event filmed by Spiegel TV Media, it becomes evident that the filmmaker committed to reflecting the actual event as accurately as possible. As a witness of the riots, Dr. Richter explained that the atmosphere in the film depicted the actual events in a very authentic way.

Parallel to the East-German struggle, the audience is confronted with the situation of the Vietnamese contract workers, who, despite their shy and quiet nature and diligent work ethic, are harassed and attacked by unemployed East Germans. Whereas most Vietnamese depicted in the film are afraid of the dangerous behavior exhibited by East Germans and devastated about the lack of support from local authorities, the main character Lien wants to stay. In one scene, she even sides with East Germans and explains to her brother that they are only after the gypsies, who deserve to be hated, as they do not work and exhibit poor hygiene. Lien claims that the previous attacks against Vietnamese housing must have been a misunderstanding.

Whether she sincerely believes this or uses it as a tactic to appease her worrying brother is unclear, but in numerous instances during the film, the audience sees Lien in close or friendly

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456 Ibid.
relationships with East Germans. In one scene, her boss fires an employee whose daughter calls her “chink”; yet Lien shows compassion and does not want her to be fired. Furthermore, the boss later states that he likes hiring Vietnamese contract workers, as they demonstrate praiseworthy work ethics. Lien is also friends with a co-worker who is dating one of the active Neo-Nazis. When Lien asks her friend why she is dating him, she gets upset and replies that Lien doesn't even know him and that at least he is one who takes action and cleans the “pigsty” (referring to the gypsies residing in the streets), which again implies that East Germans now have to take matters in their own hands, as they are the forgotten or left behind.

In order for me to gain detailed knowledge about the riots, I interviewed Dr. Wolfgang Richter, who was a witness of the event and also one of Qurbani’s adviser on set. In 1992, Dr. Richter was Foreign Representative (*Auslandsbeauftragter*) in Rostock and inside of the *Sonnenblumenhaus* with the Vietnamese when the riots and attacks occurred. During our interview, he explained that the tense situation between East Germans and foreigners had been increasing for weeks before the ultimate escalation. To understand the tension, he stated that it is necessary to differentiate between the contract workers, such as the Vietnamese, and the Sinti and Roma (or Gypsies) who were seeking asylum. In the past, the GDR had only invited contract workers who legally worked and had therefore somewhat “earned” their place in society. The Vietnamese, according to Dr. Richter, were seen as hard-working people and were appreciated.

However, the GDR had never accepted asylum seekers in the past, which changed after unification, when the West-German asylum law came into force in the *Neue Bundesländer* as well. In fact, in the GDR, only 0.51% of the population were foreigners; this number rose to 8%

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458 Dr. Wolfgang Richter (former foreign representative in Rostock) in discussion with the author, July 2017.
in 1992. Dr. Richter stated that, by 1992, so many Sinti and Roma had come to Rostock that accommodation was not immediately possible, and the asylum seekers saw no other possibility as to live on the lawn in front of the building where asylum applications were distributed. A lot of time was wasted because the local politicians and the municipality refrained from taking action and kept pushing the responsibility to someone else. Meanwhile, the condition on the lawn became more and more unbearable to watch for the residents and feelings of anger increased and later escalated. Dr. Richter explained that since this lawn happened to be next to the Sonnenblumenhaus, the angry crowd – as in a pogrom - did not differentiate between Sinti and Roma and Vietnamese anymore and let out all of their frustration with the politicians and ultimately the government. What was most shocking to him was the fact that the police left for approximately two hours, leaving the Vietnamese and him completely on their own and allowing the situation to deescalate even further.

About a week after the riots, Der Spiegel published the lengthy article, “A Serious Sign on the Wall,” at last providing a fair assessment of the situation and even criticizing the government. The article started with the sentence, “The ones in Bonn [the federal government], as it appears, have once again not figured it out.” The unnamed author first criticized Chancellor Kohl for not having properly addressed the riots and not having offered his empathy to the victims. Instead Kohl had distracted from the topic, and therefore, downplayed it by asserting that such xenophobic attacks occurred in other countries, too. Kohl even blamed former Stasi members, who “in all probability” had instigated and led the riots. The “victims

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460 Ibid.
461 Ibid.
462 Ibid.
of unity,” as the author called East Germans, had for the first time “unloaded their anger [...] about the state, from which they felt betrayed and sold” and had turned the neighborhood into “a battlefield in the fight against the republic.”  

Several East Germans are quoted saying, “The people are frustrated,” “We are the Turks in the country,” or more radical, “We are the shit on the wall.” According to the article, errors were made during the unification negotiations: the Währungsunion caused the inability of former customers from the East to pay in Deutsche Mark, the resulting downfall of many business, and finally the high unemployment rate. What the article also pointed out was that the “treasure of their [East-German] experiences” was not worth anything anymore in unified Germany. Another crucial reason that resulted in these riots mainly led by young people, previously discussed in Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark, was the disappearance of federal youth organizations in East Germany, such as the Young Pioneers (Junge Pioniere) that had offered youth and adolescents, “the feeling of togetherness and social security.” 

In light of such violence and obstacles as depicted in the film, some 50,000 Vietnamese returned to Vietnam after German unification. One of them was Mr. Kha, another one of the Moritzburger Vietnamese previously mentioned in this chapter. Until today he participates in the annual class reunion of all Moritzburger that is organized by the German ambassador in Hanoi. During those meetings, attendees recall their experiences in the GDR. Martin Spiewak, the journalist who had interviewed Mr. Kha and other contract workers in 1994, suggests that although many had never been back to Germany after their experience as contract workers, their

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464 Ibid.
465 Ibid.
“nostalgic unbroken love for Germany” persisted for decades. Spiewak observed German traces of the GDR during many curious encounters while in Hanoi. For instance, one cab driver with a Saxonian accent asked him who the next German soccer champion would be. Countless situations such as these demonstrate that many Vietnamese took a part of Germany back with them to Vietnam. According to Spiewak, Vietnamese people were aware that they benefitted from their time in Germany and embraced their “second identity,” as they were able to apply the skills learned in Germany in the job market in Vietnam. Spiewak suggests that during their time in Germany, Vietnamese workers were able to accumulate a “one-of-a-kind capital.” He was not referring to money, but to language, contacts, and life experiences. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu referred to this as cultural capital and social capital. Cultural capital can be accumulated in form of, for instance, education (Bildung) or training, and social capital, though social networks. According to Bourdieu, to some extent, both of them, are transformable into economic capital (money).  

As this illustrates, the case of Vietnamese contract workers sheds important light on the crisis of identity in the GDR. Spiewak’s interviewees lamented that Germans did not know about Vietnamese contract workers in East Germany, or that they have simply forgotten about them. Mr. Kha openly shared this sentiment. He claimed that German citizens did not do enough to maintain friendships, despite the fact that East and West Germans were so admired in Vietnam. To them, their Germany (meaning the GDR) had just expanded. It was the same place but with larger borders.

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CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that numerous former Vietnamese contract workers not only identified as German but also held fond memories of their time in the GDR, memories they cherish and passed onto the next generation until today. Although some East Germans sincerely supported the official solidarity towards their socialist fraternal country and acted upon it, the integration of Vietnamese contract workers was contested.

Pre-unification, it was the GDR administration’s ambiguous behavior towards the contract workers that often led to social marginalization and multifaceted forms of discrimination. On one hand, the contract-worker-agreement enterprise was disguised as a service to the fraternal country. However, their integration into German every-day life was (by both countries) discouraged. The GDR administration reinforced patriarchal ways to control the contract workers at work and home. Furthermore, the East-German public was not informed or educated about the contract workers’ different culture and habits, and, thus, East Germans never learned how to interact with foreigners. The Vietnamese “Boat People” in West Germany also did not offer much comfort or understanding to their fellow Vietnamese in the East, as they had settled in West Germany with more political and legal certainty (even than the Gastarbeiter) and had experienced cultural integration. Moreover, the ideological clash between North and South Vietnam transferred to Germany and seemed difficult to overcome.

After unification, the Vietnamese in East Germany were left stranded in a unified country that was struggling with, as it seems, far more pressing issues. The archival documents illustrate the challenges the East-German companies were facing on deciding the future of their contract workers all the while fighting bankruptcy and closure, which resulted in a back-and-forth shifting of responsibilities and ultimately leaving many Vietnamese fend for themselves.
The Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots were a direct result of the hopelessness, desperation, and frustration the East German felt after unification, when they faced unemployment and real existential threats for the first time in their lives in the new economy and social order. The euphoria of unification experienced by the majority of Germans and their contract workers was rapidly crushed. The hasty process of unification resulted in the desolation and frustration of East Germans with their contract workers. The increase in unemployment and the cultural “take-over” of the West were two reasons why the Vietnamese were seen as the scapegoat of East Germans’ unhappiness and racist behavior and remarks became more blatant and violent after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when discontent reached its peak during the Rostock-Lichtenhagen riots. Using foreigners as scapegoats offered a convenient escape from a sober reality and from the Western perpetrator they could not contest. “Where social belonging becomes instable, there is a return of categories, such as skin color, race, and nation … then only the certainty … to be German remains” and then “violence becomes a tendency,” expert of right-wing extremism Wilhelm Heitmeyer stated.468

Figure 6: The *Sonnenblumenhaus* in Rostock-Lichtenhagen\footnote{Figure 6 was photographed by the author in 2017.}
CONCLUSION

Shortly before unification, on April 19, 1990, Lothar de Maizière delivered a State of the Nation Address in front of the Volkskammer:

We are asked: Do we have nothing to bring to the German unification? And we reply: Yes, we do! We bring our country and our people, we bring created values and our diligence, our education and our ability to improvise […] We bring the experience of the last decades that we share with East European countries. We bring our sensibility for social justice, for solidarity and tolerance […] We bring our bitter and proud experiences on the threshold of conformation and opposition. We bring our identity and our dignity. Our identity is our history and culture, our failures and our accomplishments, our ideals and our sufferings. Our dignity is our human right for self-determination.470

In 1990, East Germans agreed to join West Germany. Although they were aware of their failed political system, they were proud of their cultural and other accomplishments outside of politics. During the unification treaty negotiations, East-German politicians requested for both cultures to be part of the unified Germany; a new country that would benefit from two different

experiences and two different peoples. East Germans asked for specific symbols that would reflect this, for instance, a new flag or a national anthem that would combine lyrics and melodies of both countries. However, West-German politicians of the leading party did not grant these symbolic wishes on the grounds that the West-German economy, legal system, and social norms were superior and had passed the test of time. This attitude set the pattern of a consistent and continual denying of East-German legitimacy and respect on a cultural, political, and social level with ramifications lasting until the present day.

In chapter one, I discussed how on a political level, West Germany propagated this narrative of West-German superiority during the negotiations about the unification treaty. Symbols that could have united Germans and made East Germans feel like they belonged and contributed in the new country were denied. Even East-German laws that were more progressive than the ones observed in West Germany were initially dismissed by West Germans, only to be implemented a few years after unification. I also discussed how several leading East-German politicians were confronted with Stasi allegations without conclusive proof and how the media turned this into a witch hunt against them, completely disregarding objective reporting. This obsessive and harsh public scrutiny of East-German politicians devastated many East Germans and even motivated a suicide. In the case of East-German politician Gregor Gysi, Stasi allegations keep resurfacing until today as part of *ad hominem* attacks.

In chapter two, I turned to the arts and examined how West-German intellectuals used cultural channels to undermine the identity and accomplishments of East-German artist. I examined the Literature Dispute (*Literaturstreit*), in which acclaimed East-German author Christa Wolf’s work was publicly shamed based on her former party affiliation in the GDR. I present evidence that her work was not appropriately evaluated according to its merits, but
merely on her former communist-party affiliation and her unwillingness to condemn an ideology and country that she had once believed in. Wolf, too, was accused of having worked for the *Stasi*. However, the fact that she admitted her involvement and proof was uncovered that she had only written positive reports about the people she informed in her reports; she therefore did not cause any harm, but this did not exonerate her, and the press continued to mock her.

In the second part of this chapter, I also illustrated how East Germans in everyday life were navigating through a country that had become foreign to them. For this, I close read two German *Wende* films, *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Berlin is in Germany*, ideal examples of the ways in which identity is negotiated by East-German citizens as a result of West-German cultural biases and stereotyping. Although these films are fictional, they represent how Germans construct and perceive the way they imagine their world and the ways others (East Germans) exist. Both films feature an East-German hero and the struggles he faces, and therefore, help explain the ramification of the West-German sense of superiority manifested in the everyday life of the East German. Again, I demonstrated how East-German artists and citizens were consistently mocked for their allegedly inferior culture and denied legitimacy.

In chapter three I examined spaces. I specifically elaborated on the problematic and highly contested destruction of the *Palast der Republik*, as an example of how a cultural space and cherished retreat of East Germans was demolished only to be replaced by an archaic symbol of the Prussian monarchy. I wrote about the architects of the palace and how their modern design, resembling the *Bauhaus* style, was ridiculed and a feasible and less expensive proposal for repurposing the palace was denied. Lastly, again with the examples of *Good Bye, Lenin!* and

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471 *Wende* means “turning point” but also refers to the time of unification.
Berlin is in Germany, I explained how such spatial transformations in East Germany further alienated East Germans in their own country.

I dedicated a final chapter to the Vietnamese contract workers in East Germany, who struggled to legally remain in unified Germany, while fighting for acceptance from Germans and their own (South) Vietnamese compatriots. Similar to East Germans, Vietnamese who had come to the GDR did not share the same ideology as South Vietnamese and were treated as unwanted outsiders. I provided a close reading of the film Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark, based on the actual xenophobic attack on contract-worker housing in East Germany after unification, that explains the East-German anger leading to attack. The high unemployment, the abolition of cultural institutions such as youth clubs, and the loss of hope for a better life after unification caused a void that the adolescents depicted in the film attempted to fill. The contract workers and asylum seekers “taking up space” in their country was a perfect scapegoat for the unfulfilled promises and “blooming sceneries” that Chancellor Kohl had promised the East Germans.472

A lot has been written about German unification, the rushed unification process, the Literaturstreit, the specific Wende films, the Palast der Republik, and the East-German contract workers. However, the main goal of this dissertation was to group all these examples together and illustrate the consistent and continuous denying of East-German legitimacy and respect after unification in all areas of life. Though one of these examples might not be sufficient to make this argument, this compilation of cases makes it impossible to deny a pattern.

The denying of East-German accomplishments and culture has lasting effects. In chapter one, I discussed the different reactions of politicians, which ran from resignation all the way to suicide. In chapter two, I wrote about Christa Wolf’s departure to the United States as a direct

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result of her defamation in the West. Chapter three examined the East-Germany's architects and their public shaming in magazines and their withdrawal into oblivion. It seemed germane there to refer to a poll conducted in 2007 showed that three-fourths of all East Germans still felt like second-class citizens.473

Although this dissertation did not aim to prove that the current xenophobic sentiments and the increasing support for right-wing parties and movements, such as the AfD and the PEGIDA, are a direct result of this feeling of being left behind, this is definitely suggested by the trajectory followed by the East Germans. These radical political philosophies are experienced as providing “an outlet for frustration.”474 Since 2014, these movements have gained more supporters and the AfD has now been voted into the Bundestag and has therefore become a threat for German democracy.

As discussed in my introductions, East Germans such as Marieke Reimann and Thomas Oberender have started to rewrite the narrative and have attempted to focus the West-German attention to East-German concerns, away from the Stasi and unethical state narrative that prevail until the present day. For future scholarship, I would welcome a new dialogue with East Germans that could lead to more inclusive policies and decisions. Those include the adjusting of wages, as continually proposed by Gregor Gysi, or the hiring of East Germans in leading (academic) positions. But I am also suggesting small changes in everyday life. A start could be the inclusion of the Gläserne Blume or other East-German art from the Palast der Republik in the new Stadtschloß. Ultimately, such small symbolic changes were what the East Germans initially longed for and were deprived of after the unification in 1990, which appears to have often

resembled an annexation rather than a merger of two equal partners, the previously sovereign polities of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany.
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