2020

Survival Strategies: Historic Preservation, Jewish Community, and the German Democratic Republic

Emily Ann Cohen
Bowdoin College

Survival Strategies:

Historic Preservation, Jewish Community, and the German Democratic Republic

An Honors Paper for the Department of History

By Emily Ann Cohen

Bowdoin College, 2020

Table of Contents

Images

All images are original and the property of the author.

List of German terms and abbreviations

BRD	*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Federal Republic of Germany, colloquially and occasionally referred to as West Germany, in English often abbreviated FRG*
DDR	*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*, German Democratic Republic, colloquially and occasionally referred to as East Germany, in English often abbreviated GDR
Gemeinde	Used to refer to the *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Groß-Berlin*, Jewish Community of Greater Berlin
IfD	*Institut für Denkmalpflege*, Institute for Historic Preservation
KdAW	*Komitee der Antifaschistichen Widerstandskämpfer*, Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters
KPD	*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands,* German Communist Party
Magistrat	East Berlin municipal government
OdF	*Ausschüsse für die Opfer des Faschismus,* Committees for the Victims of Fascism
SBZ	*Sowjetische Besatzungszone*, Soviet Occupation Zone
SED	*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands,* Socialist Unity Party
SMAD	*Sowjetische Militäradministration Deutschlands*, Soviet Military Authority of Germany
Verband	Used to refer to the *Verband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der DDR*, Association of Jewish Communities in the DDR
VVN	*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes,* Association of those Persecuted by the Nazi Regime

*After 1990, unified Germany is also called the Federal Republic of Germany. Since this time period only comes up in the conclusion of this work, this abbreviation will almost always refer to West Germany.

For the sake of consistency, all abbreviations will be based on German names. Unless otherwise indicated all translations from German—including of archival materials, newspapers, and German-language secondary sources—are my own, and I am responsible for any errors in translation.

Acknowledgements

I first want to extend my greatest thanks to my advisor Professor Page Herrlinger, whom I approached for the first time about a project a year ago and who has taught me so much about being a historian since. Thank you for patiently hearing me out as I changed my mind seemingly weekly, and for reminding me each time to "push harder," which is always what I needed to hear. Thank you to the other members of my committee, Professors Birgit Tautz and Salar Mohandesi, whose feedback, insight, and wisdom made my project better and the process always enjoyable. Thank you to the Department of History and the Office of Student Fellowships and Research for providing me the funds to travel to Berlin to conduct original archival research, and thank you to Bowdoin librarians Barbara Levergood and Carmen Greenlee, who prepared me to navigate the archives and were always friendly faces during the many hours I spent in Hawthorne-Longfellow Library. I'd be remiss to not thank my German professors at Bowdoin—Professor Tautz, Jill Smith, Jens Klenner, and Andrew Hamilton—without whom I could have never been able to do a project on German history in the first place.

Thank you to my mom, dad, sister, and extended family, who always believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. I'm sorry for not calling as much as I should have over the past year, but I think, after spending the past two months with me at home and observing my work ethic and routine leading up to a deadline, you may understand now why that was the case. Thank you to my friends, who bore the brunt of my complaints, listened as I waxed rhapsodic about Interlibrary Loan, and, most importantly, celebrated even my smallest successes. I'd like to extend a special thanks to my fellow History Honors student and, primarily, my friend and roommate Helen, who was always the first person I wanted to commiserate with ahead of a deadline and breathe a sigh of relief with immediately after. Without Helen, a source of companionship and inspiration this whole year, I don't know if I would have made it to the end.

Introduction

Consider the following two portraits of the Jewish cemetery in the northeastern Berlin neighborhood of Weissensee, approximately one hundred years apart. The first begins with the cemetery's consecration, on September 9, 1880, Erev Rosh Hashanah. Since the second cemetery established by the Jewish community (*Gemeinde*) in Berlin was nearly full, the Gemeinde needed to establish a new one; according to Jewish tradition, no gravesite should ever be removed or used again. The Gemeinde's leaders settled on a site over 100 acres in area just outside of Berlin's then-border, a size that could not be matched within the limits of the city. The grand plot reflected the Gemeinde's confidence in their community's capacity to grow and thrive. In 1880—about a decade after Jews were granted full rights as citizens of the Prussian empire in 1869—Berlin was home to 65,000 Jews, and the number was expected to increase.[1] And when it did, members would eventually die, and there would need to be plenty of space to bury the dead and protect the memory of their lives properly. The Gemeinde abided by this tenet, summarized by one Dr. Frankl, the Gemeinde's assistant rabbi, at the consecration ceremony to a group of 200 invitees: "A community that honors its dead honors itself."[2]

The first Jewish cemetery, established in 1672 in Berlin-Mitte on Große Hamburger Straße, and the second, established in 1827 on Schönhauser Allee in the neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg, were both full. In 1875 the Gemeinde acquired the plot in Weissensee and in 1878 held a competition for the design of the cemetery. Out of 25 submissions, the leaders settled on Hugo Licht's design, which featured tight geometric plots bordered by intersecting paths and interspersed with circular gardens as well as a mourning hall and arcade near the

[1] Britta Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee: Momente der Geschichte* (Berlin: be.bra Verlag, 2010), 15.
[2] Gideon Joffe, "Preface" in *115,628 Berliners: The Weissensee Jewish Cemetery – Documentation of the Comprehensive Survey of the Burial Sites* (Berlin: Landesdenkmalamt, 2013), 10.

The entrance to the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee at the end of Herbert-Baum-Straße.

entrance, inspired by Italian Renaissance churches.[3] In its design, this cemetery was already unique among its peers, and its uniqueness would only become more clear with the construction of gravesites in a wide range of styles and sizes, reflecting the spectrum of Jewish life in Berlin, the German capital and increasingly a worldly European city, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. There were modest gravestones of all the same height, with traditional inscriptions in Hebrew, and elaborately sculpted and lavishly decorated family mausoleums that displayed wealth and, implicitly, assimilation into bourgeois German society.[4] As one rabbi, interviewed for a recent documentary about the cemetery, observed, the extravagant memorial

[3] Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee,* 15.
[4] Ibid., 16.

graves "[have] fundamentally nothing to do with Judaism."[5] Other non-traditional elements added to the cemetery—a garden in 1887, flowers from which were laid on graves, rather than the small stones traditional in Jewish culture; a new ordinance issued by the Gemeinde in 1909 that allowed cremation, historically forbidden, and the burial of urns in a special section of the cemetery—further indicated the degree to which Berlin's Jews felt they had assimilated.[6] In the First World War, thousands of young Jewish Germans volunteered to fight for their homeland, and 12,000 of them died in battle. A portion of the cemetery, 49 meters wide and 90 meters long, was set aside as a field of honor (*Ehrenfeld*) for them, and a memorial to the fallen Jewish soldiers was dedicated to their memory in June 1927.[7]

Ornate gravesites in the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee.

This portrait of the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee at the turn of the twentieth century documents what some may call the golden years of Jewish life in Berlin. The second portrait to consider was painted decades later by American journalist and filmmaker Richard Kostelanetz,

[5] Rabbi William Wolff, in Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee,* 28.
[6] *Der Jüdische Friedhof in Berlin-Weissensee: Ein Wegweiser durch seine Geschichte* (Berlin: edition progris, 2003), 27, 37.
[7] Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee*, 16; *Der Jüdische Friedhof in Berlin-Weissensee,* 29.

and it is a vastly different one. In a 1987 piece for *The New York Times,* Kostelanetz pined for that era of prosperity and confidence of Berlin's Jewish community, which he found obscured by signs of recent neglect: overgrown plants, gravestones overturned by nature or man that had not been stood upright, few gardeners who can only take care of the paths. He appreciated the diversity of Jewish experiences represented in the cemetery—those of the bourgeois lawyers, doctors, writers, musicians, assimilated in German society; those of the *Ostjuden*, more conservative Jews originally from Eastern Europe; those of ultraorthodox communities formed in response to the Reform movement—and lamented the lack of such variety and vitality in 1980s Berlin, on either side of the Iron Curtain. "When asked which Berlin I like best," Kostelanetz writes, "I reply that the Berlin I like most of all is the old city, represented in Weissensee."[8]

What happened to "the old city," the one in which every third Jew in Germany lived?[9] Beginning in the late 1920s, the period of great prosperity for Berlin's Jews came to an end. With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, many people lost their jobs, including Jews, and they could no longer afford to build the lavish gravesites of years past. Soon after that, the rise of the Nazis threatened not only the socio-economic status in German society many Jews had come to occupy, but their citizenship status as well. Even as the Nazis stripped Jews of their rights and liberties, the cemetery remained under Jewish administration. But that did not prevent the Nazis from welding off iron railings and decorations from graves during their summer 1938 "scrap metal campaign" in preparation for war. Cemetery administrators pleaded with the metalsmiths to at least spare the metal and bronze lettering on some graves and plaques.[10] Sensing the momentum of the Nazis' antisemitic actions, especially following the *Novemberpogrom* (called

[8] Richard Kostelanetz, "A Lost World Interred in Berlin" The Weissensee cemetery in East Berlin recalls a flourishing prewar Jewish community," *The New York Times*, November 8, 1987.
[9] This was the statistic by the 1920s. Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee*, 39.
[10] Ibid., 41.

Kristallnacht by the Nazis) attacks on Jewish businesses and properties of November 9 and 10, 1938, the Gemeinde began using the garden and greenhouse in the Weissensee cemetery as a sort of training ground for young Jews hoping to emigrate—the skills would increase their chances of obtaining an immigration permit to Palestine and could be used to survive in their new home.[11]

In 1942, the same year that the Nazis decided on the "Final Solution" at the Wannsee Conference, the number of suicides in the Jewish community increased markedly. According to cemetery records, of the 3,257 people buried in Weissensee that year, at least 823 of them died by suicide.[12] Burials and ceremonies continued to be held, carried out by the remaining members of the Jewish community in Berlin. Wave after wave of deportations shrank the cemetery staff from 267 in the mid-1920s to 100 in 1942 to 12 by the end of the war; the only ones who remained were those who were protected because they were married to non-Jews.[13] A special burial ground was created for papier-mâché urns containing the ashes of Jews murdered in death camps at Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen, Ravensbruck, and Sachsenhausen.[14]

Between 1941 and 1945, the Nazis murdered six million European Jews, as well as millions of political prisoners, Roma-Sinti, homosexuals, and disabled individuals. In 1933, the Jewish population of Berlin was 170,000; in 1945, it was 7,000. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, over 115,000 Jews took their fate into their own hands by emigrating from Germany. After the war, tens of thousands of survivors became refugees, fleeing "the Land of the Murderers."[15] Many relocated to the United States and Palestine, where the Jewish state of Israel was established in 1948. As they began the process of rebuilding their lives and their

[11] Ibid.; Alfred Etzold, et al, *Jüdische Friedhöfe in Berlin* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1987), 80.
[12] Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee*, 73.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Etzold, et al, *Jüdische Friedhöfe in Berlin*, 78.
[15] Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes, *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), xxi.

communities, which could never be fully achieved, they wrote and spoke and wrote some more, recording their memories and beseeching the world, "Never again." On the one hand, there would appear little left to be explained about the disappearance of "the old city represented in Weissensee."

On the other hand, the American journalist visiting the Weissensee cemetery in 1987 seems to offer an additional explanation for its disappearance, one tied to the fact of the cemetery's location, in the 1980s, in the capital of East Germany, the German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*, hereafter DDR). Kostelanetz reported, "The few East Berliners I spoke to who know about Weissensee tend to regard it as 'the last relic of the bourgeois age,'" representing something antithetical to East Germany's Communist regime under the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands,* hereafter SED). As a result, the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee represented "a past that … they are trying to forget."

In some ways, the endeavor of this project is determining whether this conclusion was correct: Was the neglect of the Weissensee cemetery intentional? If so, to what end? To "forget" a bourgeois, Jewish past? And who, exactly, were "they": the leaders of the East German regime,

Present day examples of overturned, overgrown gravesites in the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee.

or the East Germans themselves? More broadly, this project answers the question of what it means for a regime to preserve an historical object or site in the first place.

This project intends to tell the other side of the story, as well, about community and tradition. What did a cemetery, reminiscent of "the old city," mean for the postwar, post-Holocaust Jewish community of Berlin, and what could they do about it? Must they cooperate with a new elite that held a different view on the past, or could they exercise a degree of autonomy? Could their perspective even be unified anyway? While this is a story about memorialization and memory, it is also about survival, in a place where one would least expect to find it. It is about the perseverance of Jewish life in a new, constantly changing country, it is an exploration of the way that that life changed with it.

There has been no shortage of writing on Germany's postwar history, particularly as it relates to the legacy of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. There has been so much discussion about dealing with the Nazi past in Germany(s) that the topic has been given a (stereotypically long and complicated) German name and a field of study in its own right: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which means "coming to terms with the past." Whether the topic was approached through the lens of literature or film,[16] national holidays or commemoration ceremonies,[17] architecture or construction of memorials,[18] or comparison with West Germany,[19] the general consensus among scholars is that, in the DDR, this process of "coming to terms" with

[16] Geoffrey Hartman, ed., *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994); Thomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust*, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester: Camden House, 1999).
[17] John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
[18] Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997);,James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
[19] Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997).

the Nazi past was virtually non-existent. In East Germany, many scholars agree, the process of legitimizing a story of socialist revolution over fascist tyranny and veneration of the Soviet Union and Communist heroes took precedent over the pressure (and some might say the necessity) to identify with Germany's ugly recent past and accept responsibility for it. This narrative of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the DDR is assumed or implied in studies that focus on the lives of Jews in the DDR as well. Studies on the relationship between the Jews and the SED, the dominant political party in an essentially single-party state, tend to assume that the state was unconcerned with supporting its Jewish citizens despite the recent suffering many of them experienced. Scholars have characterized this relationship as one based, primarily, on neglect and, occasionally, on exploitation for political gain.[20] Some historians claim that the Jews were supported by the regime, until the relationship turned hostile in the early 1950s before cooling down to be simply tolerant for the remaining decades of the DDR's existence.[21] Following these earliest studies of monolithic "Jews" in East Germany, Communist Jews have been singled out for more specialized study due to their unique position, at times precarious, between two groups that were often considered distinct from, if not wholly antagonistic toward, one another by previous scholars.[22]

[20] Marianne Krüger-Potratz, *Anderssein gab es nicht: Ausländer und Minderheiten in der DDR* (Münster: Waxmann, 1991); Jutta Illichmann, *Die DDR und die Juden: die deutschlandpolitische Instrumentalisierung von Juden und Judentum durch die Partei- und Staatsführung der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis 1990*, Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXXI, Politikwissenschaft ; Bd. 336 (Frankfurt am Main: PLang, 1997); Angelika Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany: Moral Obligations and Pragmatic Policy* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1997).

[21] Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Mario Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden: zwischen Repression und Toleranz : politische Entwicklung bis 1967* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995).

[22] Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt: die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000); Jay Howard Geller and Michael Meng, eds., *Rebuilding Jewish Life in Germany*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020).

The approach of this study is to combine aspects of previous studies—memorialization, nation building, the experiences of Jews in the DDR—in a parallel history of the establishment and maintenance of the DDR and the re-establishment of the Jewish community there, with a particular focus on the East Berlin Jewish community. It is, moreover, a history of the overlap, the intersection or interaction, between these two. In what ways was the "project" of establishing and legitimizing a socialist East German state—wholly distinct from its fascist Nazi forebears and the competing West German capitalists—helped and hindered by the attempts of the Jewish community to fulfill its needs and wants, and vice versa? To narrow my scope in an achievable project, I follow the course of the relationship between the state and the Jews by focusing on sites of historical significance, particularly returning to the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee. From the first years after the war, when the Jewish community faced vandalism and desecration and the ravages of war on its cemetery, to the late-1970s, when the cemetery came under protection as a monument of cultural history, this paper asks the question, how did the Jewish community and the East German regime interact with the cemetery—and, by extension, with one another—and why? To attempt to answer this question, I draw on several scholars in particular who have studied the role of historic preservation in "memory work" and the construction of a national mythology and national identity.[23] Specialized historical studies in East German sepulchral culture and historic preservation practices and policies have provided context to my understanding of the interactions between the SED and the East German people through the intricacies of cemetery administration and preservation, respectively.[24]

---

[23] Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Alan Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck: Historical Myth-Building in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989," *Central European History* 26, no. 1 (1993): 91–113; Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).

[24] Felix Robin Schulz, *Death in East Germany, 1945-1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2013), especially Chapter 3: "Resting Places? Cemeteries in the GDR"; Brian William Campbell, "Resurrected from the

In particular I have been influenced by the work of Michael Meng, a historian who has studied the particular fate of significant Jewish sites in the DDR.[25] In his article and subsequent book, which is a comparative study of Jewish spaces in the two Germanys and Poland, Meng takes a pessimistic view of the SED's motivation for supporting Jewish communities, a motivation he argues was also present among the leading Polish Communist Party: When they finally do take action to preserve Jewish sites beginning in the 1970s, both the SED and the Polish Communist Party did so as an act of "redemptive cosmopolitanism," "a commemorative display of multiethnicity that celebrates the cathartic, redemptive transformation of Germans and Poles into tolerant democratic citizens."[26] While in his article Meng recognizes the impact of activism on shifting the tides on attention to Jewish sites, highlighting action by local officials, preservationists, church groups, and other residents ,[27] in his book he emphasizes, rather, the "growing transnationalization of Jewish sites" through tourism and the influence of conversation about the Holocaust worldwide.[28]

Though Meng's work has been deeply informative, I take a slightly different view on the situation in the DDR. Meng views the relationship primarily from the SED's point of view, the actions as solely the result of political decisions made at the highest levels, the actions and opinions of citizens of little consequence. Instead, I argue that the relationship between the SED and the Jewish community is one of mutual benefit and reliance. The SED relies on its Jewish citizens to maintain its image and claim to legitimacy as the antifascist German state; the Jews

---

Ruins, Turning to the Past: Historic Preservation in the SBZ/GDR 1945–1990" (Ph.D., University of Rochester, 2005); Silke Schumacher-Lange, "Denkmalpflege und Repräsentationskultur in der DDR. Der Wiederaufbau der Straße Unter den Linden 1945 – 1989" (Ph.D., Universität Hildesheim, 2012).

[25] Michael Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question: The Return and Preservation of Jewish Sites in East Berlin and Potsdam, 1945–1989," *Central European History* 38, no. 4 (December 2005): 606–36; Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[26] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 2011.

[27] Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 609.

[28] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 12.

rely on the party to provide (primarily financial) support. I find that this relationship stays largely constant throughout the history of the DDR, but there were also moments of protest and outspoken opposition to the regime's treatment of Jewish sites. As vulnerable members of East German society without a lot of clout, Jews largely had to adapt their demands and requests to fit within the constraints of the SED's regime. But non-Jewish East Germans as well as critics outside of the DDR placed pressure on the state to reform its practices. Such protests threatened to unveil the SED's strategy vis à vis its Jewish citizens and revealed weakness in the party's claim to legitimacy, and thus, its rule on the whole. Through the lens of preserving historic sites, especially the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee, I can pinpoint moments of change in the strategies of the SED and the Jews.

This paper draws on archival materials, especially from two archives in Berlin, the Centrum Judaicum Archiv at the Stiftung Neue Synagoge and Landesarchiv. The former holds the documents of the organized Jewish community of Berlin (*Jüdische Gemeinde zu Groß-Berlin*, hereafter Gemeinde), as well as correspondence with government officials on the local and national level. Visiting the latter proved especially fruitful because it holds the numerous requests for funding and letters from the Gemeinde, as well as internal memos of Berlin city government officials explaining why certain decisions were made. This project uses newspaper coverage to gauge the priorities of the regime, if not an honest representation of public opinion, and occasionally draws on first-hand accounts of Jewish life in the DDR, from interviews, memoirs, and biographies.[29] Methodologically, this paper makes occasional, brief references to

[29] Helmut Eschwege, *Fremd unter meinesgleichen: Erinnerungen eines Dresdener Juden* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 1991); Elena Lappin, ed., *Jewish Voices, German Words: Growing up Jewish in Postwar Germany and Austria*, first edition (North Haven, CT: Catbird Press, 1994); Barbara Honigmann, *Roman von einem Kinde: Sechs Erzählungen* (Hamburg: Luchterband Literaturverlag, 1989); Barbara Honigmann, *Damals, dann und danach* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999); Robin Ostow, *Jews in Contemporary East Germany: The Children of Mosesin the Land of Marx* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Robin Ostow, *Juden aus der DDR und die deutsche Wiedervereinigung: Elf Gespräche* (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 1996); Richard Chaim Schneider, *Wir sind da!: Die*

other socialist countries and, given the great influence of the Cold War, to the western Federal Republic of Germany *(Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, hereafter BRD), though this is not intended to be a comparative study.

The first chapter focuses on the period from 1945 to 1953, from the immediate postwar, post-Holocaust fallout to the early years of the DDR. It begins with the struggles of the remaining Jews in Germany, especially in the eastern zone under Soviet occupation, which would become a haven for German Communists returning from exile, seeking to fulfill their vision of a socialist German state. The German Communists, considering themselves the primary victims of Nazi persecution, clashed with the surviving Jews, whose suffering was placed below that of Communist "antifascist resistance fighters" in a constructed moral hierarchy. At the same time, tensions between the Allied Powers occupying Germany grew as they tried to determine the fate of Germany. The Soviets in the eastern zone disagreed with almost all proposals by the Americans, French, and British occupying the western zones of Germany, and vice versa; the ideological rift also played out in Berlin, which was similarly divided in four sectors. The two sources of conflict—between individuals on the one hand and international superpowers on the other—had material effects on the nascent Jewish Gemeinde in Berlin and across Germany; this chapter highlights as an example the topic of restitution of Jewish properties. The chapter ends in first few years of the DDR, which appeared calm until the winter of 1952-1953, when Stalinization across the Eastern bloc led to a surge of antisemitic purges and show trials, including of high-profile SED members sympathetic to the Jewish citizens of the DDR. The period ended with a Jewish mass exodus, this time from East to West Germany.

Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland von 1945 bis heute (Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 2000). Karin Hartewig's *Zurückgekehrt* offers biographical vignettes of prominent Jewish communists.

In the second chapter I turn to the SED's attempts to define a foundational myth and national history through preservation of historical sites from the early 1950s through the 1960s. These early measures, not legally binding and thus inconsistently enforced and subject to the wills of individual preservationists, did not cover Jewish sites. The initial goals of preservation were, ironically, destruction of anything connected to the Nazi regime in hopes of defeating the memory of the regime as well. Simultaneously, the SED prioritized the restoration and building up of sites related to antifascist resistance, which became the founding myth and identity of the DDR. This, in the context of the Cold War, became essential for the DDR to distinguish itself from the BRD. As in debates about victimhood and restitution described in the first chapter, the propagation of such a myth came at the cost of the recognition of Jewish sites, history, and victimhood. Some Jews in elevated positions—as Communists or as outsiders—protested the omission of their history, as I will explore in the case of the antifascist memorial of liberation at the former Buchenwald concentration camp, a sort of counterexample to the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee.

The period of most change for the Weissensee cemetery is the period from 1970 to the mid-1980s, which is the focus of the third chapter. It is during these years that the cemetery, as well as other Jewish sites, first come under legal protection as sites to be preserved by the East German state. This coincides with the softening of Cold War tensions between East and West Germany, due to the advent of BRD Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the signing of subsequent treaties that offered the DDR the international and diplomatic recognition it had always wanted. One of the most important Cold War developments was signing of the Helsinki Accords, which declared a commitment to the protection of human rights for all. The DDR signing onto the Helsinki Accords created the proper conditions for East Germans citizens to

protest the SED's actions, including its treatment of Jewish sites, and receive international press coverage. This would be the case when the Berlin city government resurrected a plan to build a road through the Weissensee cemetery, which was stopped by the words of activists, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

While it includes many instances of neglect and suppression of the Jews and their history, this story is not intended to be a demoralizing one. Indeed, amid all the tension, persecution, and destruction that comes in between, this story begins and ends hopefully. Where it begins is shortly after a Red Army soldier entered through the gates of the Weissensee cemetery on April 23, 1945, where he was met by the cemetery staff, tearful, embracing, who had hidden in the still-standing buildings, amid partially bombed out gravestones and trees. Parts of the cemetery were destroyed and many more lives, but these ones remained, and they knew that their suffering at the hands of the Nazis was over.[30] The Soviets defeated the Nazis in Berlin on May 2, 1945. After that, one of the most remarkable, most hopeful signs of life concealed in the cemetery's landscape was discovered: nearly 600 Torah scrolls, hidden in one of the Halls of Mourning. The scrolls had been looted from synagogues by the Nazis for an anti-Jewish propaganda exhibition, but they were intercepted by Arthur Brass, the cemetery director, who in 1943 placed them in the hall for safe keeping. Between 1943 and 1945, Weissensee was hit by over 60 bombing raids, during which the hall and much of its contents were destroyed, along with the cemetery's greenhouse and some 4,000 graves. Miraculously, 480 of the Torah scrolls survived the war and were distributed to Jewish communities around the world. The other 90 scrolls, unsalvageable, were laid to rest in the cemetery.[31]

[30] Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee,* 92; Etzold et al, *Jüdische Friedhöfe in Berlin*, 80.
[31] Ibid., 100; *Der Jüdische Friedhof in Berlin-Weissensee*, 8, 14-15.

On May 11, Rabbi Martin Riesenburger—who was protected by his marriage to a non-Jewish woman, had continued to hold secret services in Weissensee beginning in 1943 while children played around him and temporarily escaped persecution within the cemetery's gates, and had continued to give a proper burial for all, including for those who lived secretly in Berlin and died in hiding[32]—led the first religious service to take place in the cemetery in plain sight, in full safety, in over a decade. This is where our story begins.

[32] Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee,* 74, 78.

Chapter 1: Categories

It was imaginable—indeed plausible—that the Jews and Communists could have been natural allies in a post-war, post-Holocaust Germany. Both were targeted by the Nazis as enemies. Prior to the war, the German Communist Party (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, hereafter KPD) at times indicated solidarity with the Jews of Germany, such as in a special edition of the party's underground publication *Die Rote Fahne* published in response to the *Novemberpogrom* of November 9, 1938: "The German working class stands at the forefront of the battle against the persecution of the Jews … The liberation of Germany from the shame of the Jewish pogrom will coincide with the hour of the liberation of the German people from the brown tyranny."[1]

However, in the years immediately following the end of the war, disagreements among Jews and Communists complicated such an easy alliance. The period between the end of the war and the founding of two German states in 1949 was characterized by drawn out negotiations about the nature of fascism and antifascism, responsibility and victimhood, and resistance. In the eastern zone of Germany, the Soviet Occupation Zone (*Sowjetische Besatzungszone*, hereafter SBZ) and Soviet-occupied eastern sector of Berlin, to which many exiled German Communists returned, in addition to non-Communist Jews who had lived there before deportation, the interests of Communists won out over those of the Jews due the construction of a moral hierarchy that privileged "fighters against fascism" over mere "victims of fascism," comprising Jews and others persecuted for non-political reasons. Communists all but secured political hegemony in the area with the absorption of the KPD and the Social Democrats into the Socialist

[1] "Gegen die Schmach der Judenpogrom! Erklärung des Zentralkomitees der KPD," *Die Rote Fahne: Sonderausgabe gegen Hitlers* Judenpogrom, no. 7 (November 1938), 1, quoted in Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 19.

Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands,* hereafter SED) in 1946. Policies enacted during this period reflected the interests of the SED, which did not necessarily represent the interests of the few remaining Jews. The voracity with which many Jewish leaders and their allies had to defend their interests, only to be drowned out, exhausted and disillusioned caused many of them to abandon the fight, further bolstering the Communist majority and perhaps contributing to the presumption in today's scholarship that Jews lacked agency in the DDR.[2]

Consequences of Communist-oriented policies were also material, affecting the financial support given to survivors as well as the ability of the Jewish to re-acquire properties stolen from them by the Nazis and inherited by the Soviet military government. Thus begun a dependent relationship between the Jews of SBZ and SED officials. Lacking both manpower and financial power, the Jewish community of Berlin,[3] on whom I will focus (with intermittent mentions of the SBZ- and eventually state-wide community) relied on those in power to grant them requests for funds and other shows of support. Though it would appear that the community would have very little room to maneuver in this relationship, the Gemeinde still sought out creative ways to persuade the SED to fulfill their needs, even if those needs did not align with the party's goals.

This relationship was not one-sided, however, for the SED, too, was but a young political party working to claim control over a state that did not yet exist—one that Britain, France, and especially the United States wanted to prevent at all costs. They attempted to wrangle the Soviet Union's influence, which was essential in propping up the SED, through joint governance of the

---

[2] Mario Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden: zwischen Repression und Toleranz : politische Entwicklung bis 1967* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995); Jutta Illichmann, *Die DDR und die Juden: die deutschlandpolitische Instrumentalisierung von Juden und Judentum durch die Partei- und Staatsführung der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis 1990*, Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXXI, Politikwissenschaft ; Bd. 336 (Frankfurt am Main: PLang, 1997).

[3] From 1945 to 1953, there was an attempt to maintain one Gemeinde for all of Berlin, despite the Cold War. In 1953 it was dissolved into two communities on either side of the Iron Curtain. Leah Kate Weiss, "An Einheitsgemeinde in Divided Berlin: Jewish Identity from 1945-1953," Bowdoin College Honors Project (2011).

German territory and Berlin, but the ideological rift between the Western Allies and the Soviets proved increasingly difficult to overcome in order to build consensus about the fate of Germany. Early debates on such topics as restitution of Jewish communal properties reveal the deepening differences between the occupying powers. To demonstrate the moral and political correctness of its policies and ideology over its opponents, the SED at times relied on its relationship with the Jews, or the portrayal thereof, to argue that it had eradicated all remnants of fascism, including antisemitism.

In the relationship between the Jews and the SED, the Weissensee cemetery would become a touchstone, an object where interests collided and the two parties interacted. The Jews used the cemetery, one of the few pieces of property it still owned, as a sort of bargaining chip to try to gain other benefits from the SED, and the party used the cemetery, partially destroyed during the war and the target of several instances of desecration and vandalism, as a place to exhibit its morality and care for its vulnerable residents. The story of this relationship, which will endure Cold War tensions, SED and Jewish community leadership changes, and bouts of discrimination and persecution for decades to come, begins here.

Rebuilding Jewish life

It is estimated that approximately 7,000 Jews remained in Berlin at the conclusion of the Second World War. They had survived various conditions and by various means: approximately 1,500 had survived imprisonment in concentration camps, over 1,400 had spent the war in hiding in Berlin, and more than 4,000 were protected by a marriage to a non-Jewish German.[4] Almost immediately, some of these survivors began efforts to establish a formal Jewish community that

[4] Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt: die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 2.

could begin the work of distributing supplies and assistance and of reclaiming Jewish communal properties stolen by the Nazis. Eventually, the early leaders hoped, there could be once again be a vibrant Jewish community like the one that had existed in Berlin prior to 1933. One of those first leaders was Heinz Galinski, who had survived imprisonment in Auschwitz and the death march to Bergen-Belsen; his motivation, he later recalled, after he returned to Berlin in July 1945, was "to give back to the survivors the belief in a restored, new life."[5]

Efforts to reestablish a Jewish community in Berlin were stymied both by the occupying Soviet Military Authority of Germany (*Sowjetische Militäradministration Deutschlands*, hereafter SMAD) and by disagreements among the surviving Jews. Would the new community be a successor to the Reich Union of Jews in Germany, established and strongly supervised by the Nazis in 1939, or try to distance itself as much as possible?[6] Who would be accepted as members: religious Jews only, or secular Jews as well?[7] By November 1946, the Berlin Magistrat, a semi-autonomous local government established by the SMAD, had granted legal status to an autonomous representative body called the *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Groß-Berlin* (Jewish Community of Greater Berlin, hereafter Gemeinde), one which aimed to unify and incorporate "all the Jews of Berlin," across the Eastern and Western sectors.[8] The Gemeinde adopted a religious definition of "Jewishness" to determine membership, though this decision proved controversial.[9] There were also the Jewish Communists who returned to Germany from

[5] Heinz Galinski, "New Beginning of Jewish Life in Berlin," interviewed by Michael Brenner, cited in Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 96.
[6] Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany*, 93.
[7] Weiss's honors project offers an engaging glimpse into negotiations within the Jewish community about the definition of "Jewishness," which continued after the establishment of a Jewish representative body for all of Berlin and ultimately encouraged the division of the Gemeinde in 1953. Weiss, "An Einheitsgemeinde in Divided Berlin, 30.
[8] Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Sitzung des Vorstandes und der Repräsentanten vom 24. Juli 1945, cited in Weiss, "An Einheitsgemeinde in Divided Berlin," 30; Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany,* 94.
[9] Weiss, "An Einheitsgemeinde in Divided Berlin," 48.

exile after the war. Their numbers in Berlin are not easily estimated, since many were secular and were not counted among the members of the Gemeinde. East German historian (and Jewish Communist himself) Helmut Eschwege estimated that approximately 3,500 "politically motivated" Jews returned to Germany before 1953.[10]

In terms of properties, the Berlin Gemeinde possessed very few at the conclusion of the war. Among them were the Weissensee cemetery and a hospital in the neighborhood of Wedding.[11] In the SBZ as a whole, another 70 to 80 properties once owned by the Jewish community of Berlin and seized by the Nazis had been confiscated by the Soviets. In the years to come, the Berlin Magistrat's Office for Church Matters (originally *Beirat für kirchliche Angelegenheiten,* after 1950 *Amt für Kirchenfragen*) dealt with requests from the Gemeinde for repair and restitution, and it even established an office of Adviser for Jewish Affairs. The Office for Church Matters also received complaints about the misuse of Jewish property by the Soviets, even those pieces still technically in possession of the Gemeinde.[12] But before turning to the restitution debate and its implications for material support of Jewish survivors in Berlin, new organizations formed in the city to support survivors warrant examination.

On top of significant support from international Jewish organizations, especially the American Joint Distribution Committee, Jews in the eastern sector of Berlin began receiving assistance from local informal "self-help organizations" called Committees for the Victims of Fascism (*Ausschüsse für die Opfer des Faschismus,* hereafter OdF). These committees emerged spontaneously across Berlin in order to provide immediate assistance in the form of food,

[10] Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt: die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 2.
[11] Rivka Elkin, "The Survival of the Jewish Hospital in Berlin, 1938-1945," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 38 (1993): 157.
[12] For instance, in July 1945, Erich Nelhans complained to the Board for Church Matters that the Red Army was using the Weissensee cemetery to hold their horses. Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany*, 94.

clothing, and medical supplies to those recently liberated from concentration camps, death marches, and other forms of imprisonment.[13] In the Eastern sector, survivors and supporters then formed formal committees, and with permission from the SMAD in June 1945, the Main Committee of OdF (*Hauptausschuss für den OdF*). Three months later, a committee of the same name was created as a department of the Main Office for Social Welfare of the Berlin Magistrat.

But who was considered a "victim of fascism"? On May 27, 1945, the Magistrat stated that anyone who could prove their status as a "victim of fascism" would be entitled to a one-time issuance of support in the form of a "special allocation" of food for a period of three months, housing, and 450 Reichsmarks. Thereafter, however, only "active political fighters" were eligible for such or similar subsidies.[14] "Fighters against fascism" (*Kämpfer gegen Faschismus*) had thus emerged as a status that was still included under the umbrella term "victims of fascism" but one that also awarded a privileged status to those who 'demonstrated' resistance to the Nazi regime. To further delineate categories of "victims," a department for "victims of the Nuremberg Laws" was created within the Magistrat's OdF, with Julius Meyer, a prominent Communist Jew, appointed its leader.[15] The precise bureaucracy of these offices and committees was less important than the distinction they aimed to create: between political "fighters" and racial or religious "victims."

Members of the OdF committees across Germany convened in Leipzig in October 1945 to clear up ambiguities around the categories. The fact that most of the members were Communists and believed in a hierarchy of victimhood that placed Communists above Jews was clear in the debates that took place. Karl Raddatz, the secretary of the Berlin Magistrat's Main

[13] Elke Reuter and Detlef Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953: die Geschichte der Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR* (Berlin: Ed. Ost, 1997), 71.
[14] Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953,* 76-77.
[15] Ibid., 82.

Committee of the OdF, clarified that only the "fighters" of Nazism should be considered the new "moral and political elite."[16] Several prominent Jewish members of the OdF protested Raddatz's claim, including Meyer and Leon Löwenkopf, who headed the Dresden Jewish community. A survivor of Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen, Löwenkopf offered a biting critique of Raddatz' statement: "What would the world say … if we say 'No, we don't recognize you [Jews}' … We would make ourselves the joke of the world."[17] The protests of Meyer and Löwenkopf were overpowered by other OdF members, who sided with Raddatz.

At the conclusion of the conference, the OdF decided on an official definition of "victim of fascism" that broadly included both various categories of "fighters" and "victims." Declared among the "fighters" were members of illegal antifascist parties; those who emigrated for political reasons; mercenaries for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War; participants in the attempted assassination of Hitler on July 20, 1944; as well as the somewhat catch-all category of the "many dauntless fighters of various resistance movements, who were imprisoned or were placed in concentration camps as a result of their fight against Hitler." Within the "victims" category were the victims of the Nuremberg Laws, who had hidden illegally during the war, were imprisoned in concentration camps, or generally were forced to wear the yellow Star of David (*Sternträger*); Jehovah's Witnesses; and those convicted of minor political offenses, called "broadcast criminals" (*Rundfunksverbrecher*), "complainers" (*Meckerer*), and "labor saboteurs" (*Arbeitssaboteure*).[18]

[16] Herf, *Divided Memory*, 82.
[17] "Konferenz der Ausschüsse 'Opfer des Faschismus' am Sonnabend 27. Oktober und Sonntag, dem 28. Oktober 1945 im Walter-Albrecht-Haus in Leipzig," October 28, 1945, cited in Geller, *Jews in Post Holocaust Germany*, 100.
[18] Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953*, 84-85.

Notably excluded from the "victims" category, save exceptional cases, were those Jews who, due to "privileged marriages" with a non-Jew, were protected from persecution and deportation. Also not mentioned in this definition of "victim of fascism" were Roma-Sinti people, homosexuals, and the forcibly sterilized (*Zwangssterilisierten*). In early 1946 Roma-Sinti were recognized as victims of the Nuremberg Laws with the publishing of the official guidelines from the Berlin Main Committee. However, their recognition was contingent on evidence of a secure residence and job, which most of them could not provide.[19] In June 1946, the SBZ's Central Administration for Labor and Social Welfare counted 15,536 fighters against fascism and 42,287 victims of fascism in the SBZ.[20] This distinction between "fighters" and "victims" was to be maintained and publicly acknowledged in the form of a stamp on the OdF-administered identification cards, and those with a "fighter" stamp were entitled to greater material support.[21]

The favored status awarded the mostly Communist "fighters" was one source of tension between the Allies. To the Americans, French, and British, "the victims of fascism were above all the Jews," as Elke Reuter and Detlef Hansel put it.[22] The Western Allies' discomfort with the privileged position of "fighters" was clear, for example, when the French sector refused to host activities planned by the OdF for the first annual Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism in September 1945.[23] Though the activities included services for the religiously

[19] "Wer ist Opfer des Faschismus? Richtlinien für die Ausgabe der Ausweise," cited in Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953*, 85-86.
[20] Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden*, 37-38.
[21] Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953*, 85; Monteath, "A Day to Remember," 200.
[22] "Akte Konferenz der Ausschüsse der Opfer des Faschismus," cited in Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953,* 83.
[23] "Parteiinterner Bericht kommunistischer Magistratmitglieder über die Entwicklung und politische Lage in Berlin (2. Septemberhälfte 1945)," cited in Peter Monteath, "A Day to Remember: East Germany's Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism," *German History* 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 203; Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953*, 86.

persecuted and a speech recognizing the particular suffering of women prisoners in concentration camps and thus memorialized "victims of fascism" according to a broad definition, the political motivation of the event was apparent in a large placard erected for the event that featured an upside down red triangle, the same one affixed to political prisoners of concentration camps, with the letters "KZ" (for *Konzentrationslager*, or concentration camp).[24]

A new organization founded in February 1947 aimed to reconcile the tension between the Allies about the definition of "victims of fascism." The Association of Those Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes,* hereafter VVN) united the committees of victims across the Soviet-occupied zone in a self-described "non-partisan and non-denominational organization." The VVN's lofty goals included strengthening democratic institutions, eradicating "race fanaticism" (*Rassenwahn*), restitution for the persecuted, and care for the surviving dependents as a legal duty of the German people.[25] Though many of the mostly Communist members of the OdF remained in the VVN, they appeared willing to back off their hierarchy of victimhood, declaring in VVN founding documents that the terms "politically persecuted" (*politisch verfolgt*) and "racially persecuted" (*rassisch verfolgt*) should be dropped.[26]

One year later the VVN declared its dedication to forging an "undivided democratic German republic in the same sense of the principal statement issued by the Allied Powers at the Potsdam Conference."[27] Western Allies allowed the VVN to establish itself in their sectors of

---

[24] Peter Monteath provides a fascinating year-by-year account of the growing tensions between the Allied powers through the planning of the Day of Remembrance. Peter Monteath, "A Day to Remember: East Germany's Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism," *German History* 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 195–218.
[25] "…als Pflicht des deutschen Volkes gesetzlich zu regeln." "Organisationsstatut der VVN in der sowjetischen Besatungszone, angenommen auf der Gründungskonferenz in Berlin, 22/23. Februar 1947," and "Programm der VVN in der sowjetischen Besatungszone, angenommen auf der Gründungskonferenz in Berlin, 22./23. Februar 1947,"both in Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953*, 589-592.
[26] Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953*, 127.
[27] "Vorwärts im Kampf für die Einheit Deutschlands. Entschließung der 2. Hauptkonferenz der VVN in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone in Halle, 24. Februar 1948, in Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953*, 605. At the Potsdam Conference, the Allies stated a commitment to, among other things, preparing "for the

Berlin, but they remained skeptical that the agenda of the organization was truly apolitical and never allowed for the formation of a national organization. Their suspicions were not unfounded, for in the same statement calling for the unity of Germany, the VVN highlighted the resistance of "former political prisoners":

> More than 20 million people from all lands met the horrors of the Nazi terror in prisons, penitentiaries and concentration camps. … Despite these horrors, upstanding men and women of varying political affiliations, religions, races and nationalities managed to resist the Nazi regime. A collective fight and a collective suffering in the jails of the Gestapo and in the concentration camps brought together the former political prisoners in an unbreakable community based on destiny and fighting.[28]

Displays of antisemitism and Cold War divides

To the Western Allies, the way organizations with Communist leadership repeatedly neglected the particular victimhood of the Jews was antisemitic. The nascent SED held quite the opposite view. Following the Marxist-Leninist tradition, the SED understood antisemitism as a mere symptom of fascism, defined by Comintern leader Georgi Dimitroff in 1935 as "the open terrorist rule of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, most imperialist elements of finance capital."[29] Antisemitism was considered another tool of the ruling class to oppress the German working class in a capitalist system; if a capitalist society no longer existed, according to the SED, neither would antisemitism.

The SED maintained, then, that as capitalist countries, the Western Allies were proto-fascist and negatively influencing the zones they occupied in Germany. Despite the Western

---

eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis and for eventual peaceful cooperation in international life by Germany." "Excerpts from the Report on the Potsdam Conference (Potsdam Agreement) (August 2, 1945)," *German History in Documents and Images*.

[28] "Vorwärts im Kampf für die Einheit Deutschlands. Entschließung der 2. Hauptkonferenz der VVN in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone in Halle, 24. Februar 1948, in Reuter and Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953*, 605.

[29] Wilhelm Pieck, Georgi Dimitroff, and Palmiro Togliatti, *Die Offensive des Faschismus und die Aufgaben der Kommunisten für die Volksfront gegen Faschismus und Krieg. Referate auf dem VII. Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale (1935)* (Berlin): 1957, cited in Timm, *Jewish Claims Against East Germany*, 39.

Allies' strong display of denazification during the Nuremberg trials of SS officers, the emerging leadership in the East claimed that its efforts to eradicate former Nazis were greater.[30] The SED highlighted antisemitic incidents and attacks that happened in the western zones as further evidence of the legacy of Nazism there, creating a contrast between the competing ideologies before two distinct German states were even established. During this period, the SED, under Soviet influence, challenged the West's legitimacy, foreshadowing a struggle for international recognition that would define much of East Germany's politics in the decades to come.

One clear instance of the SED capitalizing on shows of antisemitism is found in a February 1949 resolution "against inflammatory antisemitic propaganda" from the SED Sekretariat, the executive council of the party. In the resolution, the Sekretariat condemned the decision of the British occupation government to allow the showing of *Oliver Twist* in its occupation zone and sector in Berlin.[31] Since the appearance from 1837 to 1839 of the Charles Dickens' serial novels on which the film was based, Dickens had been criticized for employing antisemitic stereotypes in his characterization of Fagin, a poor, old Jewish man who is the villain in the story, and for conveying the character's negative qualities as a result of his faith.[32] The Sekretariat called the film an "antisemitic piece of shoddy workmanship" ("dieses antisemitische Machwerk"), noting that survivors of Nazi persecution in Berlin, Hamburg, and Hannover had already protested the film and succeeded in forcing the British occupiers to remove *Oliver Twist*

[30] By April 1947, approximately 7.6 percent of the 850,000 former Nazi party members examined by denazification commissions in the SBZ were punished in some way or another (65,000 people). In the Western zones, less than 1 percent of the over 15 million people questioned were judged "guilty of" or "burdened by" Nazi activities. Herf, *Divided Memory*, 74, 204.
[31] "Entschließung gegen die antisemitische Hetzpropaganda. Anlage zum Protokoll der Sitzung des Kleinen Sekretariats des Parteivorstandes sder SED vom 28. Februar 1949," in Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden,* 152.
[32] Susan Meyer, "Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens's 'Oliver Twist,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2005): 239–52.

from theaters. In the final lines of the resolution, the SED endorsed this protest action, reminding readers of the party's stance on antisemitism:

> The Socialist Unity Party of Germany demands the working population and all progressive Germans, regardless of political, religious or union affiliation, to oppose the humiliation of this antisemitic baiting with all of your energy, and to strengthen the collective fight of all people for democracy and national independence in the face of this trigger-happy propaganda of imperialists.[33]

The SED also frequently contested the West's self-portrayal as the more democratic, more free, and safer half of Germany for Jewish survivors by highlighting desecrations of Jewish cemeteries in the western zones. The Sekretariat alluded to such incidents in its February 1949 resolution, "In the western occupation zones … Jewish cemeteries are desecrated almost daily."[34] While that was an exaggeration, it is true that there were dozens of instances of gravestones toppled and sometimes vandalized with swastikas, though the SED failed to mention those that occurred in the SBZ. Media coverage of cemetery desecrations that occurred in the East was negligible, but when covering such incidents in the West, the SED-controlled newspapers made a point to underscore the frequency with which they occurred. Headlines such as "Another cemetery desecrated" were common,[35] and if it was not reflected in the headline, the body of the article nearly always made mention of the number of times such sites were attacked, almost always shockingly high and always attributed to resurgent, or lingering, fascist sympathies.[36] In one instance in April 1950, the *Berliner Zeitung* reported that within five years, thirty Jewish

---

[33] "Entschließung gegen die antisemitische Hetzpropaganda. Anlage zum Protokoll der Sitzung des Kleinen Sekretariats des Parteivorstandes der SED vom 28. Februar 1949," in Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden,* 152-153.
[34] "Entschließung gegen die antisemitische Hetzpropaganda. Anlage zum Protokoll der Sitzung des Kleinen Sekretariats des Parteivorstandes sder SED vom 28. Februar 1949," in Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden,* 152.
[35] "Wieder Friedhof geschändet" appeared as a headline twice within several weeks in the SED's main paper *Neues Deutschland*—on October 20 and November 9, 1949—reporting on the vandalism of Jewish cemeteries in three distinct instances, all occurring in the Western state of Hessen.
[36] One headline (and its associated 20-word news brief) in *Berliner Zeitung* reported in June 1951 that since 1945, Jewish cemeteries had been desecrated 200 times. "200 mal von Faschisten geschändet," *Berliner Zeitung*, June 15, 1951; Monika Schmidt, *Schändungen jüdischer Friedhöfe in der DDR: Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Metropol, 2007), 21.

cemeteries had been desecrated in the state of Hessen, located in the American zone of occupation. To support the claim, these papers obtained quotes from Jews living in the West about antisemitism. The president of Hessen's Jewish community reportedly told *Berliner Zeitung*, "The West German police always claim that the perpetrators are youths, but it seems strange, that these 'youths' never attack non-Jewish cemeteries."[37]

When these papers did report on desecrations of Jewish cemeteries in the eastern zone or, later, in the DDR, it was not unusual for reporters and quoted individuals to blame the action on Westerners. When ten gravestones in the Weissensee cemetery were overturned in June 1959, both *Neue Zeit* (the paper of the Christian Democrats) and *Berliner Zeitung* (a publication close to the SED but considered more editorially independent than the party's official paper, *Neues Deutschland*) reported that the inspector of the cemetery suspected a West Berliner had been paid and ordered to commit the crime.[38] The SED's framing of these incidents as perpetrated by Westerners, who were not only purportedly antisemitic but also anti-Communist, seems to have influenced even Jewish citizens' perception of antisemitic vandalism. Jalda Rebling, an actress and regarded Yiddish folksinger who grew up in East Berlin, recalled in a 1988 interview with Canadian sociologist Robin Ostow, "Every once in a while we would find a swastika painted on our mailbox, but that was directed, naturally, at Jews and Communists—that was before 1961."[39]

---

[37] "Jüdische Friedhöfe geschändet," *Berliner Zeitung*, April 23, 1950.

[38] The timing of the act—a month before a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, during which they were supposed to discuss the fate of Berlin, as either an occupied zone until Germany was reunified (the Western Allies' preference) or with a demilitarized free city in West Berlin (the Soviet's preference)—was also suspicious to East Berlin officials. They viewed the vandalism as a concerted effort to discredit the East ahead of the conference. "Schändung jüdischer Grabstätten," *Neue Zeit*, June 2, 1959; "Gräberschändung in Weißensee," *Berliner Zeitung*, June 2, 1959.

[39] Robin Ostow, *Jews in Contemporary East Germany: The Children of Moses in the Land of Marx* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 63. In a subsequent interview with Ostow, on September 12, 1990, Rebling said, "It occurs to me that the last time we held our conversation only after a thousand inquiries, in the International Press Center [of the DDR], with an overseer (*Aufpasser*), so that I didn't say anything wrong." Robin Ostow, *Juden aus der DDR und die deutsche Wiedervereinigung: Elf Gespräche* (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 1996), 105.

The implication of the time period, Ostow notes in a footnote, was that Rebling believed the vandals may have come over from the West since the Berlin Wall had not yet been built.[40]

Though the June 1959 desecration at Weissensee incident occurred in a different, deeper stage of the Cold War that will be discussed more in depth in the following chapter, it hearkens back to fears about negative press expressed in internal memos of the East Berlin Magistrat in the early 1950s, as well. After "another" grave was vandalized on April 1, 1951, Siegmund Weltlinger, the adviser for Jewish affairs in the Magistrat's Office for Church Matters, asked the Department to be vigilant and swift in its response, before the incident could be used as "propaganda against our Magistrat."[41] This would not be the last time East Berlin officials took action in response to an incident out of fear of negative attention in the Western press.

Like press coverage of antisemitic incidents on either side of the Iron Curtain, restitution also became a tool in the context of the nascent Cold War. It was used to claim moral superiority, measured in distance from the previous regime, over the other: in the Western zones because they passed restitution laws first, and in the Eastern zone because it had abolished the capitalist system that had allowed the exploitation of property in the first place. It was primarily internal pressure that prompted the SED to reconsider a restitution law that would include Jewish properties and recognize the victimhood of Jews alongside antifascist resistance fighters. But mounting disagreements and an inability to compromise among the Four Powers erupted in 1948 and 1949, halting momentum for such a sweeping change of course and staving it off in the early years of the DDR, until it was too late to turn back. However, the Gemeinde did not hopelessly walk away from the devastating outcome for restitution, for reclaiming communal properties was more than a matter of comfort or want. It was truly a matter of survival, requiring the Jewish

[40] Ostow, *Jews in Contemporary East Germany*, 156.
[41] Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) C Rep. 101-04, Nr. 28, Innere Notiz des Amts für Kirchenfragen vom 11. April 1951.

community to find creative ways to use what it did have—the Weissensee cemetery—to overcome the obstacles in its path.

The restitution debate

Since 1945, the SMAD had confiscated and nationalized private property and communal property seized by the Nazi regime, including those previously owned by Jews.[42] It had done so our of a belief that the best way to crush the Nazi legacy was to eliminate all facets of capitalism, the system Communists believed underpinned fascism. Moreover, the Communist leaders resisted measures that recognized the particular suffering of the Jews and challenged the hierarchy—with Communists as the primary enemies and victims of the Nazi regime, victims of racial persecution as secondary—that legitimated the SED's right to rule, though the party would never admit it explicitly.[43] On top of all this, the SED claimed it had paid reparations to those who truly deserved it, who had saved Germans from further war and destruction: the Soviet Union.[44]

Among the Western Allies, the United States was the biggest proponent of restitution (*Wiedergutmachtung* in German, which literally translates to "making good again") for Jewish survivors. The U.S. military government issued a restitution law for its occupation zone in November 1947, and the French passed one soon after for its zone of occupation. Though the British supported restitution to Jewish victims, they did not pass a restitution measure for two more years, preferring an "indirect rule" style of governance in which the German courts would

[42] Michael Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question: The Return and Preservation of Jewish Sites in East Berlin and Potsdam, 1945–1989," *Central European History* 38, no. 4 (December 2005): 612; Helmut Eschwege, "The Churches and the Jews in the German Democratic Republic," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 498.
[43] Herf, *Divided Memory*, 86, 95; Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953*, 115.
[44] Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 41.

hopefully decide the fate of stolen properties and, at the same time, wanting to maintain its colonial hold over Palestine, which they feared they would lose if Jews used the money made from selling returned property to emigrate there.[45] In Berlin, where the Four Powers were supposed to govern jointly, they butted heads and could not introduce a standard measure that applied to all sectors of the city. The leaders in the Western sectors cooperated with international Jewish organizations to push for the return of properties to Jewish survivors,[46] while in the Eastern sector, the 70 to 80 Jewish communal properties remained in the hands of the Soviets.

Within SED leadership, however, was Paul Merker, a Politburo member who had been a vocal defender of Jews since his exile in Mexico City. During and after the war, Merker was perhaps the most prominent critic of the majority view of such leading and dominant German Communists as Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, who opposed restitution. A longtime member of the KPD, Merker fled Nazi Germany in 1937, first to France, then in 1942 to Mexico, where he remained for the duration of the war and wrote extensively for the local German-language Communist newspaper *Freies Deutschland*. Upon his return to Germany in 1946 to join the SED's Central Committee and Politbüro, Merker could claim to have been an antifascist resistance fighter and reap the benefits. Instead, he became one of the Jews' most vocal supporters in the upper echelons of the SED, unequivocally opposing the hierarchy created by such leaders as Ulbricht and Pieck that placed Communists over Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.

Along with Helmut Lehmann, the secretary of the Department of Labor and Social Welfare of the Central Secretariat of the SED, Merker drafted a law for restitution in January

[45] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 31.
[46] For more on restitution in West Berlin and West Germany during the immediate postwar and early DDR years, see Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 32-38.

1948 that would recognize the persecution of Jews and Communists as equal, eliminating the distinction between "antifascist resistance fighters" and "victims of fascism."[47] Both "those persons who, on the basis of democratic conviction, participated in the resistance against the National Socialist state and were thereby subjected to persecution by the Nazi regime, as well as those persons who were persecuted because of their religious views or as a result of Nazi racial laws" would be eligible for a number of social welfare programs and pension benefits. It also proposed a government commission that would create and execute a restitution policy that would return property stolen by the Nazis for "reasons of race, religion, belief, or political opposition to National Socialism" to its pre-1933 owners or, if necessary, to relatives.[48] With the passage of restitution laws already in the American and French occupation zones, Merker and Lehmann urged the swift passage of their proposal.[49] Instead, debates over the law lasted for nearly two years before the SED passed any restitution legislation of its own.

At the same time that the SED leadership debated the limits of restitution, the SMAD appeared to depart from its stance against restitution and passed Order Nr. 82, calling for the return of properties confiscated by the Nazis to "democratic organizations," a designation that primarily applied to Communist groups. For reasons not entirely clear, however, the order also allowed "church and humanitarian" institutions to recover their properties, provided the relevant organizations submitted all requests for properties to be restituted within two months of the order's issue in April 1948.[50] This proved all but impossible for most Jewish communities in the SBZ, which lacked the organization and resources to file claims for all the properties stolen from

[47] Ibid., 14.
[48] Paul Merker and Helmut Lehmann, "Vorlage an die Mitglieder des Zentralsekretariats, Betr.: Gesetz über die Betreuung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes und die Vorbereitung für Wiedergutmachtung," January 19, 1948, cited in Herf, *Divided Memory*, 88.
[49] Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953,* 58; Herf, *Divided Memory*, 88.
[50] Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953*, 114; Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 613.

them. In the largest of the organized Jewish communities in the SBZ (outside of Berlin), there were at most several hundred members (Leipzig had 200 in 1945, 338 by 1949); in the smallest, there were fewer than 50.[51] Potsdam, for one, had just two surviving members in its Jewish community after the Holocaust, and the Jewish association for the state of Brandenburg, where Potsdam is located, was only able to reclaim four properties through Order Nr. 82.[52] What is more, the order had no power in Berlin, as the city was under joint quadripartite rule by the so-called Allied Kommandatura.

Hope for the Berlin Gemeinde came when, in December 1947, the Berlin city council proposed a citywide law that would return Jewish property. In another unexpected departure from Communist orthodoxy, the proposal came from the SED faction; one SED member of the council gave a rousing endorsement of restitution as "the moral and political need to make justice out of injustice."[53] By February 1948, the city council had passed a proposal for the law and sent it to the Magistrat, which submitted a draft back to the city council to begin debating that summer. The swiftness of the negotiations and sweeping nature of the proposed policy is "difficult to grasp," Michael Meng writes: "Local SED leaders were advocating here on behalf of the Jews in a way that was largely unprecedented in Central Europe at the time."[54] For instance, measures in the western zones of Germany were largely due to pressure from the U.S., and in Poland, where antisemitic attacks were even more common than in Germany at the time, Communist leaders argued that returning property to Jews would only exacerbate the violence.[55]

[51] Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany*, 19.
[52] Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 613.
[53] Proceedings of the debate, December 4, 1947, cited in Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 615.
[54] Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 615.
[55] Ibid., 615-616.

However, the timing of the debate in the city council overlapped with the deepening of an ideological rift between the Allied powers, which could ultimately derail the proposed restitution law's success. The multi-faceted joint governance of Berlin—between the Allied Kommandatura, the Magistrat, and influence of the occupying military governments outside of Berlin—was fraught from the beginning but began to show real signs of deterioration in 1947 and 1948: The Soviet representative to the Allied Kommandatura vetoed the election of SPD member Ernst Reuter as mayor of Berlin because he was staunchly anti-Communist, and amid rumors of a currency reform in the Western zones, the Soviets walked out of the Kommandatura on June 16, 1948 and did not return. The Soviets had already walked out of the Allied Control Council, which jointly governed the four sectors of Germany, three months earlier. When a currency reform did occur overnight from June 23 to 24, 1948, the Soviets responded by initiating a blockade of Berlin, an action that had already been planned but now had a clear catalyst. The blockade halted discussions about a Berlin-wide restitution law in the Magistrat and all but extinguished hopes of cooperative and collaborative governance in the Kommandatura. The blockade of Berlin would last until May 12, 1949—during which time representatives from the Western sectors of Berlin left the Magistrat; a mayor was elected for what was then, informally, West Berlin; and the Federal Republic of Germany (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, hereafter BRD) was established with the ratification of the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) on May 8, 1949.[56] It was a *Grundgesetz* because the Allies still hoped to reunify East and West, at which point an official constitution (*Verfassung*) for the single German state would be written and signed.

[56] Helga Haftendorn, *Coming of Age: German Foreign Policy since 1945* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 122.

The Soviets and the SED, however, had a different plan in mind. On October 5, 1949, the SMAD passed the "Regulation for Securing the Legal Position of Those Recognized as Persecuted by the Nazi Regime." It was not Merker and Lehmann's proposal, but rather the legal validation of the moral hierarchy that placed Communist "fighters against fascism" above mostly Jewish "victims," that declared benefits would be distributed accordingly, with no provision for returning stolen property to Jewish communities. On October 7, 1949, a group of delegates from the SBZ announced plans to draft a constitution for the independent German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*, hereafter DDR). The announcement explicitly contrasted the DDR with the BRD, calling the drafting of a new constitution

> the first step towards the restoration of [Germany's] sovereignty, independence, and freedom, while the undemocratic Germany at Bonn [the capital of the BRD], the rump Germany of the war-mongers and the dividers (*Spalter*), of the Hitlerian armaments magnates and large estate owners, continues in the hopeless perspective of enduring occupation and economic dependence.[57]

The following day, the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic was adopted, and, against the wished of the Western Allies, a second German state was born. Neither state accepted the other's claim that it was the sole representative of the German people (*Alleinvertretungsanspruch*). The DDR denied that Germany could be represented by a capitalist and, in their eyes, proto- or neo-fascist government. The BRD did not recognize the DDR as legitimate because the Federal Republic was intended to only be a provisional state until the division between East and West could be overcome.[58] In the view of the West German Parliament (*Bundestag*), no state could exist in East Germany, since the only German successor state would be a united one—and, importantly, one not under Soviet control. This view was

[57] "Announcement of the Impending Establishment of the German Democratic Republic (October 7, 1949)," *German History in Documents and Images*.
[58] Haftendorn, *Coming of Age*, 123.

represented in a speech from the BRD's first chancellor Konrad Adenauer given before the Bundestag on October 21, 1949. "The Federal Republic of Germany is alone entitled to speak for the German people," proclaimed Adenauer. "It does not accept declarations from the Soviet zone as binding for the German people."[59]

Thus, by 1949, both the Western Allies' hopes for a united Germany and the Jews' hopes for restitution of its confiscated properties seemed lost. As Jeffrey Herf put it, "The outcome of the restitution debates between 1946 and 1950 was victory for those who believed that there was 'no particular German responsibility toward the Jews,' and that restitution was a term which applied first of all to German obligations to the Soviet Union," drawing the quoted claim—"no particular German responsibility toward the Jews"—from an official DDR legislative newsletter from 1950.[60] The result was a law that underscored the moral superiority of "antifascist resistance fighters" that the top SED leaders claimed, which in turn made them deserving of political superiority and legitimated the founding of the German Democratic Republic, but in reality mostly served to further drive the Four Powers away from one another. On the local level, attempts from within the city council and government to return properties to Jewish survivors—from SED representatives no less—demonstrated that the views of the very top of the party were not hegemonic, but events on the national and international level derailed local officials' work.

By the end of 1949, the face of the VVN had changed as well. Prominent Jewish members of VVN, including Heinz Galinski, who had worked hard to reestablish the Berlin Gemeinde, became frustrated that they were often the only ones defending their status as

[59] "1949-10-21 Regierungserklärung DDR-Gründung: Konrad Adenauer," *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*.
[60] Herf, *Divided Memory,* 95; "Durchführungsbestimmungen zu der Anordnung zur Sicherung der rechtlichen Stellung der anerkannten Verfolgten des Naziregimes" (February 10, 1950), *Gesetzblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, February 18, 1950, cited in Ibid.

"victims of fascism" and resigned.[61] They left behind an increasingly Communist-dominated organization in the place of one that was meant to represent the interests of all victims of the Nazi regime.

Finding and losing agency

Any restitution law passed in the SBZ and DDR—whether it called for the return of Jewish properties or not—had little effect on the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee, since it was one piece of property that the Jewish community retained throughout the Nazi period and after the war. That did not, however, mean that it was in pristine condition: Of the approximately 115,000 gravestones in the cemetery, approximately 4,000 were damaged by bombing raids during the war, as were several buildings in the cemetery and part of the cemetery's wall.[62] As mentioned above, at least a dozen more gravestones were damaged or vandalized in separate incidents in the years following the war, most notably in 1947 and 1950.[63] Restoring the damaged graves, buildings, and wall would be nearly impossible for the Gemeinde on its own. In 1937, when there were still 140,000 Jews living in Berlin, the cemetery had 200 employees to maintain the cemetery; in 1945, there were 7,000 Jews in Berlin, the majority of them elderly, and twelve cemetery caretakers remaining.[64] One author, writing in 1986, reflected on the state of the cemetery at this time, with graves overturned and plants overgrown, "It seemed to be only a matter of time before nature took back the terrain."[65]

[61] Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953*, 105-106.
[62] Peter Melcher, *Weissensee: Ein Friedhof Als Spiegelbild Jüdischer Geschichte in Berlin* (Berlin: Haude & Spener, 1986), 107.
[63] Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 611; Schmidt, *Schändungen jüdischer Friedhöfe in der DDR*, 19.
[64] Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee*, 41.
[65] Ibis., 108.

The Gemeinde, however, did not permit nature to run its course. It used requests for funding to repair the Weissensee cemetery, which enjoyed some degree of protection under the ownership of the Gemeinde, as leverage to try to reclaim back pieces of seized property that the Soviets had refused to return to them, as well as gain other forms of recognition of Jewish victimhood at the hands of the Nazis.

On May 31, 1949, the board of the Gemeinde sent a letter to Deputy Mayor Arnold Gohr to request funding for repairs to the cemetery and a few other expenses. The letter opens by stating that the cemetery in Weissensee is in an "unbelievable condition," followed by a survey of the losses—"all of its assets through the actions of Nazi legislation"—and expenses the Jews have faced in the past few years to "completely rebuild" itself.[66] For these reasons, the board wrote, the Gemeinde requested funds for several projects: First, 11,000 marks for the reconstruction of the Weissensee cemetery wall that has been in part totally destroyed, allowing "unhindered" access to the cemetery grounds. Rebuilding the wall would prevent more instances of theft, vandalism, and desecration that the cemetery had already experienced. Second, the Gemeinde requested that the Magistrat deploy and pay 100 workers for three months to restore the cemetery's damaged gravesites. Third, the Gemeinde requested 20,000 marks to build a memorial to honor the Jewish victims of fascism on the grounds of the Weissensee cemetery, an action it considered the duty of the Gemeinde, but one it could not afford alone. Despite all of its efforts, the Gemeinde had not and still did not have the means to erect such a memorial, so it was turning to the Magistrat, noting that in other German cities, local authorities had contributed funds to create similar memorials.

[66] LAB C Rep. 101-04, Nr. 28, Brief an Herrn Bürgermeister Gohr vom Vorstand der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Berlin, 31. Mai 1949.

Following these requests for the Weissensee cemetery, the second half of the letter featured a different set of requests: for the return of properties to the Gemeinde that were under the administration of a citywide trust (*Treuhandstelle*) or of the Magistrat itself. The Gemeinde leaders framed the request as an economically beneficial measure, since the properties were being rented out by their respective administrators and the ability to do the same would make the Gemeinde's "activities" possible, without reliance on the government. The authors of the letter also took the opportunity to remind the deputy mayor that these properties had once belonged to the Jewish community or another Jewish organization. They then list over two dozen addresses of properties that were "rented out and generate a substantial income," or used by the police or the "occupying power."

The Gemeinde's letter was forwarded to its intended recipient by Siegmund Weltlinger, the adviser for Jewish affairs in the Magistrat's Office for Church Matters. Weltlinger described the content of the Gemeinde's letter—the requests for funding to restore the cemetery wall and build a memorial, and, "of even more importance," the return of properties to be used for the Gemeinde's economic growth—and he offered commentary, encouraging the deputy mayor to heed their requests.[67] He reminded Gohr that in a meeting in February 1948, the Magistrat had unanimously voted to provide 47,000 marks to the Gemeinde to subsidize repairs to the Weissensee cemetery, but the Gemeinde never received them. "It would be therefore a special benefit for the East Magistrat (*Ostmagistrat*) if this obligation were now fulfilled," Weltlinger wrote. About two months later, the Magistrat agreed to provide funds to the Gemeinde, up to 100,000 marks, to pay for the necessary reconstruction and restoration and for the erection of a memorial.[68] The memorial to the six million Jewish victims of fascist persecution was dedicated

[67] LAB C Rep. 101-04, Nr. 28, Letter from Siegmund Weltlinger to Mayor Arnold Gohr, June 7 1949.
[68] LAB C Rep. 101-04, Nr. 28, Magistratsvorlage vom 4. August 1949.

in April 1950 in the entrance to the Weissensee cemetery.[69] The letter did not mention returning any properties to the Gemeinde.

In the early years of the DDR, there was also a particularly lucrative partnership between the Berlin Gemeinde and Otto Nuschke, chairman of the Christian Democratic Union and director of the DDR's Main Division for Church Liaison (*Hauptabteilung Verbindung zu den Kirchen*) from 1949 to 1957. He was sympathetic to requests from the Gemeinde and often offered funding to Jewish communities across the DDR when they had exhausted their allotments, in excess of hundreds of thousands of marks in 1951 and 1952. He even appointed a Jewish specialist, SED-member and Auschwitz survivor Albert Hirsch, to his office.[70] To construct a new synagogue in Erfurt, the first new synagogue in the DDR, Nuschke allocated 290,000 marks to the to the city's community. The synagogue opened in 1952, several years after the restitution debate had been settled in a manner unfavorable for the Jews. In a speech at the synagogue's opening ceremony, Nuschke made clear the political stance he was taking in supporting the DDR's Jewish communities: "But here in the DDR, a question of peace awaits its answer: That is the question of compensating the Jews for the injustice carried out against them."[71]

What Nuschke did not know was that in just a few months, the injustice against the Jews would be compounded by anti-Zionist purges carried out across the Eastern bloc, including in the DDR. The Stalinization of Communist parties across the Soviet Union and Soviet areas of influence prompted a campaign against "cosmopolitanism" that alleged international Jewish organizations were "agencies of American imperialism" and by extension, that Jews who

[69] *Der jüdische Friedhof in Berlin-Weissensee: Ein Wegweiser durch seine Geschichte* (Berlin: edition progris, 2003), 8.
[70] Ibid., 165-168.
[71] Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 621.

supported Israel were themselves agents of American imperialism.[72] As another product of the Cold War, East Germany had begun an anti-Zionist foreign policy that would last practically until its demise.[73]

The first sign of the danger posed to Jews across the Eastern bloc was the removal of Rudolf Slánský, a Jew, from his position as first secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in September 1951. He was accused of plotting with American imperialists against Communism and was connected to Zionism. His persecution culminated in a show trial in Prague in November 1952, in which thirteen other high-ranking Communist Party members—almost all of them Jewish—were implicated and eleven of them sentenced to death.[74] The SED, more distrustful than ever, put out "Lessons from the Trial against the Slánský Conspiracy Center," in which it all but accused all Jews and those sympathetic to them of participating in the same anti-Communist conspiracy: "The SED cannot tolerate any more unexplained relationships."[75] In "Lessons" the SED's Central Committee specifically named Paul Merker, the non-Jewish co-author of the restitution law that placed Jewish and Communist suffering under the Nazis on equal footing, for his demonstrations of support for the Jews of Germany during and after the war. Merker was arrested on December 4 and was purged from the SED.[76]

The following months were disastrous for the Jews of East Berlin and the DDR. Hundreds of Jews fled to the West, fearing arrest and persecution. With the threat of sanction by the SED, Jewish leaders and defenders of their interests were among them, including Julius

---

[72] Robin Ostow, *Jews in Contemporary East Germany: The Children of Mosesin the Land of Marx* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989),
[73] See Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden,* 123-147.
[74] Jeffrey Herf, *East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of Paul Merker,* Alois Mertes Memorial Lecture, no. 11. Washington, D.C: German Historical Institute (1994), 16.
[75] "Lehren aus dem Prozeß gegen das Verschwörerezentrum Slánský. Beschluß des ZK der SED vom 20. Dezember 1952 (Auszüge)," in Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden,*153.
[76] Herf, *East German Communists and the Jewish Question*, 18.

Meyer, the chairman of the State Association of Jewish Communities, and Leon Löwenkopf, who lead the Dresden Jewish community. The *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin* split between East and West in December 1952, due to internal divisions about the meaning of Jewishness exacerbated by the Stalinist purges, which forced Communists of Jewish descent to choose between identities.[77] What limited autonomy the Gemeinde had gained before 1953 was lost in its disorganization and dwindling membership. To add insult to injury, the VVN was replaced in 1953 with the Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters (*Komitee der Antifaschistichen Widerstandskämpfer*, hereafter KdAW), leaving no question of the SED's priorities.

Sporadic instances of support for the Jews of East Berlin between 1945 and 1953 were overshadowed by an underlying refusal to acknowledge the victimhood of Jews during the Nazi regime and, by extension, the necessity of material restitution. The Weissensee cemetery is perhaps an exception to this rule, and the Gemeinde smartly used its dilapidated state to try to reclaim other properties it had lost. But, as had happened several times during this period, any gains were interrupted or halted altogether due to the playing out of international conflicts of the Cold War on a local level. And in the case of the 1952-1953 antisemitic purges, the Jews in the DDR would struggle to recover for the next four decades.

[77] Weiss, "An Einheitsgemeinde in Divided Berlin," 72-73.

Chapter 2: Myths

After the Stalinist anti-cosmopolitan purges of 1953, and the death of Stalin himself in March of that year, the SED's focus returned to its primary project: establishing a socialist German state. During the turbulent immediate postwar years, the Western Allies and eventually West Germany denied an East German state legitimacy, and even East Germans did not seem to fully trust the ability of the SED to lead: widespread protests of the party across the German Democratic Republic in summer 1953 were ultimately put down with Soviet tanks, further damaging the SED's claim to power. What was a young country, with a different country claiming to be the only legitimate German state right next door, to do? Similarly, the weakened Jewish community in East Germany faced a turning point: would it resign to being recognized as 'lesser' victims? Would Jewish Communists reject or hide the part of their identity that in 1953 may have put them in great danger of persecution?

Standard definitions of "legitimacy" in a political context all sound somewhat similar: "a political order's worthiness to be recognized," or "The acceptability or appropriateness of a ruler or political regime to its members."[1] In the case of a "revolutionary regime" like the SED claimed to be, legitimacy is derived from ideology; the people supported the ideology enough to spark a revolution to overturn the previous regime. In order to hold on to power, however, the regime must reassure its people of its enduring commitment to the revolutionary ideology.[2] In contrast to a totalitarian regime, where legitimacy is created by force, a revolutionary regime must win, and keep, the favor of the people through persuasion and belief. For this reason, Alan

---

[1] Kenneth Beynes, "Legitimacy," In *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, ed. Joel Krieger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); "legitimacy." In *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[2] Henry Krisch, "Political Legitimation in the German Democratic Republic," in *Political Legitimation in Communist States,* ed. T.H. Rigby and Ferene Fehér (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 111.

Nothnagle argues that myths were an effective tool for creating the SED's legitimacy. Nothnagle defines myths as "events, processes, or persons from an earlier time, which, typically estranged from their original meanings and contexts, transmit religious and ideological beliefs to a specified group in an easily comprehended, emotionally moving form."[3] Nothnagle's assertion begs the question: What narrative did the SED tell its citizens to lay claim to the German Democratic Republic, to a sovereign German state at all?

I am not claiming, nor does Nothnagle's definition of myth argue, that myths are not based in fact. Rather, a myth-building revolutionary regime tends to highlight or perhaps exaggerate certain parts of history for emotional effect and toward ideological ends. This was the case in the DDR, where the foundational myth was that the East German state was comprised of antifascist resistance fighters who, along with aid from Soviet allies, defeated the Nazi regime, the final iteration of the socialist movement in Germany. While this core of the SED's myth remained constant throughout its existence, the part of the myth that placed the DDR in all of German history evolved. The regime chose to feature figures and events of German history as heroes and victories of the socialist movement in Germany, and thus predecessors to the SED, to further claim legitimacy as a German state.

This chapter focuses on the visual and material representations and cultural tools of the SED's myth-building, demonstrated in the creation of monuments and in the practice of historic preservation until the early 1960s. Building off Rudy Koshar's assertion that "Old buildings have mattered in national memory work" and that one goal of creating national memory is the creation of a shared national identity,[4] I find that the DDR's founding myth was a form of national

[3] Alan Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 6.
[4] Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 10-11.

memory work that excluded those citizens who did not fully support the myth, which in turn was reflected in the sites deemed worthy of commemoration or preservation as monuments. The body that oversaw the creation of memorials and the maintenance of historic sites in the DDR was, after 1952, the Institute for Historic Preservation (*Institut fur Denkmalpflege*, hereafter IfD). Though the IfD's productivity was frequently stymied by internal disorder, loopholes in preservation rules, and ideological tensions between conservationists, it is nonetheless worthwhile to consider the content of its guidelines. The guidelines reveal the SED's priorities and the ways it used preservation to perpetuate its myth and claim legitimacy.

Absent from the guidelines were any Jewish sites, as being unambiguously "Jewish" was not part of the shared East German identity. The Jews who upheld the 'antifascist resistance' myth could be incorporated into the shared identity and lauded as antifascist resistance fighters themselves. But the Jewish East Germans who questioned the myth because it glossed over the victimhood and resistance of others during the Nazi regime, including the racially persecuted, were accused by the SED of harboring sympathies with Israel and the West. Such an accusation in the midst of the Cold War was arguably an ideological one, but when directed at a Jew it demonstrated belief in antisemitic tropes, vestiges of the period of anti-cosmopolitan purges.

In the first portion of this chapter, in which I discuss the formulation of the SED's historic preservation policies, the voices and story of the Jews are largely absent. This is not by design but by circumstance; it underscores the SED's tendency to exclude Jews from conversations that the SED believed did not concern them, including conversations about preservation of significant historical sites. It would take at least another decade and significant developments in the Cold War to change the SED's mind. Until it did, Jews both in the DDR and

outside of its borders continued to seek out ways to claim agency and deliver demands of recognition and assistance to the SED.

There were two forms of legitimacy, connected but not exactly the same, that the regime sought: the first was legitimacy in its own right, as a German state that succeeded everything positive and progressive in German history. This legitimacy would be created through the portrayal of a narrative of antifascist resistance as the pinnacle of socialism in Germany. The second was legitimacy relative to West Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany, which, the SED claimed, continued the legacy of the Nazi regime and thus was not legitimate. The first implied the second, but the SED used slightly different tactics in claiming them. The party involved the Jewish community directly when it had to draw a distinction from West Germany, but not in its construction of the antifascist resistance myth. It was this double standard of sorts that sparked outcry among Jews, and the SED's response revealed the enduring influence of antisemitism.

Upheaval and (re)construction

Claiming it was the antithesis of the previous fascist regime, the SED first needed to create as much distance between it and the Nazis. This was accomplished through the veneration of antifascist resistance fighters and an alliance with the Soviets, as well as through denazification that resulted in the punishment of tens of thousands of former Nazi party members. In this phase of "Antifascist-Democratic Upheaval," physical evidence of the Nazi past on the landscape of East Germany also had to be destroyed.[5] Reflecting on this period, former DDR conservationist Ludwig Deiters wrote that "at the forefront of the [DDR's]

[5] Alan Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck: Historical Myth-Building in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989," *Central European History* 26, no. 1 (1993): 96.

ideological thinking and practical behavior was the will to break with the political history, to change societal relations."[6]

The case of the Berliner Stadtschloss represents one example of this "ideological thinking" in action. The Berliner Stadtschloss, the home of kings and emperors from the fifteenth century through the end of World War I, was heavily damaged by Allied bombing raids, but repairs were still possible to preserve the palace. However, apparently due to a decision made solely by SED General Secretary Walter Ulbricht, the Stadtschloss was to be demolished. Deiters explained the decision as a conscious effort to destroy ties to Germany's feudalist history, [7] though local officials at the time claimed that it was because the damage—caused by the actions of the Allies alone—was too great.[8] Easterners and Westerners alike protested the decision, especially art historians and conservationists, though those who defended the palace's continued cultural significance were considered conservative and bourgeois. Among preservationists in the DDR a particular schism emerged between Gerhard Strauss, a backer (at least publicly) of the SED's vision for a socialist reconstruction, and Wolfgang Schubert, a vehement defender of the traditions of historic preservation.[9] Schubert was one among several prominent figures in the world of German art history and preservation to protest the planned demolition of the Stadtschloss. Nonetheless, Ulbricht's decision stood. In the place of the Stadtschloss, he envisioned "a grand square for demonstrations, upon which our people's will for struggle and for

[6] Ludwig Deiters, "Das Institut für Denkmalpflege in der DDR—Erinnerungen und Reflexionen," in *Denkmalpflege in der DDR: Rückblicke,* ed. Jörg Haspel and Hubert Staroste (Berlin: Nicolai, 2014), 32.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Brian Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 56-57.
[9] Brian William Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past: Historic Preservation in the SBZ/GDR 1945–1990" (Ph.D., University of Rochester, 2005), 67-68.

progress can find expression."[10] Over two decades later the Palast der Republik, the home of the largely symbolic East German parliament the Volkskammer, would be built in its place.[11]

The disagreement over the fate of the Berliner Stadtschloss was just one example of conflict among conservationists, conflicts that pervaded and led to differences in the practice of historic preservation. In fact, in the 1950s and 1960s historic preservation had no backing in law and thus no legal enforcement if guidelines set out by the SED went unheeded; individual conservationists pretty much had free reign to protect what they wanted to keep and demolish what they did not.[12] All the while Cold War tensions lingered in the background, exerting an influence on the story the DDR told about itself and its appearance in the landscape of East Berlin.

The DDR's first official declaration of standards for preservation of historical and cultural sites came on July 26, 1952 with the "Verordnung zur Erhaltung und Pflege der nationalen Kulturdenkmale." Surprisingly, the ordinance did not define the term "memorial" (*Denkmal*) in explicitly political or ideological terms: "Memorial, in the way it is used in this ordinance, are all characteristic evidence [*alle charakteristischen Zeugnissen*] of cultural development of our people, the preservation of which is in the interest of the public due to their artistic, scientific, or historical significance."[13] The ideological motivation behind the ordinance is implied in the evocation of "our people," for whom the protected sites stand and whose interests are at the heart of the socialist state. The preamble of the ordinance states,

The cultural heritage of the German people comprises precious works of art that,

---

[10] Cited in Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 56.
[11] Ironically, the Palast der Republik has since been demolished (in 2008), and the Berliner Stadtschloss is being reconstructed, expected to open this year primarily to house the Humboldt Forum museum. Thomas Rogers, "Berlin's Troubled Humboldt Forum Pushes Back Opening," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2019.
[12] Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 87; Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 143.
[13] "Verordnung zur Erhaltung und Pflege der nationalen Kulturdenkmale," cited in Schumacher-Lange, "Denkmalpflege und Repräsentationskultur in der DDR," 39.

> through their beauty and authenticity, is evidence of the creative power of the masses. To keep and preserve this heritage and make it accessible to the wide masses of our people is one of the most important duties of the government of the German Democratic Republic. The acquisition of this cultural heritage is the concern of the whole population, which opposes all attempts of malicious or negligent destruction of cultural memorials with the severity of the law.[14]

In December 1952, the Institute for Historic Preservation (*Institut für Denkmalpflege,* hereafter IfD) was established, replacing independent regional and local offices with a centralized one to create standard preservation guidelines. The IfD was created as a subsidiary of the Ministry for Culture, and its ideological function was made explicit in planning documents: "The tasks of the Institute include … establishing basic principles that ensure the development of monuments for the patriotic education of the German people … contributing to the creation of new monuments recognizing the history of the German workers' movement and of the German people."[15]

The IfD, however, was officially a research institution and not a governmental agency with oversight over the business of historic preservation; it did not have legal power to enforce the 1952 *Verordnung*, and individual conservationists retained significant power. This meant that opponents of the regime could intentionally ignore ideological declarations without legal consequences. The most obvious case in this regard was that of Wolfgang Schubert, the conservationist who led the defense of the Berliner Stadtschloss in 1950, who time and again prevailed over the SED's efforts to force party-line adherence in the practice of historic preservation. He was bourgeois and a serious Protestant who was described by the Ministry for Culture at one point as representing a "reactionary standpoint…[that] was a pure denial of the

[14] Ibid. In spite of what the last sentence claims, the *Verordnung* did not have legal ramifications. Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 81.
[15] "Sektretariatsvorlage, Betr.: Zentralinstitut für Denkmalpflege in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 11. Dezember 1952," cited in Schumacher-Lange, "Denkmalpflege und Repräsentationskultur in der DDR," 41.

demands of the state apparatus."[16] The Ministry for Culture passed measures to attempt to control conservationists, such as one from November 1955 that demanded all IfD employees "contribute to the strengthening of the German Democratic Republic" (through, among other actions, dedicating special attention to national monuments to the German workers' movement and antifascist resistance fighters, "in accordance to their great political significance").[17] Despite these measures, figures like Schubert who did not follow them were not forced out of their positions; Schubert became, in fact, one of the leading and most productive historic preservationists in the DDR. Schubert's influence on the field could explain why Ludwig Deiters, the former IfD employee, remarked that he was surprised by the broad definition given to "monument": Monuments to "the history of the German workers' movement and of the German people" apparently encompassed so-called "technical" monuments to the history of technology that changed the nature of the workers' movement, as well as churches and cemeteries, gardens and parks, and theaters.[18]

In any case, it became less important that not all conservationists were loyal SED supporters, since in the early 1950s the party began to embrace, as Alan Nothnagle argues, "all those figures in German history who, regardless of their own class status had contributed to the strengthening and unification of the German people" through their contributions to art, science, and technology.[19] The SED adopted this new strategy to portray a more inclusive history of the DDR, one that traced back centuries and generations rather than merely decades. The course of

[16] "Bericht über den Brigadeeinsatz vom 18.-23.6.1958 beim Institut für Denkmalpflege Halle," cited in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 92.
[17] "Protokoll über die am 23. November 1955 durchgeführte öffentliche Parteiversammlung im Institut für Denkmalpflege," cited in Schumacher-Lange, "Denkmalpflege und Repräsentationskultur in der DDR," 43.
[18] Deiters, "Das Institut für Denkmalpflege in der DDR – Erinnerungen und Reflexionen," in *Denkmalpflege in der DDR*, ed. Jörg Haspel and Hubert Staroste, 17.
[19] Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck," 95, 102. The strategy originated with Albert Norden's *Kampf um die Nation*, a sort of treatise from a prominent (and also Jewish) SED member on how to interpret German history. Albert Norden, *Kampf um die Nation: Beiträge zur Deutschlands Lebensfrage* (Berlin: Dietz, 1953).

this history was questionable and at times awkward, but with it the SED thought it could more easily claim that the DDR was the true German state—a state that represented and celebrated all the progressive and positive aspects about the course of German history. The Third Reich had been an aberration, and West Germany an unfortunate continuation of that regime, but the SED maintained that the German tradition still had a worthy successor state in East Germany.

Trying to create a coherent narrative of progressive politics while brushing over militarism, imperialism, and fascism sometimes led to what Nothnagle calls "retrograde myth-building": the appropriation of historical figures and sites that did not have any clear ties to the workers' movement, antifascist resistance, or socialism into the SED's myth.[20] From musicians and composers to literary giants[21]—and even Otto von Bismarck, the military leader who forcefully united the 26 German states in 1871—symbols of a united Germany and its contributions to the world were awkwardly incorporated into the story of socialism's development in Germany.

Moreover, the SED used the evocation of such (inter)national heroes to call for the reunification of Germany under a socialist regime. Physical symbols of peace and reconciliation, such as the Brandenburger Tor, were restored and rededicated as a reminder of past German unity.[22] But as East and West both became more entrenched on opposite sides of the Cold War, and the Federal Republic enacted the Hallstein Doctrine in 1955 to formally deny international recognition to the DDR, the probability of compromise and consensus shrank to zero.

---

[20] Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck," 104.
[21] The SED celebrated Bach, Beethoven, and Goethe with *Gedenkjahre* (commemorative years), releasing pamphlets that explained that "Goethe was an intellectual pioneer or Marxism and a symbol of German unity, Bach was…a profound popular composer who struggled against the Protestant church and 'formalism' and Beethoven was "'the inspired son of our people, the fearless champion of progress, the singer of the brotherly solidarity of nations, the passionate emissary of peace'". Ibid., 97.
[22] Ibid., 101, 104.

If international legitimacy was not yet achievable, the SED nonetheless endeavored to earn the trust and admiration of its people. A patriotic, nationalistic celebration of German artists, inventors, writers, and more was thought to arouse more enthusiasm for the state than the short-lived strategy of destruction. In addition to honoring a wider array of figures in German history, the 1952 *Verordnung* aimed to involve the people by making them feel as if they had a stake in preserving it—making historic preservation "the concern of the whole population."

The SED thought it could use cultural production to inspire East Germans. In 1950, the DDR's first Five-Year Plan for the economy outlined an expansion of heavy industry and agriculture, but it also demanded the party focus on the country's cultural output and consumption as a metric of economic growth and overall strength of socialism.[23] SED General Secretary Walter Ulbricht reported at the SED's Third Party Conference in March 1956 that the state had increased spending on culture every year during the first Five-Year Plan—nearly doubling annual expenditures over the five years, from 1.7 billion marks in 1951 to 3.2 billion marks in 1955—to spend a total of 12.6 billion marks on culture. With the next five years in mind, Ulbricht committed to even greater cultural development in the DDR: "The crucial task in the second Five-Year Plan lies in developing a Socialist culture in the German Democratic Republic and transmitting it to the entire nation."[24]

Buy any regime must deliver on its promises and fulfill the needs of its people to retain its power.[25] The DDR struggled to boost its planned economy from the beginning, and the country would continue to face solvency issues for basically the entirety of its existence. Nearly

[23] "The Five-Year Plan for 1951-1955," *German History in Documents and Images.*
[24] "Report by Walter Ulbricht at the Third Party Conference of the SED, March 25-30, 1956," *German History in Documents and Images.*
[25] Krisch, "Political Legitimation in the German Democratic Republic," in *Political Legitimation in Communist States,* ed. T.H. Rigby and Ferene Fehér, 113.

3.5 million East Germans fled to the West in the 1950s for economic and political reasons. A November 1960 report from Central Committee of the SED on the particular *Republikflucht* of young people, expressed concern that "some young people evidently leave the republic because they do not regard our accounts of the Fascist, militaristic development of West Germany as credible" because they had had too much exposure to the Western narrative.[26] Preferring to focus on the ideological and rhetorical rather than the practical, the SED believed reversing the neglect of "political-ideological work" among young people could reverse the negative trend.

But in August 1961, the East German leadership took dramatic action to keep the negative Western views on the East out—literally. A wall dividing Berlin and surrounding the western sector, cutting it off from its East German surroundings and limiting access back West, appeared practically overnight. The erection of the Berlin Wall marked a zenith of East German insecurities about its legitimacy in the Cold War, though the SED would not admit it. Instead, the regime claimed it built the "Antifascist Protection Wall" to keep out the degenerate effects of capitalism and the remnants of fascism in the West on the East, where true German tradition resided.[27]

Erecting the Berlin Wall squashed any lingering chances of reunification and also meant the SED would have to abandon its strategy calling for unity. A new ordinance on historic preservation passed on September 28, 1961 articulated the necessity of a particularly socialist nationalism. "It is necessary to develop a clear conception of the meaning and duties of historic preservation that must extend from the Marxist-Leninist analysis of history and recognize the values forged by the working people of the past generations and give an outstanding image of

[26] "Working Group for Youth Questions with the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany *Republikflucht* by Young People, Young Returnees, and New Arrivals in the Period from January to September 1960," November 10, 1960, *German History in Documents and Images.*
[27] Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 30-31.

their artistic and technical abilities," reads notes from one meeting of the national Ministry of Culture's Department of Historic Preservation.[28] Refocusing, again, on parts of the German past that were clearly connected to the development of socialism as the SED's method to legitimize itself would endure into the next decade, when Cold War developments would prompt the SED to adjust its course yet again.

Inconvenient victims become vocal critics

In 1953, in the period of de-Stalinization of the SED following the anti-cosmopolitan purges and after the split of the East and West Berlin Jewish communities, it appeared as though the relationship between the SED and East German Jews had been repaired and the regime had changed its mind about the victimhood of the Jews. The East Berlin Gemeinde began receiving support from the state and local governments again, such as in the form of 300,000 marks to rebuild one of its synagogues, at a time when the Gemeinde had only approximately 50,000 marks in its account.[29] With help from Otto Nuschke of the Main Division for Church Liaison, a memorial to the six million Jewish victims of fascism was designed for the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee. Furthermore, in a report of the memorial's unveiling in October 1953 in *Neue Zeit* —the official newspaper of the Christian Democrats, the only major East German newspaper to cover the ceremony—there was surprisingly no comparison drawn between East and West Berlin, no mention of the supposedly resurgent antisemitism in the West. Rather, the quoted speeches focused on the duty of all antifascists and German patriots to prevent the rebirth of fascism.[30]

[28] Vorschläge zur Neuregelung der Denkmalpflege in der DDR, cited in Schumacher- Lange, "Denkmalpflege und Repräsentationskultur in der DDR," 46.
[29] Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 626.
[30] "Ehrenmal für die jüdischen Opfer," *Neue Zeit,* October 13, 1953.

But this recognition did not last long. The SED's treatment of the Jews of East Berlin was characterized by selective appreciation, but also wariness. As Marianne Krüger-Potratz puts it in her study of minority populations in the DDR, Jews were "sometimes considered suspicious as 'Zionists,' sometimes privileged as 'antifascists.'"[31] To that end, Mario Kessler adds, those privileges, if Jews had them, were awarded based on participation in resistance fighting, rather than on persecution because of their Jewish identity.[32] Jewish identity alone in the DDR was neither the source of privilege, nor of protection.

Recognition of the significance of Jewish sites in the DDR—and when it rarely happened, preservation of them—was inconvenient unless it fit into a narrative of antifascist resistance or served to draw a positive contrast with the BRD. As noted in the previous section, the SED's narrative of German history was constantly changing and shifting through the 1950s and into the 1960s based on political tact, but there was one consistency: Jewish history was not part of the story, and as a result its physical remnants were mostly deemed unworthy of restoration or protection by even toothless declarations of preservation standards. Erasure of Jewish sites and the Jewish past was not unique to the East German case,[33] but deviation from that practice and press coverage thereof demonstrate the extent to which the SED would politically exploit Jewish matters for its own claim to legitimacy.

The case of Herbert Baum presents an example of the SED using a figure, both Jewish and Communist, to corroborate the narrative of antifascist resistance. Baum and his wife Marianne became leaders of a Jewish youth group in Berlin, before joining the Communist

[31] This, the author importantly points out, was much more positive recognition than most minority populations in the DDR received. Marianne Krüger-Potratz, *Anderssein gab es nicht. Ausländer und Minderheiten in der DDR* (Münster/New York: Waxmann, 1991), 91.
[32] Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden,* 123.
[33] Eight synagogues were destroyed in West Berlin in the 1950s, as were synagogues in other major cities. In Poland, synagogues were turned into shops, cinemas, museums, restaurants, swimming pools, among other things. Meng, "East Germany's Jewish Question," 627; Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 112.

Youth Association of Germany in 1934. Working in both organizations, they attempted to assemble a united front of Jewish and Communist youth to oppose the Nazi regime, in connection with the underground KPD. Straddling two groups and identities, however, was not easy. One author described Baum's group as facing "double isolation": it was not fully integrated into the KPD because its members were Jewish, but it was also not accepted by the Jewish community because its members were Communist.[34]

In 1941, Baum and his wife were forced into work in a Nazi armament factory, where they recruited even more supporters among the other forced laborers.[35] The oldest member was 40, the youngest 19. The group called itself the Baum Group and started illegally printing antifascist flyers and newspapers in the basement of Baum's apartment building and planning an attack—a demonstration of resistance—on a Nazi public demonstration that would take place on May 2, 1942. On the day of the demonstration, Baum and the 27 other members of his group were arrested and executed; afterward, in a retaliatory show of force against the Jewish leaders of the attack, five hundred more Jews were arrested, 250 of them shot and 250 of them sent to a concentration camp.[36]

Baum was originally buried in the cemetery in the Berlin neighborhood of Marzahn, which features several memorial stones to political prisoners and forced laborers during the Nazi regime, to Communist revolutionaries and Red Army soldiers. His corpse was moved to the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee in 1949, where nine years later a memorial was erected (it is not clear by whose initiative).[37] The front of the memorial gravestone, below Baum's name, reads,

---

[34] Nicola Galliner, ed., *Wegweiser durch das jüdische Berlin: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1987), 332.
[35] Alfred Etzold, et al, *Jüdische Friedhöfe in Berlin* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1987), 91.
[36] Ibid.
[37] At the same time the street that leads to the cemetery was also renamed Herbert-Baum-Straße in his honor. Galliner, ed. *Wegweiser durch das jüdische Berlin*, 333.

"He was an exemplary fighter against war and fascism." On the back is a list of the 27 members of his group arrested and executed and their ages at the time of their deaths, and below their name reads, "They fell in the fight for peace and freedom."

Despite the change in location—from a Communist cemetery to a Jewish cemetery—press coverage of the creation of the memorial chose to highlight Baum's antifascist credentials over his Jewish heritage. A *Berliner Zeitung* article about the memorial does not reference Baum's religion or that of the other members of his group. In a particularly ignorant statement, the author claimed that the group was motivated by a desire "to show the world that not all Germans had fallen victim to fascist propaganda"; as if these Jewish activists had had an option to reject the propaganda that portrayed them as public enemy number one! The author lauded Baum and his allies as heroes, rather than merely victims, hearkening back to the debate of the previous decade. Illegal printing, planning a bombing raid: "that's how the persecuted became fighters," the article states.

In the final paragraph of the article, the author reiterates the moral superiority of the Baum Group because they did not just suffer; they fought back:

> But fascism and the war it caused also destroyed the life of millions of people, who never stood up against the Brown Barbarism. They died a meaningless death from bombs, on the front, because, unlike Herbert Baum and his comrades, they did not recognize the simple truth, that, he who wants to live in peace must risk his life for it.[38]

The SED's reasons for memorializing Baum were starkly different from the reasons it appeared to show concern for the Weissensee cemetery as a whole. When preservation efforts did occur there, they were made to exemplify the distinction between the antifascist East, where antisemitism had supposedly been totally wiped out, and West, where, the SED argued, Nazis

[38] "Sie gingen aufrecht und tapfer in den Tod," *Berliner Zeitung*, July 11, 1958.

The memorial to Herbert Baum and the Baum Group, a group of Jewish-Communist resistance fighters, in the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee.

remained and posed an active threat to Jews. "At a time when the old SS officers in West Germany want to be left to command the youth again," a *Neue Zeit* article from October 1956 reported, a local provost called upon young East Berliners to spend one Sunday cleaning up the "rather neglected part" of the Weissensee Jewish cemetery, in order to "ensure that visible remnants of the SS command" were removed. This action proved that, in the DDR at least, the "spirit of the Nazi dictatorship had successfully been broken."[39] In contrast to Baum, an agent of change who stood up for himself, Jews, dead and alive, were simply victims in need of East German assistance and protection.

When reporting on instances of antisemitism in West Berlin, the East German press often went to Rabbi Martin Riesenburger of the East Berlin Gemeinde for commentary. He had survived the war in Berlin due to his marriage to a Christian woman and led secret services and

[39] "Berliner Jugend wird mithelfen," *Neue Zeit,* October 24, 1956.

conducted religious burial services throughout the war, but his demonstrations of resistance during the Nazi regime were not often a point of emphasis. Instead, he was frequently featured because he could be counted on to criticize West Germany in these instances. For this reason he was often disparaged in the West as "the Red Rabbi," though he was never officially a Communist.[40]

An example of Riesenburger's commentary can be found in a piece that appeared in *Neue Zeit* on July 24, 1963. The author of the article visits the Weissensee cemetery with Riesenburger, who tells of the 809 gravestones for Jews killed in Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, and Neuengamme, "only a fraction of the immeasurable suffering that left millions of Jews condemned to death during the Hitler dictatorship." The moving description and tribute to an enduring symbol of Jewish history, in a city that had so few such symbols left, becomes in the last paragraph a political statement on the recent indictment of Hans Globke, the chief of staff of the West German Chancellery. As a lawyer in the Nazi regime, he had not objected to the Nuremberg Laws and thus facilitated the Holocaust. As parting words for the journalist in the Weissensee cemetery, Riesenburger reportedly said, "The decision has been handed down. It is now up to the people in West Germany to wake up and concur" with this decision.[41]

As if to convince its members of the unique protection provided in the DDR, SED politicians reminded the Jewish community of 'resurgent' antisemitism in the West in direct correspondence. In a letter to the national Association of Jewish Communities in the DDR (*Verband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der DDR*, hereafter Verband), the secretary for church liaison expressed a feeling of kinship with the Jews of East Germany, who "can appreciate the

[40] Roland H. Merton, "Memoranda about Dr.h.c. Martin Riesenburger," *DigiBaeck—Digital Collections of the Leo Baeck Institute,* 1990.
[41] "Grabinschriften klagen an," *Neue Zeit,* July 24, 1963. Globke was sentenced by the East German Oberstes Gerict (Supreme Court) to life in prison, a sentence that went unrecognized outside the DDR.

politics of peace in our workers' and peasants' state" because of "their pitiful past in the Nazi era." He then reiterated the DDR's commitment to seeking peace and overcoming the proto-fascist traits that had come to define the Federal Republic—"militarism, revanchism, racial agitation, and the associated danger of war"—like dozens of East German officials had before.[42] As in the other examples, contrast with the West betrays the SED's political motivation in actions that otherwise could honor the memory of Jews and recognize the importance of preserving their history.

For the most part, however, the Jewish community expressed support for the SED. This was a survival strategy: only through loyalty could Jews hope to receive the support they needed to maintain their properties and provide necessary services to members as much as possible. Prior to parliamentary elections across the DDR in October 1963, the Verband endorsed the SED-controlled National Front as the party that would "guarantee that there would never be another Kristallnacht." This statement was particularly timely, as November 9, 1963 would mark the 25th anniversary of the Nazis' attacks on Jewish properties of November 1938. The endorsement, moreover, implied a sort of quid pro quo, which the Verband summarized with the slogan "The Republic needs all—everyone needs the Republic."[43] The Jews would do their part to strengthen the state because they had to in order to survive, but they also asked for a guarantee of support in return.

There was thus a double standard for Jews in the DDR: their sites were rarely recognized as both Jewish and antifascist, more often only recognized because of a politically favorable

[42] Centrum Judaicum Archiv (CJA) 5 B 1, Nr. 252, Brief an den Vorstand des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom Stellvertreter des Staatssekretärs für Kirchenfragen, October 16, 1959.
[43] CJA 5 B I, Nr. 252, Stellungnahme des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinde in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zu den Volkswählen, October 14, 1963.

comparison to be drawn with the West, and many Jewish citizens did not feel comfortable accusing the SED of unfair treatment because they relied on the party's support. There were other Jews, however, who were not constrained by the needs—even desperation—of the East German Jewish community because they were communists and supporters of the regime, or because they were not even East German. They occupied a position of privilege that allowed them to speak out against the SED's treatment of Jews and protected them from backlash. In the 1950s, one catalyst for such protest was the creation of a new museum and memorial to antifascist resistance fighters, but not to Jewish prisoners, at the former Buchenwald concentration camp. As a site that did receive attention and acknowledgement as significant in DDR history, Buchenwald serves as a counterexample to Jewish sites such as the Weissensee cemetery, which as a whole did not have memorial status at this point. The former camp and site of rebellion embodied the aspects of history that the SED deemed worthy of veneration and its elevated stature in history allows reflection on what, in the SED's view, Weissensee apparently lacked. Examining the critiques waged on the Buchenwald memorial, however, shows that the SED's view was not the definitive one, despite its attempts to make it so.

Buchenwald, located near the city of Weimar, was not known for its remarkable death toll (about 56,000 people were murdered or died of starvation, disease, or exposure there), but rather was renowned for the "fundamental, nearly mythological role" it played in the construction of the East German history of an antifascist resistance that took down the Nazis.[44] A clandestine group formed among the prisoners of the camp, the great majority of whom were Communist political prisoners, called the International Camp Committee, which secretly gathered weapons and planned attacks on a nearby armaments factory. The committee's most

[44] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 73.

famous, if exaggerated, act of resistance occurred on April 11, 1945, when the remaining members of the committee revolted against the remaining SS officers. It was remembered as an act of a self-liberation, though many SS officers had already fled by that point, anticipating the arrival of American troops only hours later. To add to the mythical quality of the camp, Ernst Thälmann, the leaders of the KPD between 1925 and 1933 and a hero of the antifascist movement as the founder of *Antifaschistische Aktion* (Antifa), was murdered in Buchenwald in August 1944.[45] The "self-liberation" at Buchenwald was among the most important events in the legitimation of the East German historic narrative, and it was commemorated with a monument, dedicated in September 1958, that highlighted the heroic, specifically Communist-led triumph over fascism, rather than the tragic murder of thousands or resistance by any other group.

To be sure, until late 1943 and early 1944, the camp was overwhelmingly a camp made up of political opponents to the Nazi regime. This was likely because, as James Young points out, most Jews were by late 1943 being deported directly to death camps rather than concentration camps. Young also notes, however, the composition of Buchenwald changed dramatically between then and liberation in 1945, with not only the arrival of thousands of "half-dead Jews" from abandoned death camps further east but also French prisoners and 8,000 Soviet POWs who were shot immediately upon arrival.[46] These newly arrived Jews and others were segregated from the main camp and not incorporated into the International Camp Committee and its resistance organization.

The memorial, commissioned by the government in 1951, covers over three million square-feet in total. It features a zig-zagging path called the "Street of the Nations," which is lined with large stone blocks with the names of the countries from which prisoners came. The

[45] Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, 108=109.
[46] Young, *The Texture of Memory,* 74.

path leads up a hill to the piece de resistance, literally: a bronze sculpture of eleven resistance fighters, all men,[47] backed by a 160-foot tall bell tower, both overlooking the surrounding Thuringian landscape. One of the men depicted in the sculpture raises his right hand in the "Oath of Buchenwald," a speech purportedly given at a memorial ceremony a few days after liberation. It reads, in part, "The extermination of Nazism with its roots is our slogan. The building of a new world of peace and freedom is out goal. We owe this to our murdered comrades and their families."[48] The evocation of this speech through the sculpture highlights the degree to which the myth had pervaded DDR consciousness.

The absence of any mention of Jewish prisoners in the camp was auspicious to Jewish visitors. Felix Bergmann initiated contact with Otto Grotewohl, the prime minister of the DDR, in September 1960, following a summer visit to Buchenwald. He was born in Germany but had emigrated to Palestine and was at the time a professor at the Hebrew University medical school in Jerusalem. Bergmann took issue with the "Street of the Nations" in particular, which did not mention Jews. "Was it not enough for thousands of Jews to be murdered in Buchenwald, and for millions more to be suffocated in gas chambers, in order for my people to get a place among all the nations who lost their sons?" Bergmann wrote.[49] The correspondence was taken up by Georg Spielmann, the leader of the Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters, a government agency, who replied that the Street of the Nations honored all those deported and murdered in Buchenwald, "regardless of race, religion, or ideology."[50] To that, Bergmann replied, even more

[47] It was almost always men who represented the "antifascist resistance fighter" in such memorials. Natasha Goldman draws an interesting comparison with this trope of "socialist realism" in her examination of Will Lammert's Memorial to the Deported Jews of Berlin, which depicts all women and was dedicated, clearly, not to antifascist resistance fighters but to Jewish victims. Natasha Goldman, "From Ravensbrück to Berlin: Will Lammert's Monument to the Deported Jews 1957/1985," *IMAGES* 9, no. 1 (May 22, 2016): 140–63.
[48] Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, 108-109.
[49] Cited in Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt*, 477.
[50] Cited in Ibid., 478.

vehemently,

> The Jews came to the camps as 'Jews,' i.e. as members of the Jewish people, and they were therefore placed in a special camp within the camps, separated from the 'Aryans' from all other countries, tormented with especially bestial methods and especially small rations. … It is really a mockery of my people if you now declare that the 'Jews were dragged into the camps and exterminated as Polish, Russian, Hungarian ... German citizens'. At that time, none of these peoples brought up our citizenship rights.[51]

Bergmann delivered a searing indictment of the DDR if it did not correct its course. "This moment is very important for the DDR, much more important than for the Jews, because we will survive without the memorial stone in Buchenwald. We have survived German fascism, and we are preparing to outlast the DDR, too."

Possibly in reaction to Bergmann's lambasting, the Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters joined forces with the Union of Israeli Antifascist Fighters and decided to incorporate the story of the Jewish prisoners into a memorial to be erected at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp outside Berlin. Jews' experiences would have to be featured in this new memorial, SED politician (and Communist Jew himself) Albert Norden wrote to Spielmann in March 1961 because, if not, "then you are encouraging those hostile slanders that have already been raised more than once in public, that in the DDR the suffering of the Jews under Hitler's fascism has not received sufficient attention."[52]

While Bergmann's protests of the memorial were met with swift action, the SED reacted differently when faced with a critique from one of its constituents. Arnold Zweig, a Jewish author who proclaimed pacifist and socialist beliefs, questioned the absence of "the ancient symbol of the Star of David that would have represented the Jewish victims of the fascist terror" at Buchenwald.[53] In response, the SED called Zweig a "known Zionist" and did not engage in

[51] Citied in Ibid.
[52] Cited in Ibid., 480.
[53] Cited in Ibid., 476-477.

conversation. On several counts, Zweig was an 'antifascist,' an opponent of the Nazi regime and a supporter of the East German socialist project: Before he fled to Palestine in 1933, he had been a co-editor of *Die Weltbühne*, an influential cultural publication with leftist, eventually antifascist, leanings. His books were burned by the Nazis. He was even personally invited to return to the DDR in 1948, a fortunate turn of events as he no longer felt at home in Israel and did not consider himself a Zionist anymore.

What can explain Zweig's dismissal as a Zionist, the dismissal of his critique as simply motivated by sympathy with Israel, when his grievances about the Buchenwald memorial were much less reproachful (and persistent) than Bergmann's? The SED had used the term—"Zionist"—disparagingly against Jews before, famously against historian Helmut Eschwege, who was dismissed from the SED in 1953 for labeling his nationality as "Jewish" rather than "German" on official documents.[54] Calling a Jew a "Zionist" conveyed disloyalty to the DDR, whose staunchly anti-Israel foreign policy stance was well known; in light of Israel's alliance with the United States, the Jewish state was viewed in the DDR as simply an agent of American imperialism.[55] But the term also had embedded in it much more nefarious implications of belief in a Jewish conspiracy. It carried with it, too, the memory of the Stalinist purges of 1953 and the threat of persecution, which was sufficient to silence complaints.

The SED was responsive when criticism came from a Jew outside of the DDR, speaking to the external perception of the regime, but not when it came from within. It was simpler to discredit Zweig's view as that of a "known Zionist" intent on undermining the anti-Zionist SED than it was to explain the paradox of victimhood and resistance represented in the Buchenwald memorial, or, for that matter, to justify the inconsistent treatment of Jewish sites in general. To

[54] Ibid., 190.
[55] Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden*, 123.

do so would reveal the persistence of antisemitic tropes under the guise of anti-imperialist foreign policy. But moreover, the SED could not admit the shortcomings of its myth-building efforts and the failure to indoctrinate its entire population with belief in East German moral superiority and legitimacy as the successor to the German tradition.

In the following decades, the Jews would continue to struggle for recognition and protection of its sites by the SED, and the SED would continue to shape its image and history to achieve legitimacy. The changing conditions of the Cold War in the 1970s in particular, however, would introduce an international audience and increasingly conscious East German public, placing greater pressure on the SED to address the Jewish question. The next chapter explains how it does.

Chapter 3: Laws

Arguably the most significant events of the 1970s were the softening of Cold War tensions between East and West Germany. West German chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik,*[1] which Brandt and his supporters painstakingly constructed throughout his tenure (1969-1974, ended the Hallstein Doctrine, by which the Federal Republic of Germany refused to recognize the German Democratic Republic and denied diplomatic relations with any states that had relations with the DDR. With support from Moscow, [2]Brandt's efforts to normalize relations between East and West Germany resulted in the signing of the Basic Treaty between the two German states in 1972, and then the admission of both states to the United Nations in 1973.

To the East Berlin Jewish community, however, perhaps the more important events of that decade happened right before their eyes: Their cemeteries, which they had struggled to maintain for over twenty years, suddenly came under protection as monuments of national importance. For the first time in its history, the DDR claimed a responsibility to care for and preserve the Weissensee cemetery, the largest cemetery in Europe, which had been damaged countless times by neglect or outright vandalism.

These changes, monumental on different levels, were connected by the DDR's pursuit of legitimacy. Once it became the subject of international attention and scrutiny as an independent country the DDR needed to keep pace with global trends toward inclusiveness in many areas of policy. These trends even applied to the practice of historic preservation and, by extension, to the

---

[1] The term "*Ostpolitik"* (the Federal Republic of Germany's policy toward the Eastern bloc/Warsaw Pact countries) is sometimes used in contrast to "*Deutschlandpolitik"* (the Federal Republic of Germany's policy toward the "other" Germany). My use of "Ostpolitik" throughout this work encompasses both of these meanings, as Brandt's policies toward East Germany and the Eastern bloc are interconnected, following the lead of several scholars. See M. E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Detente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), xvi.

[2] Andrey Edemskiy, "Dealing with Bonn: Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet Response to West German Ostpolitik," in *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974*, edited by Carole Fink and Bernd Schäfer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15-18.

SED's portrayal of history. The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of a new theory that, unlike previous strategies of myth-building, unambiguously laid claim to the socialist and antifascist "tradition" as well as to German "heritage," leading to a "rediscovery" of the Jewish past as well, as Alan Nothnagle put it.[3]

In reality, however, the developments of the 1970s and 1980s were not so simple. The SED did not all of a sudden "rediscover" its Jewish citizens and their past; in fact, their relationship and the ways it affected the maintenance of Jewish sites remained largely unchanged. Jews in the DDR still depended on the regime for support and were reluctant to criticize it, even when it made decisions to the Jewish community's detriment. What did change in this period was the attitudes of other East Germans, who developed a consciousness for human rights and an awareness of injustice against Jews in their own country. And in a new era of global pressure and public opinion, the SED could not ignore the protesting voices of its constituents.

Effects and limits of rapprochement

Détente between the two German states did not mean reconciliation between their interpretations of the past, and in fact, at several points it seemed to further entrench the differences between East and West. The Basic Treaty, passed on December 21, 1972, established "normal, good-neighborly relations" between the BRD and the DDR, ensured the peace and security of borders and called for respect of one another's sovereignty. As noted in its preamble, the treaty proceeded "from the historical facts and without prejudice to the different view of the Federal Republic of German and the German Democratic Republic on fundamental questions,

[3] Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck," 107, 109.

including the national question."[4] Failing to define "the historical facts," this clause avoids conflict and controversy and permits both East and West Germany to believe its view is the correct one.

Upon admission to the United Nations, neither the BRD nor the DDR showed signs of abandoning their position. The divergent views came across plainly in the two countries' first speeches before the UN General Assembly on September 19, 1973. Speaking on behalf of the DDR, Foreign Minister Otto Winzler said the legitimation of the DDR in the UN was also a legitimation of its history, in which the people and government of East Germany "have broken once and for all with the aggressive and militaristic politics of the former imperialistic German Reich, which bears the main burden of responsibility and guilt for two world wars that brought nations immense sacrifice and untold suffering."[5] As before, the SED derived the DDR's legitimacy from a history, however constructed, of working-class revolution and Communist resistance to Nazism.[6] On the other hand, BRD Foreign Minister Walter Scheel stated the fact that there are two Germanys before the Assembly was "a display of the face of my people: cause and victim of the war, divided not of their own doing, now living in two countries and uncertain of a common future." Scheel also reiterated West Germany's commitment to eventual German reunification, which East Germany rejected.

An unofficial part of rapprochement was the question of East German reparations to Jewish Holocaust survivors and their descendants, and here, too, the DDR demonstrated consistency with its past position on the matter. Following the signing of the Basic Treaty, the

[4] "The Basic Treaty (December 21, 1972)," *German History in Documents and Images.*
[5] "The Two German States in the United Nations (September 19, 1973)," *German History in Documents and Images.*
[6] It was conveyed, for instance, in the first line of the final Constitution of the German Democratic Republic, passed in 1974: "Continuing the revolutionary tradition of the German working class and supported by the liberation from fascism…" "The Definition of East German Identity in the Final GDR Constitution (October 7, 1974)", *German History in Documents and Images*.

Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, an American Jewish organization established in 1951, renewed its attempts to bring East German leaders to the table and discuss paying restitution to Jewish survivors and their descendants.[7] Furthermore, the Claims Conference tried to coerce the DDR into considering restitution in its new era of international diplomacy by requesting "all sympathetic governments to lend their aid and assistance to this endeavor" by ensuring that the subject of restitution be included in negotiations.[8] This appeal had little effect on Western European countries, which were quick to establish diplomatic relations with the DDR following the country's entry into the UN. Israel and the United States, however, were receptive to the Claims Conference's calls to action, and while the SED continued to deny diplomatic relations with Israel due to its "aggressive imperialist policy"[9] and in order to preserve Arab allies in the Middle East, the regime seemed interested in what the Americans had to say.

When the Claims Conference reached out to the SED's Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters (*Komitee der Antifaschistichen Widerstandskämpfer*, hereafter KdAW) directly to arrange informal meetings, the KdAW said it would only meet with an American citizen and "only to avoid a malicious campaign against the DDR … the KdAW would use the talks to underline the unchanged DDR position regarding restitution claims."[10] When Benjamin Ferencz, an American, finally met with Otto Funke, KdAW chairman, in November 1976, Ferencz expected an offer of 500 million Marks restricted to claims of Americans only, which would be considered acceptable by the Claims Conference. Instead, Funke delivered a statement

[7] For a full discussion, see Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany*, 94-111.
[8] Cited in Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany*, 95; "A resolution adopted by the Board of Directors of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany at its Annual Meeting on 10 July 1973 in Geneva," in Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany*, Appendix 1, 201.
[9] Article from *Junge Welt*, March 7, 1973, cited in Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany*, 98.
[10] Cited in Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany,* 105.

from the KdAW: "inspired by humanitarian ideals," it had decided to give a one-time donation of $1 million toward U.S. Jewish citizens who were victims of Nazi persecution. A second statement from Funke explicitly denied any legal or moral claims against the DDR and refused discussion of such claims.[11] The Claims Conference, frankly offended by the gesture, rejected the donation. "Had we been given the opportunity to place before you the full magnitude of the injuries and losses inflicted on the Jews, the absolute inadequacy of the sum mentioned in your declaration would have become apparent," read the Claims Conference's response to the KdAW.[12] Despite repeated attempts to negotiate reparations, and an especially narrow failure in 1988, the SED and the international Jewish community were never able to reach a consensus on the topic.

There were, however, areas of Cold War negotiations around which both East and West Germany appeared to coalesce, two of which, though seemingly disparate, are significant for this paper. One of them was historic preservation. The DDR gained unofficial admission to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1969, an institution organized by UNESCO to which many Western European countries already belonged. Even if in actuality the practice was not a priority of the SED at the time, the appearance of interest in historic preservation was sufficient to gain recognition by the institution and, the SED believed, use it as a stepping stone to further political and diplomatic relations with member countries.[13] Prior to the signing of the Basic Treaty and the DDR's admission into the UN, the Ministry of Culture plainly indicated its belief that historic preservation was most useful as a means to foreign policy

[11] "A statement issued by the Committee of the Antifascist Resistance Fighters of the German Democratic Republic, delivered by Otto Funke to Benjamin B. Ferencz on 22 November, 1976 in Berlin," in Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany*, Appendix 7, 207; Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany*, 109.
[12] "A letter dated 6 December 1976 from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany to Otto Funke, chair of the Committee of the Antifascist Resistance Fighters of the German Democratic Republic," in Timm, *Jewish Claims Against East Germany*, Appendix 8, 207-208.
[13] Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 269.

ends.[14] The further benefits of engaging seriously in historic preservation became clear as time went on, when East Germany's historic preservation practices received glowing press coverage in the West, boosting the regime's legitimacy on the whole. An article in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, for instance, reported a few months prior to the passage of the 1975 historic preservation law, "Even before the new wave of interest, the GDR had spent considerable sums in restoring many of the great centers of German culture which lie on its territory: Goethe's Haus in Weimar, the Wartburg near Eisenach where Lutehr translated the Bible into German, and the Zwinger Gallery in Dresden."[15] That year, coincidentally, was also the International Year for Historical Preservation and was celebrated widely across Western Europe.[16]

Another major event of détente was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which began in July 1973 in Helsinki and over two years later with the signing of the Final Act on August 1, 1975, more commonly known as the Helsinki Accords. The agreement is known for its declaration of human rights and the commitment signatory countries made to securing those rights. In the case of East Germany, it is often believed that the signing of the Helsinki Accords cleared the way for East Germans to protest their regime's failure to comply with the agreement, marking a clear turning point in the DDR's history.[17] More recent analyses of the human rights in the DDR show, on the contrary, that discussion of "human rights" did in fact exist in the DDR prior to 1975; it was actually an important talking point for the DDR's

[14] "Direktive – für die Teilnahme des Präsidenten des Nationalkomitees der DDR des ICOMOS und Generalkonservators des Instituts für Denkmalpflege Genosse Professor Dr. Ludwig Deiters und der Tagung des Konsultativ und Exekutivekomitees in Paris vom 25. November 1972," September 22, 1972, in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 274.
[15] Jonathan Steele, "Historical Outburst," *The Guardian*, June 30, 1975, in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 273.
[16] Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 290.
[17] Daniel Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton Univeristy Press, 2001).

claim to legitimacy.[18] I find that, however, that the Helsinki Accords do introduce a new era when considering citizens' level of comfort with speaking out against the party.

These two realms of international consensus—on the value of historic preservation and the guarantee of human rights—became relevant for the East Berlin Gemeinde and the Weissensee cemetery, which continued to suffer from years of neglect. Though Jews remained cautious and reluctant to protest the regime on whose financial support they relied, other, less vulnerable East Berliners were empowered in this new era of global attention and pressure to speak out against injustice against the Jewish community exemplified in the cemetery, as we will see in the third section of this chapter.

Drafting the *Denkmalpflegegesetz* of 1975

It was clear at the end of the 1960s that current rules were not effectively preserving historic sites, whether toward the ideological benefit of the regime or in general. A table from the IfD around 1965 counts just under 30,000 historical sites and monuments in the DDR with a total replacement value of between 10 and 12 billion Marks. The cost to properly maintain them would be just over 250 million Marks annually, nearly 50 times greater than the Ministry of Culture's 1967 allocation of 5 million Marks to historic preservation and 200 times greater than that of 1974, when funding by the Ministry of Culture reached a historic low of 1.25 million Marks.[19] A different table compiles data from six socialist countries to show that the DDR also

[18] Paul Betts, "Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights: The Case of East Germany," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3, no. 3 (October 31, 2012): 407–26; Ned Richardon-Little, "Dictatorship and Dissent: Human Rights in East Germany in the 1970s," in *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s*, ed. Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013): 49-67.

[19] "Normative Maßnahmen für Entwicklungsarbeit," undated (but grouped with other documents from 1963-1965), in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 238; Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 237-239.

faced a dearth of not only funding but also personnel relative to its neighbors. For example, while Poland had fewer monuments than the DDR (approximately 30,000 and 50,000 respectively, reported in 1974), it employed 38 million Marks in central and regional preservation funds, while the DDR employed only 8 million. The DDR had fewer "workers in specialized preservation firms" than any other listed country, despite having more monuments than each.[20]

By the 1970s historic preservation had fallen from the priorities of the SED. This was determined in part by General Secretary Walter Ulbricht himself, who, in addition to standardizing the construction of residences with the *Plattenbau*, the concrete apartment buildings meant to symbolize classlessness that are now stereotypical of the former East Germany, also envisioned the construction of new, impressive "socialist city centers" to display the technical skill and strength of the SED.[21] Ulbricht's vision endangered some of the most historic sites in Berlin, including the Nikolaikirche, the oldest building in the city, as well as the Berliner Dom, whose connection to the Prussian monarchy so close to the center of the city was unfavorable to the SED.[22] While these buildings were spared, others were not, such as the thirteenth-century Paulinerkirche in Leipzig. The destructive tendencies of Ulbricht's plan were understandably unpopular among conservationists, not to mention economically imprudent.[23]

[20] "Vergleichszahlen zur Durchführung der Denkmalpflege in sozialistischen Ländern," undated (one column of table lists "year of report," each is between 1967 and 1974), in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 253.
[21] The most famous example of this vision can be found in the center of Berlin, though it is visible from all corners of the city: the 368-meter tall *Fernsehturm* (TV Tower). Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 255.
[22] Memo from Ministry of Culture, Abteilung Bildende Kunst und Museen, cited in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 261.
[23] Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 276.

These factors were considered in 1971 when Ulbricht was ushered out of office and replaced by Honecker.[24]

From a practical standpoint, the core issue at the beginning of a new decade was the lack of legal backing for historic preservation; enforcement was spotty, and there existed no legal repercussions for failing to adhere to preservation rules. From an ideological standpoint, the SED perceived East Germans lacked a 'socialist consciousness' and commitment to the regime. While they may have had negative associations with the West,[25] they did not necessarily have positive associations with the East, either.

To resolve this double-faceted problem with historic preservation, SED theorists proposed a new theory of East German history, a new conception of which objects and sites ought to be preserved, and by 1975 there were legal consequences if they weren't. The new theory recognized the importance of both East Germany's "heritage" (*Erbe*) and "tradition" (*Tradition*). *Tradition* described those parts of German history that had always been honored by the DDR's leaders: history of the working class and revolutions and antifascism. *Erbe* described parts of history that, though "ideologically less desirable," were impossible to overlook in Germany's national history.[26] This seems similar to the "retrograde myth-building" and appropriation and restoration of monuments such as the Brandenburger Tor that occurred in the 1950s, but the difference was the context: While in the 1950s, SED leaders still had hopes for German reunification under a socialist state, in the 1970s, following the passage of the Basic

[24] Another important factor, however, was Ulbricht's resistance to taking direction from Moscow on negotiations with the BRD. Brezhnev preferred Honecker, who seemed less likely to take risks and go against the desires of the Soviet Union, and gave his blessing to the transfer of power that would facilitate détente. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil*, 168.
[25] The SED's Institute for Public Opinion Research surveyed workers, soldiers, and members of the Free German Youth in the late 1960s and early 1970s and found that respondents felt that nothing connected them to the "imperialist" Federal Republic, while "everything connected them to the socialist and antifascist" DDR. Cited in Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck," 99, 19ff.
[26] Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck," 107.

Treaty, the SED's goal became to portray the DDR "as a Germany in its own right," one that was "a product of the entirety of German history."[27] At the eighth Party Conference of the SED in 1972, Kurt Hager, a member of the Ideology committee of the Politbüro, expressed this broader understanding of German history, "Our socialist culture in the DDR protects the living progressive artistic efforts of the past and continues it in the spirit of socialism. The socialist society is the only real successor to all of the progressive, historical efforts and traditions of efforts towards a human existence."[28] Revolutionary, socialist, and working-class history would remain the top priority for the SED, but this new strategy under Honecker was designed to promote positive association with the East German state among a broader swath of the population—and among outside observers—in this new era of international attention.

In the late 1960s Minister for Culture Klaus Gysi and chief conservationist of the IfD Ludwig Deiters began discussing the possibility of revising the 1961 *Verordnung* to strengthen the central Institute and streamline the list of protected objects and sites. To counteract the financial concerns, the drafters of a new decree explored the possibility of requiring preserved buildings to have additional economic utility. The 1968 draft decree included the provision that preserved buildings should be used "not just as tourist objects, museums, cultural houses or clubs, rather as often as possible as hotels, restaurants and homes, as village centers, schools, kindergartens and administrative buildings."[29] This, and abandoning Ulbricht's costly plans for demolishing and building new socialist city centers, could save the IfD money and put it toward

[27] Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck," 106; Alfred Loesdau, "German History and National Identity in the GDR," in Margy Gerber, ed., *Studies in GDR Culture and Society* 7 (New York: University Press of America, 1987): 213.
[28] Kurt Hager, "Sozialistische Kulturpolitik. Referat des Genossen Kurt Hager, Mitglied des Politbüros und Sekretär des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands auf der 6. Tagung des ZK der SED am 6./7. Juli 1972" cited in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 278-279.
[29] "Neuordnung des Schutzes und der Pflege der Denkmale der Geschichte und Kultur in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," August 1, 1968, cited in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 267-268.

preserving the sites deemed most significant to the history of the DDR, which were still sites commemorating antifascist resistance and working-class history.

To truly demonstrate a commitment to preserving *Erbe* and *Tradition*, Deiters and Gysi determined that a historic preservation law, rather than a decree, was necessary. Among the reasons, Deiters explained at a meeting of the citizen-led Cultural Union (*Kulturbund*) in April 1972, was the growing international attention paid to historic preservation.[30] Likely a more pressing consideration was low morale among IfD employees. The Ministry of Culture feared that if it failed to quickly address the problems of disorganization, underfunding, and lack of enforcement, there would be even fewer people left to uphold the system.[31] The Ministerrat, the East German parliament, passed the DDR's first historic preservation law on June 19, 1975.

The *Denkmalpflegegesetz* (literally "care of monuments law") outlined as its goals the preservation of monuments "in such a way that they serve the development of the socialist consciousness, aesthetic and technical education, as well as the ethical education, of the state."[32] This sentence indicated the SED's broader goals of indoctrination through education; not only would DDR citizens gain a better understanding of the socialist history of the state, they would also learn about aesthetic and technical prowess in German history and why it is important to preserve evidence of that history—presumably the "ethical" part of education. Protected sites would be included as monuments on a central (national) list, a regional list (*Bezirksdenkmalliste*), or a district list (*Kreisdenkmalliste*); the assignment to one of these lists was determined by the governments at each level "according to the relevance" of each

[30] "Protokoll – Arbeitsseminar 'Bau- und Denkmalpflege' in Bad Saarow, 16.-18.4.72," cited in Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 287.
[31] Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 288.
[32] "Gesetz zur Erhaltung der Denkmale in der DDR – Denkmalpflegegesetz," *Gesetzblatt* I, Nr. 26, S. 458, June 19, 1975.

monument. District preservation councils were in contact with city governments and even more localized councils or community groups, as well as with individuals and institutions who privately owned historic sites, and were required to inform them of their responsibilities as owners of protected sites. The regional governments were responsible for overseeing and ensuring the quality of the work and were required to provide a budget for preservation. The central organ combined the capacities of the Ministry for Culture and the IfD to dictate the scientific standards and methods of preservation and had final say in removing an object from any list. Preservation officials at any level could also for the first time punish failure to fulfill the expectations of the law with fines, from 10 Marks to as high as 1000 Marks (for repeated violations within a two-year span).

The positive effects of the law on historic preservation emerged gradually. SED officials who were apathetic to historic preservation took time to come around to the new ideological backing, and conservationists who were used to getting their way had to adapt to newly enforced rules and repercussions.[33] In terms of funding, the benefits were clearer: Agencies and authorities at all levels of government allocated 299 million Marks to historical buildings in just one year, 1981, compared to approximately 613 million Marks that had been spent on historical buildings since 1949. The cash flow was expected to continue as strong, with 300 million planned for 1982 and 200 million for 1983.[34] On the other hand, the new law did not remedy some of the issues that existed before, such as the prioritization of sites in big cities to the detriment of smaller cities and towns.[35]

[33] Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 294-297.
[34] The extra 100 million Marks was presumably related to preparations for Martin Luther Year, celebrating the 500th birthday of the revolutionary figure. Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 299; Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck," 108.
[35] Campbell, "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past," 298.

The Jewish cemetery in Weissensee: New status, same challenges

The *Denkmalpflegegesetz* defined "monument" very broadly. It could be any object that was considered "evidence of political, cultural, and economic development, that due to its historic, artistic, or scientific significance … has been deemed a monument by the appropriate legislative body in the interest of the socialist society." This included everything from war memorials and monuments to the "culture and way of living" of the working classes, to architecturally meaningful municipal buildings and palaces, even churches and, yes, cemeteries. The vagueness of the law meant that the SED could add objects to the list that did not appear to have anything to do with the "realization of the ideas of socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism" for reasons that fir with the message of German progress that underlay all of East German history. As we will see with the case of the Weissensee cemetery, however, some defended the historic significance of protected objects when they were threatened, often revealing a disparity in the understanding of what made an object historically significant, especially in the case of the Jewish community. Concerned citizens took advantage of the greater visibility of Berlin and the SED's policies in the 1970s and especially the 1980s to coerce the SED's vision to match theirs.

By September 1977, the Beriln Magistrat's Department of Culture had drafted a list of 153 monuments divided into four categories for its *Bezirksdenkmalliste*: historical monuments, architectural monuments, monuments of landscape and garden design, and monuments of fine and applied arts. The category with the most monuments, by far, was the historical monuments, which had four subsections of its own: monuments of political history, of cultural history, of production and transportation history, and of the culture and lifestyle of the working classes. The wide range of types of monuments reflected the Magistrat's even broader understanding, relative

to that expressed in the official law's text, of the new law's significance. By way of introduction, the drafted list includes a "Rationale" (*Begründung*) section, which states that the listed objects "belong in their entirely and diversity to the elements of the rich cultural life of our society—whether of national or international importance, whether historical or artistic monuments, whether from earlier centuries or from the history of the DDR."[36]

According to this rationale, the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee was added to the Berlin *Bezirksdenkmalliste* on September 21, 1977, as a monument of cultural history. The reasons for registering the monument are not perfectly clear, but a look at the stated criteria for objects considered monuments of cultural history and the addition of other Jewish sites in Berlin on various lists, offers some insight into officials' thinking.

A document titled "Criteria for Inclusion of Monuments in the *Bezirksdenkmalliste*" from August 1976 states that monuments of cultural history should recall pioneering figures in the arts and sciences and their achievements that "shaped artistic or scientific progress on a regional or national level."[37] In the case of Jewish cemeteries, the fact that German figures who contributed to the arts and sciences were buried there was apparently sufficient to warrant protection as a monument to cultural history. This is clear in the entry for the cemetery on Schönhauser Allee. The second Jewish cemetery in Berlin, established in 1827, was listed as a monument of cultural history on the *Zentraldenkmalliste* as early as December 1975. It was typical for an entry on any monument list to include a short description or explanation of the significance of the object, of the person or event it memorialized. In the case of the Jewish cemetery on Schönhauser Allee, three names are listed in parentheses below the entry: Mendelssohn, Liebermann, Meyerbeer.

[36] LAB C Rep. 121, Nr. 436, "Beschlussvorlage – Bezirksdenkmalliste der Hauptstadt der DDR, Berlin," September 21, 1977.
[37] LAB C Rep. 121, Nr. 436, "Kriterien zur Aufnahme von Denkmalen in die Bezirksdenkmalliste," August 27, 1976.

This suggests that it was because these figures[38] were buried in the cemetery, it was eligible for preservation and protection as a historical monument.

In contrast, the site of the oldest Jewish cemetery in Berlin on Große-Hamburger-Straße was included on the 1977 *Bezirksdenkmalliste* as a monument to political history, alongside a memorial to the founding of the *Spartakusbund* (the group led by communists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht that led the 1918 Revolution), several memorials of antifascist resistance fighters, and a memorial to Karl Marx. By way of explanation for the cemetery's inclusion on the list is the note, "Memorial site for the 50,000 Jewish victims who were murdered by fascists in the concentration camps at Auschwitz and Theresienstadt."[39] Indeed, the Nazis used a space in front of the cemetery as a gathering place for Berlin's Jews before deporting them to the camps, a fact that was memorialized with the erection of a bronze plaque and group of sculptures in 1985.[40] The green space of the former cemetery—active between 1672 and 1827 as a Jewish cemetery, destroyed by the Gestapo in 1943, and used as a mass grave in April 1945—was included in an "Ensemble" of sites on Große-Hamburger-Straße and neighboring Sophienstraße on the list of architectural monuments.[41]

The cemeteries on Schönhauser Allee and Große-Hamburger-Straße demonstrate the subjectivity that pervaded historic preservation, even with the passage of new law intended to standardize the practice across the country. A Jewish cemetery could be recognized as a

[38] They are philosopher Moses Mendelssohn; artist and one-time president of the Prussian Art Academy Max Liebermann (who a different later list of "selected gravestones" noted had been "removed from his position by the fascists"); and composer Giacomo Meyerbeer. LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 626, "Übersicht über ausgewählte Grabstätten und Grabanlagen auf den Jüdischen Friedhöfen in der Hauptstadt, die mit staatlichen Mitteln erhalten, restauriert und gepflegt werden sollten," January 29, 1981.
[39] LAB C Rep. 121, Nr. 436, "Bezirksdenkmalliste der Hauptstadt der DDR – Berlin," September 1977.
[40] Goldman, "From Ravensbrück to Berlin," 140.
[41] The rest of the ensemble is made up of the eighteenth-century Protestant Sophienkirche and associated cemetery, neobaroque houses on Große-Hamburger-Straße, the former location of a Jewish boys' school, and the former location of the first nursing home of the Jewish community. LAB C Rep. 121, Nr. 436, "Bezirksdenkmalliste der Hauptstadt der DDR – Berlin," September 1977.

monument to cultural history, architectural history, or political history, dependent on the aspects emphasized and, implicitly, the degree to which it contributed to the SED's antifascist message. More notably, in only one instance—that of the Große-Hamburger-Straße listed as a political historical monument—was the fact that these cemeteries represented a significant part of Jewish life in Berlin considered relevant enough to include in the object's description, and in no instance did a Jewish cemetery appear to be listed as a way of celebrating German-Jewish history.

As for the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee, an entry in an earlier draft of the *Bezirksdenkmalliste* from March 1976 simply lists the names of three people buried there,[42] similar to the listing of the cemetery on Schönhauser Allee. In the official 1977 list, however, the note accompanying the cemetery's entry is, "The largest Jewish cemetery in Western Europe, with many figures from various fields."[43] In addition, in the declaration of the cemetery's monument status, it is specified that the cemetery "in its entirety"—from the gravestones to the "yellow-brick buildings [and] arcades with Corinthian columns," to the landscaping—comes under the law's protection.[44]

The new status conferred to the cemetery did not markedly change it, at least not immediately. The Gemeinde still struggled to take care of it; by 1980 there were only 14 employees to maintain and keep clear all 115,000 gravesites.[45] The Ministry of Culture increased annual funding to the Gemeinde allocated specifically for cemetery reparation and restoration—as much as 170,000 Marks in 1981, more than five times as much was provided to the Gemeinde

[42] They were Albert Fraenkel, a doctor who discovered the cause of pneumonia; Oskar Blumenthal, a theater critic and director of Berlin's Lessing Theater; and Kurt Lesser, a graphic artist. LAB C Rep. 121, Nr. 436, "Entwurf der Bezirksdenkmalliste," March 21, 1976.
[43] LAB C Rep. 121, Nr. 436, "Bezirksdenkmalliste der Hauptstadt der DDR – Berlin," September 1977.
[44] CJA 5 A 1, Nr. 675, "Denkmalerklärung –Jüdischer Friedhof Herbert-Baum-Straße 45," September 21, 1977.
[45] Lothar Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel: die jüdischen Gemeinden in der SBZ/DDR und ihre Behandlung durch Partei und Staat 1945-1990* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1997), 260.

30 years earlier for the same purposes[46]—and surveyed of the state of the cemetery, identifying areas in need of attention, which were many, and making plans to address them, such as directing the Magistrat to send people to assist the caretakers.[47] Beginning in 1980, about 40 members of the Freie Deutsche Jugend *Studentensommer* ("student summer") program spent two to three weeks each summer doing repair and custodial work on the cemetery, cutting down trees and mowing the lawn.[48] But there was always more to repair. During one of his meetings with local politicians to keep the Magistrat up to date on the needs of the Gemeinde, chairman Peter Kirchner informed deputy mayor for internal affairs Günther Hoffmann of various areas in need of repair at that moment in July 1980, such as a wall of the Schönhauser Allee cemetery and certain significant gravesites in the Weissensee cemetery. Kirchner noted that the arrival of the *Studentensommer* participants was so helpful, that he requested the program continue each year thereafter.[49]

The relationship between the Gemeinde and the regime thus remained largely consistent with that of the past decades: Jews struggled to care for the Weissensee cemetery and asked for financial assistance from the government, but many, especially leaders of Jewish communities across the DDR, still defended and praised the SED for supporting them. Evidence of this can be

[46] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 596, "Abrechnung über den Zuschuß des Magistrats von Berlin von 170.000,-- M," February 26, 1981; LAB C Rep. 101-04, Nr. 28, Letter from the Jewish Gemeinde of Berlin to the mayor, May 31, 1949; LAB C Rep. 101-04, Nr. 28, Letter from Siegmund Weltlinger, Office of Church Matters, to the mayor, June 7, 1949.
[47] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 596, "Instandsetzungs- und Unterhaltungsarbeiten auf den Friedhöfen der Jüdischen Femeinde in den letzten 2 Jahren," January 1976; LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 626, "Untersuchung zur Umgestaltung der Jüdischen Friedhöfe in der Hauptstadt der DDR, Berlin," September, 26, 1977; LAB C Rep. 101, Nr. 626, "Stand der Realisierung der Maßnahmen zur Unterstützung der Jüdischen Gmeeinde von Berlin bei den Erhaltungs- und Instandsetzungsarbeiten auf den jüdischen Friedhöfen in der Hauptstadt," September 8, 1980.
[48] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 626, "Zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Realisierung von Maßnahmen zur Unterstützung der jüdischen Gemeinde von Berlin bei den Erhaltungs- und Instandsetzungsarbeiten auf den jüdischen Friedhöfen in der Hauptstadt," n.d., but references several dates in 1980.
[49] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 626, "Notiz über das Gespräch des Stellvertreters des Oberbürgermeisters für Inneres, Genossen Hoffmann, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Jüdischen Gemeinde von Berlin, Herrn Dr. Kirchner, am 17. 7. 80," July 23, 1980.

seen in documentation from the fortieth anniversary of the Novemberpogrom in 1978, when the state and the association of Jewish communities across the country co-sponsored a series of events in commemoration of the Nazis' terror. In a published collection of the speeches from the events, many speeches by Jewish leaders expressed gratitude toward the SED. "Living in respect and security in the socialist German state" was the title of one of the speeches, given by the president of the national association of Jewish communities Helmut Aris.[50] In the foreword to the collection published by the association, Aris wrote, "A deep 'thank you' goes out to our fatherland, the German Democratic Republic, which, through its humanistic constitution, guarantees us all the rights of free people, including the free exercise of religion."[51] These speeches did, however, mark a divergence from the previous decades in two noteworthy ways: first, embedded in the title of the collection of speeches, *Gedenke! Vergiss nie!* (Remember! Never forget!), was a clear recognition of Jews' victimhood through the Holocaust that the SED had consistently rejected. Secondly, only a few of the speeches made mention of 'neo-Nazi' or 'neo-fascist' tendencies there. For perhaps the first time, the state did not use Jewish suffering or discussion of antisemitism to compare itself with the BRD for political leverage (though a contrast is implicit in several mentions of "the socialist German state").[52]

Whether the SED assigned people to care for the cemetery as purely "propagandistic and publicity work assignments," as Lothar Mertens claims,[53] or whether it felt responsible for its state of disrepair and now felt propelled to act on it, recognizing the Weissensee cemetery's protected status, is not entirely clear. What is clear, however, is that a failure to demonstrate

[50] Helmut Aris, "Leben in Achtung und Geborgenheit im sozialistischen deutschen Staat," *Gedenke! Vergiss nie! 40. Jahrestag des faschistischen "Kristallnacht"-Pogroms* (Berlin: Union Verlag, 1979), 11.
[51] Helmut Aris, "Vorwort," *Gedenke! Vergiss nie!* 7.
[52] Two other speeches—not given by members of the Jewish community but by politicians (one from the CDU, one from the SED, respectively)—were titled "The socialist German state has become a homeland for her German citizens" and "We can be proud of our socialist German Democratic Republic." *Gedenke! Vergiß nie!* 23, 44.
[53] Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel,* 262.

support of the Gemeinde in this material way would have been used as evidence of the SED's neglectful or actively harmful of treatments of Jews within the DDR by the Western media, which continued to portray the East German government as oppressive and backwards. The SED's dependency on the Jewish community in this way thus remained consistent in the new era of international attention; it perhaps became even more important. One article in the *Los Angeles Times* in October 1977 cited a shrinking Jewish population as the root of most of the Gemeinde's problems, but also faulted the regime for apathy toward the cemetery in particular. Kirchner, the chair of the Gemeinde, was quoted in the article saying, "The government doesn't really care. It knows the East German Jews are gradually dying out. The cemetery is overgrown with weeds and trees. It's a disgrace."[54] Coverage from West Germany also tended to highlight the failures of the SED, such as in one *Tagesspiegel* article from 1979 reporting on the disrepair of East Berlin's cemeteries that concluded with the following damning remark: "What the Nazis couldn't accomplish is now being taken care of by the ravages of time."[55] Such negative reporting—drawing a direct association between the Nazis and the SED, which the SED had spent its entire existence denying—was not inconsequential to East German leaders, either, evidenced by the fact that the *Tagesspiegel* article had been clipped out and saved in the Magistrat's files.[56]

The Magistrat addressed worry about negative press head on, such as during that July 1980 meeting with Kirchner, when Deputy Mayor Hoffmann asked if there had been any work relating to public relations. Kirchner replied that in the Weissensee cemetery there was currently one film being filmed, and another awaiting approval from the state secretary for church

[54] "For East Berlin's Tiny Jewish Community, Attrition Is Now the Deadliest Enemy," October 11, 1977, *Los Angeles Times*.
[55] "Was die Nazis übrigließen, verwildert in Vergessenheit," November 25, 1979, *Tagesspiegel*.
[56] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 626.

matters.[57] In internal correspondence, too, local officials warned against the damaging effects of such negative press, not necessarily on the SED's reputation abroad but apparently on the Jewish citizens of East Berlin themselves. When the Gemeinde requested 300,000 Marks to repair its synagogue on Rykestraße in March 1976, the Office of Internal Affairs determined that it could cover the cost of repair, but not the cost of scaffolding required to complete the repair. However, in a notice to the mayor of East Berlin, Kurt Helbig, the deputy mayor for interior and executive affairs, urged,

> For political reasons, we consider it necessary not to postpone the repair of the synagogue, the only place of worship of the Gemeinde in the capital. Right now the Jewish community [and] its chairman Dr. Kirchner, are being attacked and slandered in the mass media of West Berlin and the BRD for their position against Zionism.[58]

While East German Jews did face criticism from abroad, largely about the DDR's refusal to pay reparations to survivors of the Holocaust and for its anti-Zionist stance,[59] Jews in the DDR who were sympathetic to Israel were not safe from the SED's slander as "Zionists," either; this paper has already outlined several instances of the SED using the label "Zionist" to discredit Jews who opposed the regime. East Germany's long-standing anti-Israel foreign policy stance on anti-imperialist grounds culminated in 1975, when the DDR voted in favor of a UN resolution declaring Zionism a form of racism.[60]

While the SED had espoused an anti-Israel policy tinged with antisemitism for years, it was only in the mid-1970s, after the DDR supported the UN resolution, that the policy received

[57] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 626, Notiz über das Gespräch des Stellvertreters des Oberbürgermeisters für Inneres, Genossen Hoffmann, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Jüdischen Gemeinde von Berlin, Herrn Dr. Kirchner, am 17. 7. 80," July 23, 1980.
[58] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 596, "Aktennotiz für den Oberbürgermeister," March 25, 1976.
[59] "Behind the Headlines the Jews of East Germany," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 7, 1981,
[60] Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 2016), 288.

significant pushback from East Germans—especially non-Jewish East Germans.[61] This was one example of a wider development across the East German population that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, a development that proved most important for the protection and restoration of Jewish sites. While many aspects of the past few decades remained consistent—the Jews' dependence on the government for support, the SED's concern for Jewish sites primarily out of concern for its own image—the attitude of average citizens had begun to change. They began questioning and critiquing the actions of the SED towards its Jewish citizens in a broader movement for human rights, garnering international attention that previous protests did not. One case in 1986, when a peculiar plan to build a street over the Weissensee cemetery became public, shows the coalescence of East German activists around a site of distinct Jewish importance. The SED came under fire by citizens for violating the protected status of the cemetery, eventually forcing the government to change course.

In the mid-1980s the Berlin Magistrat began discussions on a plan to build a road through the Weissensee cemetery. The construction plan originated when the cemetery was first established, in 1880, to connect the outer neighborhood of Berlin to the city center, and back then the area promised to the city government did not actually transect the cemetery. The Jewish community signed a treaty in 1915, agreeing to not bury any bodies in the promised area. But the Jewish community foresaw a future need for expansion and included in the second paragraph its intent to buy the land on the other side of the promised area and continue the cemetery there.[62] Whether due to war or simply oversight, construction never began, and the 300-meter-long and

[61] In particular, Protestant leaders were vocal critics of the DDR's endorsement of the UN resolution. See Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 186-187.
[62] Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee*, 39-40.

36-meter-wide area remained empty as the Jewish community continued to expand and bury its members, even opening a second entrance for the cemetery.

Then, 70 years later, the plans for a major connecting road through the cemetery were once again relevant because of the establishment of Hohenschönhausen, a new district on the outskirts of Berlin. The Gemeinde did not outwardly oppose the plans, since the area had been kept clear for this purpose. The plans also had proposed a new, somewhat less intrusive design for the road: a six-lane road slightly below the level of the cemetery, with a bridge over the road connecting the two parts of the cemetery, rather than the original ploughed road directly through the cemetery.[63] The Gemeinde thus agreed to the construction, in principle, in June 1986 in a letter to the City Council for Interior Matters, requesting that the construction not create "inconsiderable difficulties for the cemetery operation, the work of the employees, nor for visitors."[64]

While the leadership of the Gemeinde, cognizant of its dependence on the government, may not have been in a position to loudly protest the construction, other citizens, Jews and non-Jews alike, prodded the government for answers about the plans, in line with a broader movement across the DDR for greater transparency and attention to human rights from the SED. Almost immediately after the Gemeinde agreed to the plan in June 1986, letters arrived from Stefan Heym, a Jewish and socialist author who had fled Germany in the 1930s and studied in the U.S. before returning to the DDR. Despite his ideological leanings, he had been critical of the SED for its censorship of writers. The road construction was one more instance of the regime's

[63] Wauer, *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee*, 128.
[64] Cited in Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel*, 266.

infringements on citizens' civil rights in the DDR; the proposed route was also in close proximity to the grave of Heym's wife.[65]

Another leader of the human rights movement in East Berlin was artist Bärbel Bohley, who wrote a letter to the SED's Central Committee protesting the construction over the cemetery. Bohley had collected 130 signatures on the letter and sent it to East Berlin Mayor Erhard Krack, as well, in July 1986. It was "irresponsible to destroy a piece of cultural history," Bohley wrote, "that is not only of the Jews' history, but of ours as well," recalling the same language used by the Berlin government to justify historic preservation a decade earlier.[66] Making matters more uncomfortable for politicians, Bohley shared her complaints and the story of the government's hypocritical actions with members of the Western press, ushering in an avalanche of requests from Western media companies to film and photograph the cemetery. The East Berlin Magistrat denied media requests and the claim that the cemetery would be divided, following the advice of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which granted external media permission and warned in an internal report that the story would be "played up by imperialist media as 'cemetery desecration'" in order to "disparage the DDR."[67]

The case of Thomas Heise, who sent two letters several months apart inquiring about the construction plans, allows us to understand how one person's opinion could change on the matter, and perhaps points to a changing mindset among the population as a whole. Heise, a resident of the Friedrichshain neighborhood of Berlin who "closely follows the development of Berlin," sent a letter to the editors at the *Berliner Zeitung* in April 1986 asking if there existed plans to build a street through the cemetery. The letter's tone was deferent to the SED: "I notice

[65] Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel*, 267.
[66] Protestbrief vom 6. Juli 1986, cited in Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel*, 267.
[67] Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel*, 266.

those projects designed and implemented with great dedication and love, how the party of the working class cares for the well-being of its citizens," he wrote. The question was also not intended to be accusatory; Heise offered his speculations about the roads that could be extended through the cemetery, finding the plan an extremely beneficial one that would "enormously" save time.[68] Evidently, the paper's editors had responded that they were not aware of any such plans, for several months later, in September, Heise sent a second letter to the *Berliner Zeitung* after learning from the Gemeinde's president Kirchner that there were, in fact, such plans. In stark contrast to the previous letter, Heise's tone turns accusatory and defiant. He deeply regrets that such a "mistake of urban construction" could take place, and that the paper was uninformed of the plan was "inexcusable." He continued,

> A road through the cemetery has not only irreparable ecological consequences; it also turns the formula (*Formel*) of moral and ethical responsibility toward the Jewish people into a hypocritical formula! Inform the readers of your paper aobut the construction work and call on them, as responsible citizens, to speak out.[69]

The paper's publishers forwarded the letter to the deputy mayor for internal affairs Günter Hoffmann and requested that he respond directly to Heise.[70] Hoffmann did a month later, assuring Heise, in one sentence, that there were no plans to build a street through the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee.[71] Indeed, by the time Hoffmann responded to Heise the plans for the construction had been called off by Erich Honecker himself after hearing from "the other side,"[72]

Once again, the fear of ostracism on an international stage forced the SED to change its course and messaging. This was a new phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s as the DDR gained

---

[68] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 596, Letter from Thomas Heise to BZA editors, April 20, 1986.
[69] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 596, Letter from Thomas Heise to BZA editors, September 23, 1986.
[70] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 596, Letter from Berliner Verlag Central Correspondence Department to Deputy Mayor for Internal Affairs Günter Hoffmann,
[71] LAB C Rep. 104, Nr. 596, Letter from Günter Hoffmann to Thomas Heise, October 21, 1986.
[72] Letter from Erich Honecker to Heinz Galinski, October 1, 1986. Cited in Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel*, 269.

international attention, for both good reasons and bad. Something also changed within the DDR, however, as a result of Cold War détente, and it was the role of DDR citizens. Stefan Heym, Bärbel Bohley, and Thomas Heise were only a few activists who spoke out against the SED's abuses of civil and human rights, in the one instance highlighted here, on behalf of the struggling Jewish community of East Berlin. But their activism could happen because of a confluence of international geopolitical decisions and domestic ideological strategy. The citizens of the DDR challenged the SED, using the very same language the SED had used to talk about human rights and historic preservation to force the state to adapt, and, eventually, it succeeded.

Conclusion

Around the time Honecker called off the plans to build a road over the Weissensee cemetery, conversation about Jewish life in East Germany—or the lack thereof—seemed to reach a fever pitch. More and more Western newspapers began reporting on "How the other Germans treat their Jews,"[1] noting, as Richard Kostelanetz did, the state of disrepair of such sites as the cemeteries and the (embarrassingly) still bombed-out synagogue on Oranienburger Straße. Stories about neo-Nazis in the DDR and accusations that the SED had been complacent in the face of "virulent" antisemitism "stung" the party, and its leaders promised to launch investigations into such claims.[2] Domestic interest in Jewish history and culture also increased. Irene Runge, a native New Yorker who moved to East Germany as a child, founded a Jewish cultural group in 1986 called "*Wir für uns*" ("For ourselves"). A member of the generation of Jews who grew up in the DDR, often to Communist parents who rejected their Jewish heritage, Runge felt distant from her Jewishness but found the organized Gemeinde unwelcoming, desiring a space to become reacquainted with Jewish religion and culture outside without the limits of orthodoxy.[3]

Interest in Jewish culture and history among Christians particularly grew in the 1980s, as they began to question the Church's complicity in the Holocaust and the DDR's handling of the Nazi past.[4] The Conference of the Protestant Leadership wrote, "An enormous guilt lies on our people … In light of the failure and manifest guilt of Christianity, today everything must be done

---

[1] Frank Johnson, "How the other Germans treat their Jews," *The Times (London)*, September 6, 1985.
[2] Leslie Colitt, "E. Germany stung by anti-Semitism claim," *Financial Times*, August 10, 1988.
[3] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 187; Ostow, *Jews in Contemporary East Germany,* 47. Other members of this second generation of Jews in the DDR are notable authors such as Chaim Noll and Barbara Honigmann. Max Lazar, "Strangers in Their Own Communities: Second-Generation Jews in Divided Germany, 1945-1989" (M.A., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2016); Elena Lappin, ed., *Jewish Voices, German Words: Growing up Jewish in Postwar Germany and Austria*, First edition (North Haven, CT: Catbird Press, 1994).
[4] Goldman, "From Ravensbrück to Berlin," 159-162; Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 186.

to spread knowledge about historic and contemporary Jewry."[5] Other groups came out stronger against the DDR and the SED directly, such as leaders of the East German Protestant peace movement who wrote in 1985 that "the great majority of the people who then became citizens of the DDR" were complicit in the Nazi terror because of "their passivity and silence."[6]

In 1988, the year that would mark fifty years since the Novemberpogrom of 1938, Honecker introduced the SED's most ambitious project yet in honor of the Jewish community: the restoration of the Neue Synagoge on Oranienburger Straße and creation of a Jewish museum inside. The decision came after the SED had previously rejected five requests to build a Jewish museum—the most recent in 1981. Klaus Gysi, a Communist of Jewish descent who was the state secretary for church matters at the time, suggested that the move was potentially a sign of the DDR's willingness to accept responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime.[7] Indeed, the previous year, Honecker had begun discussions with the World Jewish Congress about restitution for emigrated Jews of German descent.[8] In November, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Novemberpogrom, the state broke ground on the synagogue as it hosted lectures, film screenings, and other events about German-Jewish history.

In the summer of 1989, the East Berlin Magistrat announced a competition, in collaboration with local artists and architects, for the design of a monument to honor "the work of Jewish citizens in Berlin, to reflect on their persecution and to honor their resistance."[9] But it was never completed, interrupted by a different crisis for the SED: the unintentional opening of

---

[5] Statement of the Conference of the Protestant Leadership, September 24, 1978, cited in Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 186.
[6] Markus Meckel and Martin Gutzeit, "Der 8. Mai—unsere Verantwortung für den Frieden," cited in Herf, *Divided Memory*, 363.
[7] Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 191-192.
[8] Herf, *Divided Memory,* 363.
[9] LAB C Rep 121, Nr. 799, "Protokoll der Arbeit der Verprüfungskommission zur Vorbereitung der Juryarbeit für den Wettbewerb zur Errichtung einer Denkmalanlage über das Wirken jüdischer Bürger in Berlin, zum Gedanken an ihre Verfolgung und zur Würdigung ihres Widerstandes," June 9, 1989.

the borders with the West and the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. It had come after months of peaceful protests by East German citizens, calling for greater freedom to travel and protection of human rights. Once the wall had fallen, it appeared the East German experiment had as well: Citizens no longer believed in a wall that was put up to keep out the fascists on the other side, if they ever believed it in the first place.[10] The Peaceful Revolution of 1989 introduced the first real free, democratic elections in the DDR in March 1990, when the people voted out the SED in favor of a political party called the "Alliance for Germany." Christian Democrat Lothar de Maizière was elected prime minister on a platform promising reunification, and one of his first acts upon taking office on April 12, 1990, was to accept responsibility, on behalf of the East German people, for the crimes of the Nazis.[11] De Maizière's short tenure as the first and only democratically elected prime minister of the German Democratic Republic ended on Ovtober 3, 1990, when the DDR became part of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Reunification brought with it great upheaval of many aspects of the lives of former East Germans. In the case of the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee, the years following reunification saw the initiation of dozens of restoration projects, an effort to restore each overturned, overgrown, still war torn gravesite in one of the largest Jewish cemeteries in Europe.[12] In 2005, for the 125th anniversary of the cemetery's consecration, supporters of the cemetery encouraged the local government to increase funding in order to make a bid to add the cemetery to the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites, which the Berlin *Senat* agreed to do in conjunction with the Jewish community and the Foundation of the Neue Synagoge - Centrum

[10] Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 31.
[11] Timm, *Jewish Claims against East Germany*, 179.
[12] *Der Jüdische Friedhof in Berlin-Weissensee: Ein Wegweiser durch seine GeschichteI,* 9-11.

Judaicum.[13] Though the cemetery was not chosen for the list, work continues to this day to survey and restore each of its over 115,000 gravestones.

The goal of this project is not to make an indictment of the SED and the DDR for only honoring its Jewish citizens and the sites important to their history—indeed, recognizing them as part of East German history—when it appeared global pressure demanded it. It was, rather, to understand why that may have been the case. The answer comes down to survival, for both the Jews and the regime. In a position of great vulnerability, still subjected to antisemitism and persecution for their religion—albeit a different brand of it—the small population of Jews in East Germany had just enough bargaining power, without speaking out against the SED, to just maintain its services and properties. The SED, on the other hand, balanced a myth of antifascist resistance with an image of progressiveness and legitimacy, either of which could be undermined by a dissatisfied Jewish community. The fate of one was intertwined with the other, until, in the case of the Jewish community, others started to notice injustice and protested to stop it.

Today, some consider the German term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("coming to terms with the past") to have two meanings: it's original meaning, dealing with the memory of the Nazi regime and its war and genocide, and, after reunification, dealing with the memory of the East German dictatorship and its extensive, nearly omniscient surveillance state, restrictions on freedom, and oppression of dissident voices.[14] Opponents of the SED have drawn parallels between two the undemocratic regimes. The aforementioned leaders of the East German Protestant peace movement disparaged the DDR in 1985, "Coming to terms with the past

[13] Klaus Wowereit, "Preface," in *115,628 Berliners: The Weissensee Jewish Cemetery – Documentation of the Comprehensive Survey of the Burial Sites*, 6.
[14] Claudia Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, 272-273.

includes the obligation to actively oppose the system of fear and threat and injustice and misuse of power within our own society."[15] Even scholars of today have compared the two, as James E. Young did, somewhat glibly, in discussing the SED's reluctance to accept Jews as victims of fascism:

> to mourn the victims of anti-Jewish terror was perceived as deflecting from the mission at hand: it was to identify with those who liberated the camps and not with the victims of tyranny. For, as victims of past tyranny, East Germans might have identified themselves a little too easily as victims of current tyranny, as well.[16]

The similarities seem even stronger when considering a particular strain of work on the Jewish experience in the DDR, where Jews lived "between repression and tolerance,"[17] just to be "instrumentalized" by the party and state.[18]

To interpret the story of Jews in the DDR in these ways, however, is to understand Jews simply as victims of SED repression, or beneficiaries of regime patronage only when politically convenient for the party. But in reality, Jews in East Germany preserved their traditions, their properties, and themselves with creativity and persistence—and occasionally a little external support. To recall the words Felix Bergmann wrote to protest the Buchenwald memorial in 1960, "We have survived German fascism, and we are preparing to outlast the DDR, too."

[15] Meckel and Gutzeit, "Der 8. Mai—unsere Verantwortung für den Frieden," cited in Herf, *Divided Memory*, 364.
[16] Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 77.
[17] Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden: Zwischen Repression und Toleranz: politische Entwicklung bis 1967*.
[18] Illichmann, *Die DDR und die Juden: die deutschlandpolitische Instrumentalisierung von Juden und Judentum durch die Partei- und Staatsführung der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis 1990*.

Bibliography

Archives (online and institutional)

Archiv der Stiftung "Neue Synagoge Berlin—Centrum Judaicum" (Centrum Judaicum Archiv)
5 A 1 Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin nach 1945
5 B 1 Verband der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der DDR
DigiBaeck—Digital Collections at Leo Baeck Institute
Landesarchiv Berlin
C Rep. 101 Magistrat von Berlin, Oberbürgermeister
C Rep. 101-04 Magistrat von Berlin, Beirat für kirchliche Angelegenheiten/Amt für Kirchenfragen
C Rep. 104 Magistrat von Berlin, Bereich Inneres
C Rep. 121 Magistrat von Berlin, Abteilung Kultur
German History in Documents and Images

Newspapers Consulted

Berliner Zeitung
Financial Times
Jewish Telegraphic Agency
Neue Zeit
Neues Deutschland
The Los Angeles Times
The New York Times
The Times (London)

Interviews, Speeches, and Memoirs

Eschwege, Helmut. *Fremd unter meinesgleichen: Erinnerungen eines Dresdener Juden.* Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 1991.

Gedenke! Vergiss nie! 40. Jahrestag des faschistischen "Kristallnacht"-Pogroms. Eine Dokumentation herausgegeben vom Verband der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der DDR. Berlin: Union Verlag, 1979.

Honigmann, Barbara. *Roman von einem Kinde: Sechs Erzählungen*. Hamburg: Luchterband Literaturverlag, 1989.
---. *Damals, dann und danach.* Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999.

Lappin, Elena, ed. *Jewish Voices, German Words: Growing up Jewish in Postwar Germany and Austria*. First edition. North Haven, CT: Catbird Press, 1994.

Ostow, Robin. *Jews in Contemporary East Germany: The Children of Mosesin the Land of Marx*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
---. *Juden aus der DDR und die deutsche Wiedervereinigung: Elf Gespräche*. Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 1996.

Schneider, Richard Chaim. *Wir sind da!: Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland von 1945 bis heute*. Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 2000.

Edited Volumes, Dissertations, and Monographs

115,628 Berliners: The Weissensee Jewish Cemetery – Documentation of the Comprehensive Survey of the Burial Sites. Berlin: Landesdenkmalamt, 2013.

Campbell, Brian William. "Resurrected from the Ruins, Turning to the Past: Historic Preservation in the SBZ/GDR 1945–1990." Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2005.

Der Jüdische Friedhof in Berlin-Weissensee: Ein Wegweiser durch seine Geschichte. Berlin: edition progris, 2003.

Eckel, Jan, and Samuel Moyn, eds. *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in The 1970s*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.

Etzold, Alfred, Joachim Fait, Peter Kirchner, and Heinz Knobloch. *Jüdische Friedhöfe in Berlin.* Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1987.

Fink, Carole and Bernd Schäfer, eds. *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974: European and Global Responses*, Publications of the German Historical Institute. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Fox, Thomas C. *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999.

Galliner, Nicola, ed. *Wegweiser durch das jüdische Berlin: Geschichte und Gegenwart.* Berlin: Nicolai, 1987.

Geller, Jay Howard. *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Geller, Jay Howard and Michael Meng, eds. *Rebuilding Jewish Life in Germany*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020.

Gillis, John R., ed. *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Haftendorn, Helga. *Coming of Age: German Foreign Policy since 1945*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Hartewig, Karin. *Zurückgekehrt: die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR*. Köln: Böhlau, 2000.

Hartman, Geoffrey, ed. *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994.

Haspel, Jörg and Hubert Staroste, eds. *Denkmalpflege in der DDR: Rückblicke.,* Berlin: Nicolai, 2014.

Herf, Jeffrey. *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

---. *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967–1989.* Cambridge: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 2016.

Illichmann, Jutta. *Die DDR und die Juden: die deutschlandpolitische Instrumentalisierung von Juden und Judentum durch die Partei- und Staatsführung der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis 1990*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXXI, Politikwissenschaft ; Bd. 336. Frankfurt am Main: PLang, 1997.

Kessler, Mario. *Die SED und die Juden: zwischen Repression und Toleranz: politische Entwicklung bis 1967*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995.

Koshar, Rudy. *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Krüger-Potratz, Marianne. *Anderssein gab es nicht: Ausländer und Minderheiten in der DDR.* Münster: Waxmann, 1991.

Ladd, Brian. *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Lazar, Max. "Strangers in Their Own Communities: Second-Generation Jews in Divided Germany, 1945-1989." M.A., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2016.

Melcher, Peter. *Weissensee: Ein Friedhof Als Spiegelbild Jüdischer Geschichte in Berlin*. Berlin: Haude & Spener, 1986.

Meng, Michael. *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Mertens, Lothar. *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel: die jüdischen Gemeinden in der SBZ/DDR und ihre Behandlung durch Partei und Staat 1945-1990*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1997.

Morris, Leslie and Jack Zipes, eds. *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Nothnagle, Alan. *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999.

Reuter, Elke, and Detlef Hansel. *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953: die Geschichte der Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR*. Berlin: Ed. Ost, 1997.

Sarotte, M. E. *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Detente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Schmidt, Monika. *Schändungen jüdischer Friedhöfe in der DDR: Eine Dokumentation*. Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2007.

Schulz, Felix Robin. *Death in East Germany, 1945-1990*. New York: Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2013.

Schumacher-Lange, Silke. "Denkmalpflege und Repräsentationskultur in der DDR. Der Wiederaufbau der Straße Unter den Linden 1945 – 1989.," PhD diss., Universität Hildesheim, 2012.

Thomas, Daniel. *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism.* Princeton: Princeton Univeristy Press, 2001.

Timm, Angelika. *Jewish Claims against East Germany: Moral Obligations and Pragmatic Policy*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1997.

Wauer, Britta. *Der jüdische Friedhof Weissensee: Momente der Geschichte = The Weissensee Jewish cemetery: moments in history*. Berlin: Berlin-Ed. im be.bra-Verl., 2010.

Weiss, Leah Kate. "An Einheitsgemeinde in Divided Berlin: Jewish Identity from 1945-1953." Bowdoin College Honors Project, 2011.

Young, James E. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Scholarly Articles and Book Chapters

Betts, Paul. "Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights: The Case of East Germany." *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3, no. 3 (October 31, 2012): 407–26.

Deiters, Ludwig. “Das Institut für Denkmalpflege in der DDR—Erinnerungen und Reflexionen.” In *Denkmalpflege in der DDR: Rückblicke,* edited by Jörg Haspel and Hubert Staroste, 16-46. Berlin: Nicolai, 2014.

Edemskiy, Andrey. “Dealing with Bonn: Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet Response to West German Ostpolitik.” In *Ostpolitik, 1969-1974: European and Global Responses*, edited by Carole Fink and Bernd Schäfer, 15-38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Elkin, Rivka. “The Survival of the Jewish Hospital in Berlin, 1938-1945.” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 38 (1993): 157-192.

Eschwege, Helmut. “The Churches and the Jews in the German Democratic Republic.” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 37 (1992): 497-513.

Goldman, Natasha. “From Ravensbrück to Berlin: Will Lammert’s Monument to the Deported Jews 1957/1985.” *IMAGES* 9, no. 1 (May 2016): 140–63.

Herf, Jeffrey. “East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of Paul Merker.” Alois Mertes Memorial Lecture, no. 11. Washington, D.C: German Historical Institute, 1994.

Koonz, Claudia. “Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory.” In *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, edited by John R. Gillis, 258-280. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Krisch, Henry. “Political Legitimation in the German Democratic Republic.” In *Political Legitimation in Communist States,* edited by T.H. Rigby and Ferene Fehér, 111-125. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982.

Loesdau, Alfred. “German History and National Identity in the GDR.” In *Studies in GDR Culture and Society* 7, edited by Margy Gerber. New York: University Press of America, 1987.

Meng, Michael. “East Germany’s Jewish Question: The Return and Preservation of Jewish Sites in East Berlin and Potsdam, 1945–1989.” *Central European History* 38, no. 4 (December 2005): 606–36.

Meyer, Susan. “Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens’s ‘Oliver Twist.’” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2005): 239–52.

Monteath, P. “A Day to Remember: East Germany’s Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism.” *German History* 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 195–218.

Nothnagle, Alan. “From Buchenwald to Bismarck: Historical Myth-Building in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989.” *Central European History* 26, no. 1 (1993): 91–113.

Ostow, Robin. “The Shaping of Jewish Identity in the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1989.” *Critical Sociology* 17, no. 3 (October 1, 1990): 47–59.

Richardon-Little, Ned. “Dictatorship and Dissent: Human Rights in East Germany in the 1970s.” In *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s*, edited by Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, 49-67. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.