



Amieke Bouma

German Post-Socialist Memory Culture

Epistemic Nostalgia

Amsterdam
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List of Abbreviations

AAÜG	Gesetz zur Überleitung der Ansprüche und Anwartschaften aus Zusatz- und Sonderversorgungssystemen der DDR [Law on the Transfer of Claims and Entitlements for Additional and Special Retirement Schemes of the GDR]
ABF	Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultät [Workers and Peasants' Faculty]
AEK	Alternative Enquête Kommission Deutsche Zeitgeschichte [Alternative Commission of Inquiry into German Contemporary History]
AG	Arbeitsgruppe [working group]
AK	Arbeitskreis [working group]
AKGKS	Antifaschistisches Komitee gegen Krieg und Sozialraub [Antifascist Committee against War and Social Theft]
ALV	Arbeitslosenverband Deutschland [German Association of the Unemployed]
BAG	Berliner Alternatives Geschichtsforum [Berlin Alternative History Forum]
BDM	Bund Deutscher Mädel
BSG	Oberstes Bundessozialgericht [Supreme Social Court]
BStU	Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik [Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic]
BüSGLH	Bündnis für soziale Gerechtigkeit Berlin-Lichtenberg/Hohenschönhausen [Alliance for Social Justice Berlin-Lichtenberg/Hohenschönhausen]
BüSGM	Bündnis für soziale Gerechtigkeit und Menschenwürde [Alliance for Social Justice and Human Dignity]
BVfS	Berliner Verfassungsschutz [Berlin's security agency]

B'90/Grünen	Bündnis '90/Die Grünen [Alliance '90/The Greens]
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union [Christian Democratic Union]
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik [German Democratic Republic]
DF	Deutscher Friedensrat [German Peace Council]
DFB	Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands [Democratic Women's Federation of Germany]
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund [German Trade Union Federation]
DKP	Deutsche Kommunistische Partei [German Communist Party]
Einigungsvertrag	Vertrag zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über die Herstellung der Einheit Deutschlands [Treaty on the Establishment of German Unity]
EPF	European Peace Forum
FDGB	Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund [Free German Trade Union]
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend [Free German Youth]
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei [Free Democratic Party]
FETG	Freundeskreis "Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte Ziegenhals" [Circle of Friends of the Ernst Thälmann Memorial in Ziegenhals]
FPdR	Freundeskreis Palast der Republik [Circle of Friends of the Palast der Republik]
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FSS	Freundeskreis der Sport-Senioren [Friends' Circle of Sport-Seniors]
GBM	Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde [Society for the Protection of Citizen's Rights and Human Dignity]
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GRH	Gesellschaft zur rechtlichen und humanitären Unterstützung [Society for Legal and Humanitarian Support]
GST	Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik [Society for Sport and Technology]

HIAG	Hilfsgemeinschaft auf Gegenseitigkeit der Angehörigen der ehemaligen Waffen-SS [Mutual Help Community of Members of the Former Waffen-SS]
HSH	Berlin-Hohenschönhausen
HU	Humboldt University
HV-A	Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung des MfS [Main Directorate for Reconnaissance of the MfS, the foreign intelligence service of the MfS]
IM	Informelle Mitarbeiter [“Unofficial Employees”, informants of the Stasi]
Insiderkomitee	Insiderkomitee zur Förderung der kritischen Aneignung der Geschichte des MfS [Insider Committee for the Promotion of Critical Appropriation of the History of the MfS]
IROKK	Initiativgruppe zur Rehabilitierung der Opfer des Kalten Krieges [Initiative Group for the Rehabilitation of Victims of the Cold War]
ISOR	Initiativgemeinschaft zum Schutz der sozialen Rechte ehemaliger Angehöriger bewaffneter Organe und der Zollverwaltung der DDR [Joint Initiative for the Protection of the Social Rights of Former Members of the Armed Bodies and the Customs Administration of the GDR]
IV-VdN	Interessenverband ehemaliger Teilnehmer am antifaschistischen Widerstand, Verfolgter des Naziregimes und Hinterbliebener [Association of Former Participants in the Antifascist Resistance, Persons Persecuted by the Nazi Regime and Their Family Members]
JW	<i>Junge Welt</i>
KdAW	Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer in der DDR
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands [Communist Party of Germany]
KSČM	Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy [Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia]
LAG BW-Dora	Lagerarbeitsgemeinschaft Buchenwald-Dora [Camp work group Buchenwald-Dora]

MfS	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, Stasi [Ministry of State Security]
MLPD	Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands [Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany]
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ND	Neues Deutschland
NVA	Nationale Volksarmee [National People's Army]
OiBE	Offizier im Besonderen Einsatz [Special Operations Officer of the MfS]
OKV	Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden [East German Board of Associations]
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus [Party of Democratic Socialism]
PoW	Prisoner of War
RFB	Revolutionärer Freundschaftsbund Ernst Thälmann und Kameraden [Revolutionary Friendship Union Ernst Thälmann and Comrades]
RFB	Rote Frontkämpferbund [Alliance of Red Front-Fighters]
RÜG	Rentenüberleitungsgesetz [Pension Transfer Act]
SAT-K	Sozialer Arbeitskreis Treptow-Köpenick [Social Working Group of Treptow-Köpenick]
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands [Socialist Unity Party of Germany]
SMAD	Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland [Soviet Military Administration in Germany]
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social Democratic Party of Germany]
TIG	Territoriale Initiativgruppe [Territorial Initiative Groups]
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UOKG	Union der Opferverbände kommunistischer Gewaltherrschaft [Union of Associations of Victims of Communist Tyranny]
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
ver.di	Vereinigte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft [United Services Union]

VFDG	Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaften Förderverein zur Geschichte der Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung [Free German Trade Unions Foundation to Support the History of the German Trade Union Movement]
VKSG	Verband der Kleingärtner, Siedler und Grundstücksnutzer [Association of Allotment Gardeners, Settlers and Plot Users]
VPT	Verband zur Pflege der Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee und der Grenztruppen der DDR [Association for the Maintenance of the Traditions of the National People's Army and the Border Troops of the GDR]
VVN-BdA	Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes-Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten [Association of Persons Persecuted by the Nazi Regime-Union of Antifascists]

Introduction

Abstract

After German reunification, former members of the GDR elite (and in particular of its *Staatssicherheitsdienst* secret service, the Stasi) organized in various self-help organizations that united under the *Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden* (OKV) umbrella. A major function of OKV is the defense of the GDR's historical legitimacy, against the prevailing opinion that the GDR was a state of injustice. This continuation of GDR discourses since the 1990s follows the GDR's political epistemology (to borrow from Andreas Glaeser), understood as specific knowledge-making practices governed by an inflexible political conviction. Today these epistemics lead to the continuing self-isolation of the OKV organizations, preventing them from linking up with other social groups that might otherwise support their goals. At the same time the GDR epistemics allow the OKV to defy any contention.

Keywords: GDR, postsocialist transformation, *Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden*, memory, political epistemology

Getting access

On a bright June day in 2012, I headed to the *Neues Deutschland* building in East Berlin. My aim was to have a conversation with former Stasi members and sympathizers about their personal biographies and the way in which they understand the GDR and unified Germany. I was interested in the historiography of post-socialism, and wanted to learn more about the way in which the “losers” of the *Wende* reflected on their lives in the GDR, a state they had believed in, after its demise. During my initial quest for information, I soon found out that a group of former GDR cadres had united in a number of organizations, under the umbrella of the East German Board of Associations (*Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden*, OKV). Quite unspectacularly, I had found their contact information on the internet, where they host regularly updated websites. Two of the organizations had

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immediately responded to my request for a meeting, and so it was that I trailed to Berlin to see their representatives.

In the course of the encounter, it turned out that my curiosity was met by theirs. A first meeting with two representatives of the OKV's general board (a former professor and a former Stasi officer) quickly turned into an interview apparently designed to assess my motives – most importantly, if I was not intending to publish a scandalous article in the popular press. At the time, I was rather bemused by the string of questions pertaining to my family background – most noticeably including the occupations of my parents and grandparents. Only later did I learn that this was standard Stasi investigation practice.¹ I reported that I was interested not primarily in German issues but in the history and historiography of the former socialist states (at that time I had just finished a project on history and epics in post-Soviet Turkmenistan),² and that I was born in the Netherlands three years before the Berlin Wall came down. My parents and grandparents were all Dutch, and, as a bonus, had started their careers as workers and farmers – which appealed to them since the GDR was, ultimately, conceived of as the “workers’ and peasants’ state” (*Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*). It was, however, my mother’s occupational background in children’s day care which made the most favorable impression on my interviewees; they asked me detailed questions about Dutch day care arrangements, which they contrasted with what they saw as the limited access to day care in East Germany after the fall of the GDR. This neatly fitted into their paradigm that the GDR provided better social care than does the FRG.

Eventually the OKV board, and in particular the organization’s then-president Siegfried Mechler, gave me the green light, and kindly introduced me to several activists from various associations affiliated to the OKV. I understood that the OKV’s organizational culture was rather hierarchical, and this obviously worked to my benefit.

The OKV has been serving as an umbrella for various legal and social support action groups. The biggest OKV member organizations in terms of membership are the *Gesellschaft zum Schutz von Bürgerrecht und Menschenwürde* (GBM), the *Gesellschaft zur rechtlichen und humanitären Unterstützung* (GRH) and the *Initiativgemeinschaft zum Schutz der sozialen Rechte ehemaliger Angehöriger bewaffneter Organe und der Zollverwaltung*

1 I would like to thank Neringa Klumbyte for pointing this out to me.

2 Amieke Bouma, “Turkmenistan: Epics in Place of Historiography”. In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, special issue “Nationen und Geschichtspolitik im Kaukasus und in Zentralasien”, 59(4) (2011), pp. 559–585.

der DDR (ISOR). Most members of these organizations, and especially of ISOR and the GRH, had a professional background in the “Stasi” secret service (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, MfS), army (NVA), or juridical apparatus of the former GDR; in short, they were united in having a profile that after unification made them subject to political and juridical measures of transitional justice. But I also encountered OKV members and sympathizers who had not been involved in the GDR power ministries, but who can still be described as having had positions close to the regime, including numerous professors, foreign traders and cultural workers. While ISOR and other lobby and support groups have certain pragmatic goals (like the elimination of pension reductions), smaller OKV member associations are centered around socialist heritage conservation, and protest against the destruction of GDR buildings and monuments that have tremendous symbolic value to them. Such groups include the *Freundeskreis “Ernst-Thälmann-Gedenkstätte Ziegenhals” e.V.* and the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*. The latter lobbied for the preservation of East Berlin’s “People’s Palace”, the political and cultural centre of the GDR. Since the demolition of this building the *Freundeskreis* maintains mobile exhibitions on the *Palast*, both out of a personal connection to the torn-down center and in order to inform people about “the real history of the GDR”. What all these associations have in common is that they want to change the public perception of the GDR, and the Stasi in particular.³ To this end the *Ostdeutsches Kuratorium von Verbänden* also organizes historical conferences and publishes books on the GDR’s history.

Over the course of four years, I conducted six fieldwork trips to Berlin and interviewed 30 activists and members of twelve OKV organizations.⁴ These meetings usually comprised life interviews, focusing on memories and events both during and after the GDR, and ended with more detailed accounts of their views on history and current politics, and of their social and political activities. Most of these interviews lasted two and a half to four hours. Some people, in particular board members of various OKV

3 This was mentioned by several people whom I spoke with in Berlin, including Siegfried Mechler, Helmut Hoffert and Wolfgang Schmidt, who was previously the chair of the now-defunct *Insiderkomitee zur Förderung der kritischen Aneignung der Geschichte des MfS*, a working group within the GBM which focused in particular on historiography. Interviews conducted in Berlin (with Wolfgang Schmidt, 12 June 2012; with Helmut Hoffert, 10 July 2012; and with Siegfried Mechler, 12 July 2012).

4 Here, I am counting the organizations that the interviewed primarily identified with – very often, they were simultaneously members in other OKV organizations, yet with a lower degree of engagement.

organizations, were interviewed repeatedly about the developments in their respective organizations. I also attended several meetings and events that were organized by different OKV organizations, as well as the OKV's 2013 board meeting, and talked with OKV members and sympathizers on these occasions.⁵

During these interviews and conversations my own role was that of stimulating my interlocutors to tell their stories. I guided the conversation by posing questions, and naturally expressed empathy whenever I sincerely felt it – especially in the context of memories of war and suffering. My interlocutors were aware of the fact that the goal of my research was not a retrospective justification of the GDR. Rather, I made it clear that I am interested in biographies and personal views on history and politics, how they formed and developed. However, I am also aware that most of my respondents in fact did hope to convince me of their views on the GDR. At the same time, to have an outsider simply listening to their stories, and take them seriously, was to some already a vindication of these stories.

My fieldwork was also facilitated by the advanced age of most OKV members (new members are almost absent), which made it easier for them to talk to me – and some of the elder members also regarded my presence as a “last opportunity” to tell their story. Obviously, there were also people who did not want to speak with me – either out of suspicion, or, in some cases, because they regarded talking about their past “too painful”.⁶ Yet after I returned to Berlin for the third time, thereby having, in the eyes of the OKV, proven my serious research intentions, I found that several of my first interview partners had recommended me to friends, and people approached me asking whether I would like to also hear their life stories, or they suggested whom else I might want to meet.

Other important sources for my research on the OKV included the many publications written by its different organizations, as well as by individual members. Organizational newsletters, usually sent out on a monthly or quarterly basis, provided valuable information on the developments within the OKV and its subsidiaries. Newsletters of earlier years were used to trace back events and debates in the past. The websites also provide organizational information, including agendas, reports of past events, protest letters and

5 Throughout this book, I refer to people interviewed with their real names in case their activities within the OKV were public. Where this was not the case, I have made use of pseudonyms.

6 An initial plan to meet with a former director of one of the GDR's antifascist memorials was canceled for this reason. Two interviewees reported that they had friends with interesting stories, but who did not want to talk to an outsider.

calls for action, and often also correspondence with political parties or functionaries, as well as a space for discussion among members. The OKV's views on politics and history are moreover documented in books published by the organizations (especially the bigger ones such as ISOR, GRH and GBM) as well as by specific activists within the OKV (often former professors or ambassadors). Together these can be regarded as the "internal" sources on the OKV. A variety of "external" sources on the OKV were also used, including newspaper reports, books criticizing the OKV's activities, and even a report by the Berlin state security on several of the OKV's largest organizations. For my research on the judicial activities of the OKV, I looked into the German pension laws and traced back the official documentation of court procedures related to ISOR's legal complaints, especially the court rulings. Such sources helped to corroborate the claims made by representatives of the OKV on their activities and achievements.

A last source that should be mentioned here are the personnel files of former Stasi officers as well as files of informants (IMs) stored in the archives of the *Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes* (BStU).⁷ These archives contained information on the careers and personal lives of the people I interviewed, and I used them to corroborate the life stories that these persons had shared with me. The highly personal information stored in these files cannot be shared in this book, and we should also be aware of the problems and limitations that come with using secret service files as historical evidence. However, the stories that these OKV members told about their engagement with the Stasi were substantiated by evidence from the time. This counted for information on career paths (including promotions, but also demotions, and their reasons) as well as for more private information on family affairs of Stasi employees that were subject to detailed scrutiny and constituted an important subject of performance appraisals.⁸ In this way, the files I accessed confirmed my impression that OKV members remained invested in a vision of the GDR as it was shaped

7 For more on the BStU, see below.

8 It should be noted here that, due to the highly personal information that is stored in the Stasi archives, access to files is strictly limited. My request for documentation was granted for seven personalities, resulting in access to documents that ranged from single index cards to multiple files containing hundreds of documents. Due to the Stasi's interest in every aspect of the lives of their employees, the number of people mentioned in the files is much larger – reaching from childhood friends to the extended families of in-laws. The files did not reveal intentional "blank spots" in the narratives of my informants. BStU MfS HA II Nr. 26296; BStU MfS HA XX Nr. 208; BStU MfS HA KuSch Nr. 15113; BStU MfS KS Nr. 15206/90; BStU MfS KS II Nr. 626/83; BStU MfS AIM Nr. 5118/59; BStU MfS AIM Nr. 5486/61; BStU MfS AGMS Nr. 10208/88; BStU Karteikartenkopien.

during the times of this former state – so much so, even, that their current life stories still reflect the accounts of their successes and failures, their merits and pitfalls, as reported by informers, by their superiors in the GDR's secret police, and by themselves, in autobiographic accounts from their time of active service.

Studying “fallen elites”

As I learned more about the different organizations represented in the OKV and the outlook of their members, I understood that this would not simply be a project about a group that was embittered by a failed adjustment to life in unified Germany. I was surprised to find that most of the people I spoke to used their bitterness for a kind of “productive anger”: the OKV gave them the opportunity to engage with a broad scope of political, juridical and social problems. Ironically, the OKV was their pathway out of isolation and arguably contributes to their integration into post-*Wende* German society – while at the same time maintaining, shaping and channeling their emotional attachment to the GDR. On a practical level, many people appeared to use the OKV as a means to stay “occupied” – quite literally, after having lost their jobs during the *Wende* or soon thereafter. Furthermore, their professed mourning over the GDR did not prevent many of them from being actively involved in other organizations that have nothing to do with the former socialist state. This dawned on me when during my first research trip to Berlin, two ladies told me that “this country [unified Germany] is not our country” – only to immediately tell me about their many volunteering activities, not only for the OKV but also for several local and social initiatives.⁹ This seeming paradox struck me, and ignited my curiosity about the way in which a specific memorialization of the past enables present-oriented activities.

What also struck me was the way in which other researchers approach this organization. As former Stasi members and their sympathizers have a reputation of being closed to outsiders, I was initially mainly worried that representatives of the OKV would be unwilling to talk with me. Some friends and colleagues even warned me that I was going to meet very dangerous persons, suggesting that the former agents of the GDR's secret service were secretly still in operation. Indeed, researchers who had previously worked on GDR secret police and military personnel had found it difficult

9 Interview with Margitta Mechler and Gertrud Fischer, 13 June 2012.

to contact former officers. To quote from Andrew Bickford, who conducted field research on former officers of the GDR's army (*Nationale Volksarmee*) in the late 1990s, "[w]hile it was generally not a problem meeting with lower-ranking officers and their families, gaining access to high-ranking former officers was a tricky process of vetting, knowing who to talk to, observing military courtesies and customs, of using the right words and phrases at the right time".¹⁰ His prize interviewee, former NVA general Klaus Dieter Baumgarten, was willing to meet with the anthropologist only after a full year of attempts to establish contact. He then asked Bickford to come to a train station carrying that day's copy of *Neues Deutschland*, picked him up with his GDR *Trabant* car and drove him to his home, taking various intentional detours ostensibly to prevent Bickford from locating its exact position. Anna Funder, in her *Stasiland*, mentions the same kind of trouble in speaking to former Stasi officers in the early 1990s – and even reports that people who were willing to talk to her received death threats.¹¹

Yet we should keep in mind that when Funder and Bickford did their research the fall of the GDR was obviously still fresh on people's minds. Already in the late 1990s Bickford observed that "[a]fter assuaging their initial suspicions, former officers were more than willing to speak to me"; his position as a foreigner and as a scholar made him appear more "objective" in the eyes of his informants.¹² By the time I arrived in Berlin, ten more years had passed, and all people I spoke with seemed to have reconciled themselves with their status of belonging to a "fallen elite", to use Bickford's expression. Yet this was not resignation, for they still persist in their public activities to rehabilitate the GDR heritage.

It is also important that the former GDR cadres I spoke with were, with very few exceptions, between 70 and 90 years old. Over the previous 25 years, they had become used to being asked for interviews. They say they turned down most of these, out of disappointment with the way they are generally depicted in the press.¹³ But instead of operating secretly, these organizations have become focused on improving the "public reputation" of the GDR – and, by extension, of their members. To this end, OKV organizations produce a constant stream of pamphlets and volumes, and regularly write letters to the editors of "friendly newspapers". They also developed a strong internet

10 Andrew Bickford, *Fallen Elites: The Military Other in Post-Unification Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011), p. xiii.

11 Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories from behind the Berlin Wall* (London: Granta Books 2011), p. 243.

12 Bickford, *Fallen Elites*, p. 17.

13 Interviews with Helmut Holfert (OKV press officer; 10 July 2012); Wolfgang Schmidt (acting director ISOR; 12 June 2012).

presence to bolster their image. This does not mean that they are necessarily open, or honest; rather, they have a particular vision on historical and current developments which they try to “sell”. I am aware that they decided to talk to me in the hope that I would convey their views to a larger audience. They seem to have accepted that I do this from a particular research perspective which will not necessarily be flattering.¹⁴

Interestingly, especially colleagues working on German history expressed moral qualms about my research plan. When it comes to the GDR, the scholar is still pressured to clarify his or her stance on politics and morality. Nearly thirty years after the end of the GDR, this is obviously not just an academic question: when in 2014 the *Linke* party (which grew out of the successor party to the GDR's Socialist Unity Party) was for the first time about to not just participate in but *lead* a new government in the German federal state of Thuringia, the media debate about this process revived discussions about the party's SED heritage, in framings reminiscent of the early 1990s.¹⁵

Following Thomas Kohut, my point here is that one does not have to sympathize with people in order to empathize with them. When interviewing people who belong to the “German generation” born between 1900-1914, Kohut found that they recollected their Nazi sympathies without much personal reflection. Kohut explained his own position in the following manner: “My aim, then, is certainly not to engender sympathy for the interviewees, or for Germans belonging to their generation, but to reduce the intellectual and emotional distance separating us from then, in part by thinking our way inside their unique historical circumstances, in part by recognizing that on some level they were as we are and that we have within us the capacity to be as they were.”¹⁶ And this opens up the possibility to look at the people under investigation not only in their capacity as perpetrators or bystanders of particular politically motivated crimes, but also in their capacity as people who had to get on with life after the collapse of the system that encapsulated their values and beliefs.

14 In 2014, I published the first results of my research in an article on ISOR. In an email, ISOR representatives wrote that they recognized their organization in the article, even if they disagreed with my interpretation of specific issues. When I visited Berlin in May 2015, this position was reiterated by other OKV members.

15 My intention is not to equate *Die Linke* with the members and positions of the OKV; to the contrary, Chapter 6 will demonstrate how remote they are from each other. See also Amieke Bouma, “Ideological Confirmation and Party Consolidation: Germany's *Die Linke* and the Financial and Refugee Crises”. In: Luke March and Daniel Keith (eds.), *Europe's Radical Left: From Marginality to the Mainstream?* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International 2016), pp. 133-154.

16 Thomas Kohut, *A German Generation: An Experiential History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2012), p. 17.

The purpose of this book

The present book is therefore about how the change of political order affects people who strongly identified with a former state, and how they reflect on their former lives some 25 years after their state ceased to exist. How are their emotional attachment to the former state and their negative attitude to the new situation affected by moral and political debates, as well as by the juridical and practical outcomes of regime change? In this sense, the book contributes to the literature on social transformation, and in particular on the reordering of East German society after the political upheaval of 1989.

The collapse of a political system, and even an entire state, has tremendous effects on the people who felt they belonged to this state. As these people continue to embody the old state in the new one – both out of personal attachment and because they are assigned this role by others – the present book is also situated within the field of memory studies. Central is the GDR genealogy of contemporary memorization. This memorization can come in very different forms: celebrating GDR state holidays, writing autobiographies, even conducting lawsuits and political lobbying. In Germany, questions of GDR memory that I am interested in are often understood as falling into the category of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the “coming to terms with the past”. As this term was coined in the context of how to remember and overcome the heritage of Nazi atrocities, any engagement with the GDR heritage is therefore implicitly or explicitly linked to the heritage of the *Third Reich*. Such comparisons – which I believe are very misleading – will come up at several points of the present book, all the more since several of my interview partners had themselves been enrolled in the *Hitler Jugend* in their youth.

But the present study is also about civil society activism, in a very peculiar case. How do former GDR elites organize themselves, how do their organizations maintain GDR practices and values? Which priorities do they set for themselves in activism (social support, defending the GDR heritage, political activity), and which strategies do they select for which purposes (legal procedures, lobbying politicians, public campaigns and manifestations)? How far do they continue the strategies that they have been familiar with from their GDR past, and how far do they adapt them to the new legal and political framework of unified Germany?

And, finally, the present book is also about the radical left spectrum in contemporary Germany, for the OKV has consistently been positioning itself in that field – a circumstance that is usually overlooked by scholars of the German radical left. Of particular importance is how OKV groups interact with the party *Die Linke* – the indirect successor party of the GDR's

dominant socialist party – but also with extraparliamentary parties and groups of the radical left spectrum. How successful is their linkage and their outreach – how far does radical left solidarity bring them? Paradoxically, these questions are also crucial for assessing the degree to which the OKV has been integrated into German politics.

Central to OKV's memory culture as well as to the political and social activism of the OKV members is their understanding of German politics, both before 1989 and after. The way OKV members understand politics, and how they form and maintain this understanding, will be a guiding thread throughout this book.

Remembering the GDR

From my opening remarks it should be clear that any analysis of the OKV – whether from the perspective of contemporary history, memory studies, or politics – must take into consideration the highly politicized nature of German debates on the GDR heritage. While the history of the GDR is still very present, and many citizens have experienced life before 1989, public discourse is largely dominated by discussions about the political structure of the GDR, epitomized by its system of political repression through the secret service (Stasi). Yet the GDR “lives on” in the minds also of young people in so far as many in the eastern parts of unified Germany still perceive themselves as different from their western counterparts. Easterners claim they are being neglected and regarded as somehow inferior by a “West” that “overtook” the East after 1990 – regardless of the fact that since 2005, Germany has a *Bundeskanzler* (prime minister) with East German roots. Some investigative journalists have tried to prove that the Stasi enjoys “a second life”, and undermines German state and society.¹⁷ Civil society organizations that represent their interests – whether legitimate or not – are regarded by many as enemies of the state.

Official post-'89 narratives on the GDR indeed reflect the prevalence of western German voices in politics, but also in science, business and the media. In mainstream discourses this has led to the “objectification” of the GDR as a static and backward state.

17 Jürgen Schreiber, *Die Stasi lebt: Berichte aus einem unterwanderten Land* (München: Droemer Knaur Verlag 2009). The phrase “the Stasi is alive” is often used, also in more nuanced reports; see, e.g., Christoph Seils, “Das Stasi-Netzwerk lebt”. In: *Cicero* (June 2006). Accessed 2 November 2016: <http://www.seils.in-berlin.de/innenpolitik/das-stasi-netzwerk-lebt.html>.

Post-*Wende* debates about the character of the GDR have been shaped by two commissions of inquiry into the GDR that worked from 1992-1994 and from 1995-1998, respectively. Both commissions came into being on the initiative of the German parliament, the *Bundestag*.¹⁸ On the symbolic date of 17 June 1994,¹⁹ an overwhelming majority of the *Bundestag* deputies supported the official proclamation according to which the GDR was a “SED dictatorship”.²⁰ This was a seemingly definite verdict on how the history of the GDR should be assessed, on the basis of an inquiry commission of historians whose mandate was clearly political. From the start its work was marred by ideological disagreements between parliamentarians: while conservatives and liberals insisted on viewing the bankruptcy of the GDR as proof of the inhumanity inherent in any form of socialist ideology, left-leaning parties wanted to see the political wrongs of the GDR evaluated in isolation from its proclaimed ideology.²¹

The parliament’s attempt to formulate, and then to disseminate, an established “correct” view on recent history has evoked much criticism, as an attempt to monopolize historical interpretation. Yet this critique might be unjust; as Andrew H. Beattie argues, the first commission’s attempt at “transitional justice” – to hold to account those who had been responsible for repression in the GDR – was supported by a large majority of East Germans.²² The initiators of this first commission came from the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and they saw it as “a forum for an ongoing, broad and systematic debate about the GDR and its meaning in unified Germany”.²³ The commission would “systematically examine the workings of the old regime (and thus counteract public hysteria over the Stasi connections of

18 The full names of these two commissions of inquiry were *Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland* (Coming to Terms with the History and Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in Germany), which ran from 1992 to 1994, and *Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozess der deutschen Einheit* (Overcoming the Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in the Process of German Unity), from 1995 to 1998.

19 On 17 June 1953, a large workers’ uprising in the GDR was brutally suppressed by the authorities.

20 For more on the first *Enquête Kommission* that prepared the ground for this motion, see the article by the chair of the *Bundestag* committee: Rainer Eppelmann, “Die Enquete-Kommissionen zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur”. In: Eppelmann et al (eds.), *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2003), pp. 401-406.

21 For a more thorough discussion, see Andrew H. Beattie, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries into East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books 2008).

22 Andrew H. Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering the GDR: Official and State-Mandated Memory since 1990”. In: David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (eds.), *Remembering the German Democratic Republic in a United Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), pp. 23-34; here p. 25.

23 Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering the GDR”, p. 26.

prominent individuals)” and “recommend legislative reforms, especially to benefit the SED’s victims”.²⁴ The commissions were thus “less ‘top-down’ and more consultative and inclusive than is often assumed”.²⁵ Still, proportional representation hardly invalidates claims that this was mainly a West German enterprise,²⁶ and Beattie also showed that conservative and center-right parties (CDU, FDP) have used the East German past to invalidate their opponents on the left (including not only the SED’s successor party, PDS, but also the SPD and even the B’90/*Grünen* – a party that absorbed a considerable proportion of the GDR’s civil rights movement).²⁷

Yet the *Bundestag* did not feel completely comfortable taking on a leading role in memorialization either, and from the late 1990s we observe a “move from official to state-mandated memory”.²⁸ The *Bundestag* remained important in allocating funds to memorials and other projects of commemoration but it did so mainly through third parties and after expert review. Of special interest to us is the Sabrow Commission (named after its chairman, Martin Sabrow, a leading historian of contemporary Germany), which worked in 2005 and 2006. In contradistinction to the previous commissions, the Sabrow Commission did not comprise politicians but historians and specialists in the field of GDR memory and memorialization; and its goal was not to investigate GDR history but to review how GDR history has been studied and interpreted since 1990. One of its main findings was that up until that point the memory of the GDR in unified Germany had been too much focused on political and institutional aspects – and therefore failed to connect to the “everyday memories” (*Alltag*) of ordinary East German citizens.²⁹

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 27.

26 This is so because the population of the GDR was much smaller than that of West Germany. On 31 October 1990, the FRG comprised of 63.6 million inhabitants, whereas the GDR’s population comprised of only 16.1 million. Table adopted from *UN World Populations Prospects 1990* (New York 1991), quoted in Jean-Louis Rallu and Alain Blum (eds.), *European Population, Vol. I: Country Analysis: Demographie Europeene* (Paris: John Libby Eurotext 1991), p. 102.

27 Individual B’90/*Grünen* politicians differed in their position on the *Enquête Kommission*; whereas some were skeptical of its self-acclaimed role in history writing, others viewed the commission as a chance to encourage (also) history writing “from below”. See Beattie, *Playing Politics with History*, pp. 45–46.

28 Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering the GDR”, p. 33.

29 The Sabrow Commission published a collective volume to “document the debates” in and on the commission (as it was heavily criticized for its wish to focus more on *Alltag* – interpreted by several conservative politicians, historians and commentators as a “left” political agenda). The volume offers interesting insights into the interlinkage between politics and memory culture. See Martin Sabrow, Rainer Eckert, Monika Flacke, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Roland Jahn, Freya Klier, Tina Krone, Peter Maser, Ulrike Poppe and Hermann Rudolph (eds.), *Wohin treibt die*

Three types of memory

Sabrow later identified three ways in which the GDR is remembered: (1) as a dictatorship (*Diktaturgedächtnis*); (2) through the ways in which people accommodated themselves to the regime (*Arrangementsgedächtnis*); and (3) as a legitimate attempt at radical social change (*Fortschrittsgedächtnis*).³⁰ This is a useful distinction for contextualizing the sort of memory current among activists and sympathizers of the OKV.

Broadly speaking, the *Diktaturgedächtnis* (memory of dictatorship; more commonly referred to in English as the “totalitarianism thesis”) is the most politically salient, and thus most prominent in “official memory”. This is visible in politics, public debates, documentaries, remembrance day activities and education. Naturally, this memory is also preserved through the network of former Stasi prison memorials. The long-time scientific director of the memorial at the Stasi investigative prison in *Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* (HSH), Hubertus Knabe (2000-2018), is a very vocal proponent of this *Diktaturgedächtnis*. Knabe regularly publishes scathing indictments of current politics for not bringing the perpetrators to justice.³¹ In turn, the HSH memorial, as well as Knabe, have regularly been protested by former Stasi officers, in concerted activities supported by OKV organizations. Moreover, the *Diktaturgedächtnis* has strong backing in academia, with well-known political scientists such as Klaus Schroeder and Eckard Jesse.³²

Yet other historians emphasize the limitations of totalitarianism, and especially the GDR's lack of total oversight and control over its population. Writing about the GDR in the early 1980s, Günter Gaus coined the term “niche society” to describe a situation in which citizens withdrew into

DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2007). The commission concluded that the new concept for memorialization of the GDR (which it was commissioned to develop) should “contribute to raising awareness about the dictatorial nature [*Diktaturcharakter*] of the GDR [...] as well as to the honoring of resistance and opposition. [It should also] map the complexity, the normalization processes [*Veralltäglicung*] and the ‘constructive contradiction’ of the GDR, and put these into the historical relational dimension of the German-German dual statehood [*Doppelstaatlichkeit*] [...] and of the East-West conflict” (p. 11).

30 Martin Sabrow, “Die DDR erinnern”. In: Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Erinnerungsorte der DDR* (München: C.H. Beck 2009), pp. 18-19.

31 Hubertus Knabe, *Die Täter sind unter uns. Über das Schönreden der SED-Diktatur*, 4th ed. (Berlin: Propyläen 2011); Hubertus Knabe, *Honeckers Erben. Die Wahrheit über DIE LINKE* (Berlin: Propyläen 2009).

32 Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED Staat. Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag 1998); Eckard Jesse (ed.), *Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Bilanz der internationalen Forschung* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 1999).

specific “niches” in the private sphere to refute the state efforts at control and politicization. Such niches were both intimate and apolitical, and offered citizens an individual space beyond the state’s purview.³³ Yet as the notion of niche society implied a strict division between the state and its citizens, it obscured the ways in which citizens simultaneously engaged with the state. Later scholars have tried to capture the ways in which society and regime *accommodated* each other, by pointing to the many ways in which citizens were linked to the state and participated in its institutions while at the same time challenging its politics. This idea is the basis of what Sabrow termed the *Arrangementsgedächtnis* (memory of accommodation), and it is also reflected in Konrad Jarausch’s term “welfare dictatorship”,³⁴ as well as in Mary Fulbrook’s concept of an “adapted dictatorship”. As Fulbrook points out,

Implausibly large numbers – perhaps one in six of the population – were involved in one way or another in what might be called the micro-systems of power through which GDR society worked. This system cannot be described in terms of an extended “state” that was “doing something” to a “society” conceived of as separate from the “state”: rather it was the very way society as a whole was structured.³⁵

The “accommodation thesis” gained prominence especially among historians who study daily life in the GDR. By pointing to the ways in which society and regime were inextricably linked, these scholars do not seek to question the undemocratic nature of the GDR. Rather, they prioritize social and cultural history over the sole preoccupation with politics – and especially over the “system question”. This approach produced case studies on cultural life and leisure in the GDR.³⁶ In his account of the *Kulturbund*, the GDR’s mass organization for the conduct and propagation of culture, Helmut Meier

33 Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe 1983).

34 See Konrad Jarausch: “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship”. In: Konrad Jarausch (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-cultural History of the GDR* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books 1999), pp. 47–69, which offers a good overview of the totalitarianism theory and its flaws.

35 Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2008), p. 236.

36 Including on the organization of culture in factories (Annette Schuhmann, “Veredelung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik? Betriebliche Kulturarbeit vor 1970”. In: *Potsdamer Bulletin* 28/29 [2003], pp. 73–78) and on the national level (Helmut Meier, “Der Kulturbund der DDR in den siebziger Jahren. Bestandteil des politischen Systems und Ort kultureller Selbstbetätigung”).

concluded that this organization was both “part of the political system and a place for cultural self-actuation”.³⁷ Mary Fulbrook likewise argues that East Germans in fact had various reasons to join the state-led mass organizations of the GDR, including the “perks” that membership might bring.³⁸ She points out that in some organizations, participation was so widespread and integrated into everyday life that it appeared as mere routine to join them.³⁹

Obviously, people participated in organized culture and leisure activities (although not necessarily as many as GDR propaganda suggested) because this suited their interests.⁴⁰ The abovementioned studies on the GDR correspond to a broader trend in research on how citizens of former socialist states participated in state-organized activities, and how they made these activities personally meaningful in ways that were not always foreseen by the regimes.⁴¹ This suggests that people were creative in shaping their lives within the confines of the possible, and that they were often more limited by *the state of the GDR* – its inability to fulfill its promises – than by *the GDR state*. This vision of the GDR as a state that had good intentions, and that provided room for a good life when politics were ignored, is reflected in the popularity of *Ostalgie* (literally: “Eastalgia”, nostalgia for the GDR) from the late 1990s. The causes, and particularly the content, of this *Ostalgie* are still debated,⁴² but expressions of *Ostalgie* are rooted in recollections of everyday life in the GDR, in which specific consumer goods are remembered as typical of the East German state, and as “familiar” and “cozy”.

The “totalitarian” and “accommodationist” visions described above do not so much disagree over the nature of the political regime of the GDR.

In: Evemarie Badstübner [ed.], *Befremdlich Anders: Leben in der DDR* [Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag 2000], pp. 599–625).

37 In the 1970s, the *Kulturbund* was part of the “National Front” of political parties and mass organizations in the GDR. Meier, “Der Kulturbund der DDR in den siebziger Jahren”.

38 As an example, one could think of access to holiday spots for members of the GDR’s trade union, the Free German Trade Union League (*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*; FDGB). Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, p. 225.

39 This was for instance the case with the GDR’s children’s organization, the Young Pioneers, which was organized in such a way that it was seen as a normal part of ordinary school life. Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, pp. 127–130.

40 Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses: Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books 2009), pp. 14–15.

41 Including, for instance, the seminal work of Alexey Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005).

42 There is a substantial body of literature on this subject. I will discuss the issue of *Ostalgie*, and the problems of this concept for discussing the outlooks of the OKV, in more detail in Chapter 1.

Their disagreement is rather over how strongly people's lives were shaped by politics on a day-to-day basis. In the case of *Ostalgie*, this ties in with a critique of unified Germany – especially when coupled with a certain disappointment with personal conditions since 1990. The relatedness of nostalgia to the present also implies that its underlying notions of the past might well differ from one nostalgic person to the other – ranging from an “apolitical” view on the personal past (concomitant with the *Arrangementsgedächtnis*) to a more politicized critique of the present. Such differences are not unimportant: and it must be emphasized that the upsurge of *Ostalgie* in East Germany has not led to the emergence of a strong revisionist GDR milieu.

This brings us to the third way of remembering the GDR. The *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* views the GDR as having been a legitimate attempt to build a new state. In particular, its adherents regard state socialism as a real, valid and justified attempt at establishing an alternative to West German capitalism. This understanding leans heavily on official political and historical discourses promoted in the GDR – and specifically on the idea of a state based on the ideals of antifascism, after the atrocities committed by the Germans under National Socialism. In the GDR, this narrative was not only supported by the regime and its adherents. Crucially, it has been suggested that this broad acceptance of the necessity of the GDR as a project was one of the reasons why there was for a long time little opposition in East Germany: there was a leftist opposition to the GDR that was dissatisfied with the state's leadership, but these leftists did not want to give up the GDR as a state.⁴³ Antifascist legitimization narratives of the German Democratic Republic were fed by the observation that in West Germany, there was indeed a substantial continuation of fascist personnel structures – an observation that the GDR authorities were constantly bringing back to attention, for example, by publishing a series of “brown books” (*Braunbücher*) on influential Nazis in the Federal Republic of Germany.⁴⁴ Although historians

43 After 1990, there appeared to be almost a general consensus that the fall of the SED could not but lead to the unification of the two Germanies. Ideas of a “third way” for the GDR on the principle of a new form of “reform socialism” were popular among civil rights activists, artists and intellectuals, but not among the population at large. For more on this issue, see Markus Trömmel, *Der verhaltene Gang in die deutsche Einheit. Das Verhältnis zwischen den Oppositionsgruppen und der (SED-)PDS im letzten Jahr der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2002).

44 One of these *Braunbücher* that listed former Nazis in the West German “government, economy, administration, army, justice system and science” became the object of a controversy when Federal German authorities confiscated its copies at the Frankfurt Book Fair of 1967. *Braunbuch. Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik und in West-Berlin. Staat, Wirtschaft, Verwaltung, Armee, Justiz, Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen

later established the accuracy of the information contained in the “brown books”,⁴⁵ they clearly functioned as propaganda for the East German regime; and, obviously, the SED maintained a very specific ideal of antifascism, and of what an antifascist state should look like. Yet after the demise of the SED’s one-party rule in the late 1980s, GDR citizens who had been attracted to the reformist vision of a new, East German “third way” gave up this view; today, the view of the GDR as a “legitimate alternative” is obviously a minority opinion in Germany.⁴⁶ Instead, both the “dictatorship” and “accommodation” understandings of the GDR regard the political system of the GDR as having been wrong – and the people who supported it as morally corrupt.

The *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* is most vividly perpetuated in the group that this book is about, the OKV-related associations. For OKV activists, the memory of progress not only justifies the GDR as it was but also delegitimizes the developments after 1989. This puts them in a more narrowly defined milieu of people who still dispute German unification. In a review of GDR memory in Germany, Sabrow depicted these groups as follows:

[T]here exists a parallel “environmental memory” in politically and professionally structured networks of former GDR elites, which cultivates a “memory of voluntary annexation” [*Anschluss Erinnerung*], understanding the GDR as the “normal state” [*Normalstaat*] and unification as a colonial submission with the agreement of those colonized, in a conscious analogy to the *Anschluss* of Austria to the German Reich in 1938.⁴⁷

Republik 1965); Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes, Moshe Zimmermann, *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (München: Karl Blessing Verlag 2010), p. 18.

45 Conze et al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit*, p. 18.

46 A study conducted ten years after the fall of the Wall suggests that most of the former dissidents by that time had also come to see unification as the best possible outcome of the *Wende* – unlike the former functionaries who are the subject of the present study. See Eckhard Jesse (ed.), *Eine Revolution und ihre Folgen. 14 Bürgerrechtler ziehen Bilanz: Jens Reich, Konrad Weiss, Marianne BIRTHLER, Vera Lengsfeld, Günter Nooke, Wolfgang Templin, Markus Meckel, Erhart Neubert, Freya Klier, Rainer Eppelmann, Edelbert Richter, Ulrike Poppe, Friedrich Schorlemmer, Joachim Gauck* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag 2000).

47 “Parallel existiert ein weiteres und in Netzwerken politischer und fachlicher Natur organisiertes Milieugedächtnisses früherer DDR-Eliten, das eine vereinigungskritische Anschluss Erinnerung pflegt, die die DDR als Normalstaat und die Vereinigung als koloniale Unterwerfung mit Zustimmung der Kolonisierten in gezielter Analogie zum Anschluss Österreichs an das Deutsche Reich 1938 erscheint”. Martin Sabrow, “Der ostdeutsche Herbst 1989 – Wende oder Revolution?” (Paper presented at the conference on “*Herrschaftsverlust und Machtverfall*” in honor of Hans-Ulrich Thamer, LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte, Münster, 11 October 2008).

Within the OKV, many of the GDR's ideological schemes for understanding the world remain current, in spite of the fall of the GDR, and in opposition to the very critical political and historiographical discourses that have since been developed in Germany. This resilience of GDR narratives within the OKV raises questions about how GDR modes of political thinking were trained and maintained.

Political epistemics

One academic work that will guide my approach to the longevity of GDR political thinking in post-*Wende* organizations of former Stasi coworkers and GDR state representatives is Andreas Glaeser's impressive 2011 monograph *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism*. Glaeser is interested in a question that is crucial for understanding the peaceful transition from socialism to liberal democracy in 1989: why was the Stasi unable to prevent the mass protests of that year from toppling the regime, in spite of the fact that it was well-informed about long-lingering dissatisfaction and growing opposition in society?⁴⁸ At first sight, this question seems to be rather remote from the issues we are dealing with here; but as I will argue below, Glaeser's approach provides a good entry gate for coming to terms with the resilience of GDR political thinking in an unsupportive environment.

There are of course several interpretations as to why the Stasi did not shoot at the demonstrators. The security service did not get clear orders, as the party/state top was in complete disarray; the protests of the population assumed a magnitude that they understood could not be crushed without much bloodshed, which would have gone far beyond the levels of violence that even Stasi members were prepared to apply; and in contrast to earlier uprisings, this time the GDR leadership could not count on Soviet help to crush the unrest.⁴⁹ One other explanation would be that the party, and by extension the Stasi as its "shield and sword", had itself lost faith in the socialist ideology, and therefore fell

48 Andreas Glaeser, *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2011).

49 Walter Süß, *Staatssicherheit am Ende. Warum es den Mächtigen nicht gelang, 1989 eine Revolution zu verhindern* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag 1999), pp. 742-752; John O. Koehler, *Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder: Westview Press 1999), pp. 403-410; Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi* (New York: Oxford University Press 2010), pp. 177-180; Fulbrook, *The People's State*, p. 293.

into paralysis.⁵⁰ It is this last interpretation in particular that Glaeser expands upon.

The central argument in Glaeser's work is that Stasi officers were well aware of problems in the GDR, but that they were driven and inhibited by a specific "political epistemology" – or "historically specific politics-oriented knowledge-making practices".⁵¹ According to Glaeser, the answer to the question why secret police officers did "not even fire a single shot in [the GDR's] defense when its very existence came under threat", although they had certainly been trained to do so, can be found in the "increasing disorientation of party state functionaries caused by an accelerating discrepancy between lived experience and official party descriptions of life in the GDR".⁵² This raises the question "why [...] the party state [was] unable to develop more successful action-guiding understandings of itself in a wider world".⁵³ His conclusion is that the failure of the East German state, and the inactivity of the Stasi during its final hours, can ultimately be attributed to the failure of ideological doctrine to shape effective *political* "understandings". Such understandings are a central element in political epistemics.⁵⁴

In other words, the regime change has to be understood above all by coming to terms with the inability of the system to cope with oppositional opinions, despite its sophisticated facilities and overwhelming resources. I argue that the contemporary OKV organizations are guided by the same political epistemics that already failed to apprehend changes in 1989. Today these same epistemics lead to the continuing self-isolation of the OKV organizations, and therefore to their failure to mobilize other forces in society that might otherwise support them in reaching their goals. At the same time this mode of political understanding gives the OKV members the strength to defy any contention.

50 Concomitant with Glaeser's interpretation, Walter Süß describes the Stasi's "unsolvable dilemma" in the following words: "the path of ideological purity must not be left, but at the same time 'new paths' should be found". Süß, *Staatssicherheit am Ende*, p. 219.

51 Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. xxvi.

52 Ibid., p. xxi.

53 Ibid. Note that this question pertains to the inactivity of the Stasi rather than to the fall of the GDR itself. Although Glaeser argues that the failure of East Germany's political epistemics should be seen as a grand theory of socialism's demise parallel to economic and political explanations to this event (XVI), elsewhere he differentiates between (unmentioned) direct causes of the collapse of socialism and the failure of epistemics as an underlying problem explaining the regime's failure to adjust itself to developments in society. See Glaeser, "Power/Knowledge Failure: Epistemic Practices and Ideologies of the Secret Police in Former East Germany". In: *Social Analysis* 47(1) (2003), pp. 22–23.

54 Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. xxvi.

Glaeser conceptualizes knowledge of the state and society as “an ongoing process of orientation” that is shaped and reshaped through personal encounters with institutions. These institutions validate our understandings or fail to do so. In turn, such understandings influence people’s activities, and shape the way in which they interact with institutions, and influence them in a feedback loop. This goes for both citizens and state officials.⁵⁵ Understandings thus constitute the practical knowledge of how to behave and fulfill certain functions in a community. In the case of the GDR, and especially in the case of its official institutions, this knowledge was heavily shaped by the socialist ideology of the state.

Understandings are of fundamental importance to individuals because they provide agency: they “sort out *what we are reacting to and why we are acting at all*” and “provide a notion of *what to do*, that is, *how to react to the situation that is already understood to some degree*. They supply discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic templates to *direct action*”.⁵⁶ Such actions in turn lead to a validation of the underlying understandings – and institutionalize those particular understandings, by making them context-independent and generally shared. This institutionalization of understandings provides efficiency to decision-making and coordination processes with likeminded people, be it in the Stasi or in dissident groups. The danger is that this process institutionalizes the understandings to such a degree that they become fixed fetishes that can never again be questioned.⁵⁷

To appreciate this argument, it is important to realize that our understandings are central to our identity. Hence they are largely formed in relation to the group (or groups) that we belong to or seek to identify with. There is thus a distinct emotional factor that makes us cling to those understandings that we share with our environment.⁵⁸ And the same holds true for the emotive justification of authority: we tend to put trust in those we agree with, because this feels good.⁵⁹

55 Ibid., p. xviii.

56 Ibid., p. 38; emphasis in the original.

57 Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. 42.

58 Ibid., p. 180.

59 Aside from a mnemonic community, the OKV could also be described as an emotional community, that is, a community that can be defined by its particular norms of valuating and expressing emotions (Cf. Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2006]). Both memorization and dealing with emotions in the OKV are, however, closely bound to its members’ understandings of life in the GDR and after – and thus to what Glaeser describes with the concept of political epistemics.

Networks of authority are based on shared political understandings and emotions. This was especially true for SED cadres, Stasi officers, and others who identified strongly with the socialist state – and it is still alive in OKV circles. In the GDR, this identification was not questioned by private interactions with people who did not share their ideology because centralized housing policies often landed cadres in housing blocks with colleagues who shared their political convictions. And as the GDR gave no public room to other views, such networks of authority coincided with the state and its central institutions. Moreover, the narrowly defined concept of state socialist ideology was profoundly shaped by the moral authority of a generation of “veteran communists” whose “antifascist struggle” formed the foundation myth of the East German socialist state.⁶⁰ This moral authority contributed to the reluctance of a next generation to refute the political views and policies of the founding fathers of the GDR – ultimately adding to a climate in which their visions could not be disputed.⁶¹ And as we will see in Chapter 2, for OKV leaders the relationship with “veteran communists” is very important.

From Glaeser’s perspective, before 1989 the Stasi did *not* suffer from a lack of ideological orientation as such; to the contrary, the security service had a strongly internalized orientation/epistemics. But this orientation was extremely inflexible and prevented Stasi officers from adapting to the new historical situation. The ideological doctrine remained firmly in place, yet the political understandings based on this ideology were increasingly ineffective. This is also visible from statements of former Stasi members, who, with hindsight, reported their doubts of the political course in the 1980s, yet at the same time remained attached to the GDR’s state ideology. As we shall see later on, the same argument can also be applied to the “OKV identity”.

As Glaeser demonstrates, Stasi officers were remarkably isolated from people with other views – that is, from those whom they were supposed to monitor and control. This relative isolation also resulted from the surveillance methods employed by the secret service. The Stasi operated through a widespread network of informants, or “unofficial employees”

60 Communists who joined the KPD before 1933 are usually referred to as “old communists”, in analogy to those who joined the Communist Party in Russia before the 1917 revolution. In her study on the lives of German “old communists” – in essence, the ruling class from the GDR’s beginning to its demise. Catherine Epstein uses the term “veteran communists” as a reference to the importance of their participation in the resistance against the Nazis. Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2003), p. 3.

61 Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries*, p. 232.

(*Informelle Mitarbeiter*, IMs), and it primarily relied on the reports of IMs that had infiltrated dissident groups. Even officers who investigated the opposition therefore hardly had any direct encounters with dissidents, instead relying on the information mediated by their informants.⁶² That is, contacts with the objects of investigation were “outsourced” and the Stasi became self-sufficient.

Even so, by the late 1980s Stasi officers must have been aware of the growing dissatisfaction among the population that obviously contradicted their own ideological view of the GDR. Such contradictions had to be somehow rendered innocuous. Glaeser discusses a number of counteractions and relativizing strategies that officers employed to weaken such contradictions by “mak[ing] the troubling validations appear less relevant”.⁶³ Because many of these strategies are clearly discernible in the memories narrated by OKV members, it is worth quoting Glaeser at some length:

First, in cases where officers felt treated unjustly, the socialist theodicy offered two ways out: either the officer could see that he had failed to self-objectify properly, or he could attribute the course of the events to the failings of a single superior, an individual person who did not get it right. Second, the typical line of defense against seemingly irrational orders or policies was building on understandings about the economy of knowledge. According to these rationalizing understandings, each and every person knew only a small slice of the whole. The necessity of secrecy prevented a more liberal sharing of information, and therefore only those higher up could judge situations properly because they had more of an overview. Third, actions or measures that did not live up to ideas of proper communist behavior could be justified as necessitated by the particular historical context, as a tactic [or] a mere compromise necessary now for the greater good of the socialist project in the long run. Finally, fourth, a most important strategy was to admit the failings of socialism, its imperfect state, but then to point out that this imperfect form of socialism was still far superior to capitalism with its contemptuous logic of exploitation. This last move found expression in a frequently evoked trope. The GDR was described as “the best GDR there is” (*die beste DDR, die es gibt*).⁶⁴

62 Glaeser, “Power/Knowledge Failure”, p. 15.

63 Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. 545: “Counteractions affirm newly emerging understandings resonating negatively with the diagnosis of ‘contradiction,’ thus weakening it indirectly. Relativizations work through networks of authority in which meta-understandings are mobilized to show that the troubling validations experienced do not actually mean what they were taken to mean.”

64 Glaeser, *Political Epistemics*, p. 547.

Glaeser concludes that the Stasi had, in essence, the material at hand to question the viability of the state as it was. Yet the understandings of politics and the state – in particular, of the apparent scientifically proven leading role of the party in society and the Manichaeian worldview that only discerned between friend and foe without the possibility for constructive critique, left no room to identify problems – and discuss their solutions – within the system. This ultimately had to do with the logic that saw any public identification of problems as a form of critique to the party line which was, in its (in) famous self-celebratory song, “always right” (*Die Partei, die Partei, die hat immer recht*⁶⁵). Thus, the very act of discussing problems qualified a person as a bad communist – and this logic led to a situation in which convinced communists in fact did see problems, but did not dare to discuss them as this would greatly endanger their professional but also social positions. After all, they still identified with the state and its ideology, and although they registered contradictions under socialism, they stopped well before the point of thinking these contradictions through to what would perhaps have been their logical consequence – namely, that the particular form of state socialism represented by the East German regime was in fact unviable.

Today, most OKV members will admit, with hindsight, that the GDR was unviable “as it was”. Yet they also remain convinced that the GDR was indeed a good attempt at a socialist state, and that its failure was largely the outcome of historical developments and related to the Cold War environment in which the state developed. Thus, the GDR failed not because of its internal, socialist ideology, but because of its external, capitalist enemies. This allows OKV activists to continue to defend the GDR and its ideology. The above-sketched isolation paradigm can also be applied to the OKV environments of today. They are consciously self-isolating, and thereby protect their “political epistemics” from challenges that come from outside of their group. As we will see in Chapter 1, OKV members developed and cultivate common stereotypical responses to some of those challenges, including criticism as to how the GDR dealt with the 1953 uprising, as to the human tragedy of the Berlin Wall, and as to the pervasiveness of the Stasi in GDR society; and in Chapter 6 I will discuss how, when contacting others for concerted action, OKV activists cannot give up on demanding that any potential partner must subscribe to their own political epistemics, which seriously inhibits the organization’s outreach. Thus in many ways, contemporary practices within the OKV go back to the ideological environment of the Stasi and other state institutions that most of its members were part of before 1989.

65 Louis Fűrberg, *Lied der Partei* (first performed in 1950).

The Stasi stigma

The self-isolation of OKV members goes hand in hand with their public stigmatization. This puts pressure on former Stasi officers, and limits their opportunities of goal-oriented action. Spurred by the accessibility of the Stasi archives, scholars have since the early 1990s produced a considerable body of literature on the GDR's former secret service. Much of this work is carried out by researchers affiliated to the Stasi documentation center (of the *Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes*, BStU). Established in 1990 to deal with the paper legacy of the GDR's former secret service, this government agency was directed consecutively by several prominent GDR human rights activists.⁶⁶

The opening of the Stasi archives revealed the identities of many of the "informal employees" (IMs) of the Ministry of State Security (MfS), that is, its many unpaid but contracted agents who, according to Glaeser, formed a huge net of sources for information that the core Stasi officers were not able to fully make sense of. High-ranking east Germans were identified as Stasi informants. The public pressure on IMs thus enroots the idea that the GDR system permeated the whole of society. By relating the system to concrete individual biographies, the Stasi files are an important source for studying life experiences in the GDR.⁶⁷ Especially members of the SED successor party PDS (later *Die Linke*) were regularly attacked as former Stasi spies, including its leading figure, Gregor Gysi, who in the GDR was a lawyer for many dissidents. Gysi managed to clear himself of any concrete charges, and in response sued persons and institutions who accused him of implications with the Stasi. The controversy continues up to the present time; *Die Linke* is regularly criticized for its refusal to unequivocally distance itself from the GDR past.⁶⁸ When in 2014 *Linke* politician Bodo Ramelow (himself from West Germany) became prime minister of the East German *Bundesland* Thuringia, this could only happen

66 For a comprehensive list of literature see BStU, *Bibliografie zum Staatssicherheitsdienst der DDR*, Stand 31.12.2015. Accessed 3 November 2016: http://www.bstu.bund.de/DE/Wissen/Bibliothek/Auswahl-Bibliographie/auswahl-bibliographie_node.html. The BStU publishes a series of publications (*MfS Handbuch: Anatomie der Staatssicherheit*). Its 28 volumes (so far) shed light on the structure and functioning of the Stasi by looking at individual service units and key issues. For how the Stasi operated locally, see Bruce, *The Firm*.

67 Barbara Miller, *The Stasi Files Unveiled: Guilt and Compliance in a Unified Germany* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 2004).

68 See also Chapter 6.

after *Die Linke* agreed to label the GDR an “*Unrechtsstaat*” in the coalition agreement.⁶⁹

While the 173,000 “informal coworkers” (IMs) of the Stasi could still defend themselves by arguing that they had been pressured into cooperation, this argument is hard to sustain in the case of the 91,015 official Stasi employees whom the GDR had in paid service by 1989.⁷⁰ Most of them became unemployed after the dissolution of the GDR’s secret service, and their identities were made public. Some of these today form the core of OKV branches. Stasi officers were now no longer the ones who interrogated in the name of the socialist “good”, but found their ideals and activities questioned by the new, democratic and unified Germany. Several former SED and Stasi coworkers were accused and convicted of crimes against humanity.⁷¹ A number of agents who conducted intelligence work in the West, including some who would later unite in the OKV,⁷² received serious prison sentences. With the exception of a few who subsequently went into security companies, many did not find new skilled employment. The stigma also extends to persons who did not work for the Stasi but in other “professions close to the regime”. In a state-led labor market as in the GDR, this included not only functionaries of the SED party and the state organs but also university personnel,⁷³ managers in the cultural sector, as well as all professions that involved traveling abroad (e.g., foreign trade agents). Even if these people were less targeted in public debates, they equally lost their positions as well as their social status.

69 Die Linke, SPD, B’90/Grünen, “Koalitionsvertrag zwischen den Parteien DIE LINKE, SPD, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN für die 6. Wahlperiode des Thüringer Landtags: Thüringen gemeinsam voranbringen – demokratisch, sozial, ökologisch”. (final version, 20 November 2014), p. 2.

70 Roughly 1 in every 60 GDR citizens above the age of eighteen was working, professionally or informally, for the Stasi. These numbers do not include people whose relation with the MfS had been broken (e.g., due to retirement) before 1989. Jens Gieseke, “Schild und Schwert der Partei – Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit”. Printed in: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Im Visier der Geheimpolizei: Der kommunistische Überwachungs- und Repressionsapparat 1945-1989: XVIII. Bautzen Forum, 10. und 11. Mai 2007* (Leipzig: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2007), pp. 21-32; here p. 24.

71 Taking into account the Stasi’s reputation for human rights abuses, the number of convictions has been surprisingly low. Although investigations into a large number of specific misconducts were begun in the 1990s, these were often hampered by lack of evidence and by mismatches between GDR and Federal German laws. See, e.g., Anne Sa’adah, *Germany’s Second Chance: Trust, Justice, and Democratization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1998).

72 Former Stasi spies in the west have their own circle (*AG Aufklärer*) within the GRH, one of the OKV’s larger organizations: <http://www.kundschafter-ddr.de/>. See also Chapter 4.

73 Renate Mayntz (ed.), *Aufbruch und Reform von oben: ostdeutsche Universitäten im Transformationsprozess* (Frankfurt am Main 1994); Sven Vollrath, *Zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Intervention: Der Umbau der Humboldt Universität 1989-1996* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag 2008).

This elimination of GDR elites has led some of them to claim that the West was applying *Siegerjustiz*, or “victor’s justice”.⁷⁴ Indeed, from all former socialist countries of Central/Eastern Europe that went through the cardinal transformations of the 1990s, it was in the GDR that the break with the past was most strict and consequential: the old state was dissolved, and the old elites were largely replaced, often by people from former West Germany.⁷⁵

Overview of the book

This study is thus about a significant number of people formerly close to the regime, who reacted to their loss of status, and to the public pressure on them, by setting up interest organizations to defy the FRG. I will argue that their rejection of the new regime can be partly attributed to negative experiences and the feeling of exclusion after Germany’s reunification. Yet the root cause for continuing to support the GDR is of an epistemic and emotive nature: admitting that the GDR was, in the end, a failure would mean giving up deeply held ideological and political convictions, and admitting that one’s own life activities were unwarranted.

In the following chapters I explore various approaches to the subject of my study. In Chapter 1, I focus on the phenomenon of nostalgia, which, I argue, is a driving force for uniting in OKV groups. But this nostalgia needs to be nuanced: in the case of OKV we are not dealing with the “banal” nostalgia (to borrow from the concept of “banal nationalism”) that gives former GDR citizens a warm feeling when they detect a *Trabant*, or a *Schwalbe* motor scooter, on the streets of East Berlin. I conceptualize OKV nostalgia not as the longing for a past but as a longing for the longings in the past: the failure of the GDR as a state project is acknowledged, but the belief in the potential of the GDR, as a promise, is still alive. Nostalgia is connected to memory, and OKV organizations put a lot of emphasis on maintaining the memory of the GDR as a just state. The various aspects of this *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* (to use Sabrow’s term) are discussed on the basis of how my interview partners expressed their nostalgic feelings for the past and their rejection of the present.

74 For a detailed account of the many problems in doing and defining justice after the collapse of the GDR, see Sa’adah, *Germany’s Second Chance*, especially Chapter 4, “Successor Justice: The Appeal to Common Sense and the Redefinition of Justice”, pp. 143–188.

75 For the different fate of the state security in Poland, see Maria Los and Andrzej Zybertowicz, *Privatizing the Police State: The Case of Poland* (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave 2000).

In Chapter 2 I discuss individual biographies of OKV activists, according to the narratives that I recorded in my interviews with them. Here my approach for understanding the “OKV mentality” is historical: I argue that the OKV is largely directed by a generation of men and women who share the experience of Second World War disruption (even if they were too young to serve at the front), and for whom the GDR presented not just opportunities for self-fulfillment and upward mobility but also a redemption for the failure of the Germans to resist the temptations of Nazi ideology. Hence the strong antifascist motive that is central in all OKV statements and publications, and that seems today so out of tune. Antifascist convictions among the OKV members are one-to-one copies of the GDR “antifascist myth”, that is, East Germany’s self-presentation as the “better” Germany, accompanied by accusations hurled against West Germany that the early FRG was in fact a continuation of the Nazi regime. The ideological dogma that fascism is just a radical form of capitalism makes it possible to also reject present-day Germany. Rationalizations for this dogma are found in recent NATO and UN military operations to which unified Germany has contributed.

Part I of this book, comprising of Chapters 1 and 2, is thus based on the life experiences of individuals whom I interviewed; their personal accounts I use for clarifying the emotions they share, and for establishing broader patterns in their experiences and how they valued them when talking to me. The peculiarity of the OKV emotions is that they are coupled with hard-line political convictions: nostalgia, as an emotion, is reproduced in memory practices, and hardened by the persistence of GDR-made political dogmas. Nostalgia and memory are therefore closely connected to present-oriented activities.

Part II comprises an organizational analysis of the OKV. Associations affiliated with the OKV uphold a broad variety of agendas. In Chapter 3 I attempt to give an overview of the spectrum of the OKV affiliates, to demonstrate the whole range of their focus areas. While the bigger OKV organizations concentrate on the core tasks of lobbying and of going to court, the smaller groups – with sometimes just a handful of members – are equally important to the overall OKV umbrella: they provide the ideational glue, and in particular the memory function that is connected to the GDR political and cultural heritage. While Chapter 3 discusses the origins and developments of the central OKV member organizations that I already mentioned above (especially GBM and GRH, with ISOR being the subject of Chapter 5), Chapter 4 discusses the numerous tiny clubs of activists that fight for the protection and maintenance of certain buildings, monuments, songs and even GDR-type dachas. I trace the genealogy of OKV’s wide spectrum out of one particular member organization, the GBM. Of particular

interest are those associations that have managed to establish a strong local presence in some parts of Berlin, for they were most successful in linking up with broader social interests that go beyond the core ex-GDR identity.

Part III of the present study (Chapters 5 and 6) deal with the political work of the OKV, and evaluate their functions and their achievements. In Chapter 5 I investigate one of the big OKV member associations that engages in lobbying for Stasi interests, ISOR. ISOR has been quite successful in suing the German state for the pension cuts that the *Bundestag* imposed on former GDR political elites and groups “close to the regime”. Given that the GDR did not provide its citizens with the opportunity to sue the government, I pose the question why ISOR chose to adopt this legalistic approach: going to Germany’s highest court, the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, not only requires familiarity with legal practices in unified Germany but also a principled decision “to proceed according to the rules”, that is, to abstain from more contentious strategies. In fact, the OKV has no reputation of making trouble in ways that are not publicly accepted: in leftist street demonstrations, OKV joins in but does not take the lead. In this chapter I not only analyze the legal activities of ISOR and its lobbying of politicians but also explore the legal experience that ISOR men and women had accumulated in the GDR. I come to the conclusion that GDR practices of settling disputes by mediation and by petitioning can be seen as blueprints for the legal activities of ISOR. Ironically, the court successes that ISOR has claimed have granted many former GDR social groups exemption from the pension cuts that were imposed on former GDR elites in 1991 – but not the core of its Stasi constituency. As in 2015 the legal venues for reclaiming the original pensions have dried up, I argue that also ISOR is turning inward, and its main focus now lies on community building, like in most other OKV units.

In Chapter 6 I continue the discussion on how OKV associations relate to possible partners or allies beyond the GDR elite environment. Of particular interest here is the GDR’s ruling party SED, which reinvented itself first in the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), then in the *Linkspartei*, and finally in *Die Linke* of our days. I argue that the more the party attempted to reform itself, the more it alienated itself from the circles that make up the OKV. This transformation of the SED successor party into a broad radical left party is still continuing, and the party is marred with confrontations between Marxist and “traditional” leftists (close to OKV thinking) on the one hand, and an increasing “new left” segment (which feeds also from West German party members), on the other. For this chapter, I had the opportunity to interview former SED politician Hans Modrow, who has served as the OKV’s

anchor in *Die Linke*. But as Modrow was also the last GDR prime minister who “liberated” the party from its responsibility for the Stasi, his authority is not unchallenged among OKV members.

This final chapter is also the place where I address the *Freundeskreis Palast der Republik*, an association that has been struggling for the preservation, and then for the memorialization, of East Berlin’s GDR People’s Palace. I selected this group for a case study because the *Freundeskreis* could have linked up with other citizens’ initiatives beyond the OKV that also struggled against the destruction of the building – in particular with young occupiers that used the empty structure for art work, exhibitions and other purposes. Yet this cooperation failed, and I argue that it did so because of the OKV’s unwillingness, or inability, to accept any group that does not subscribe to their form of GDR memory, and to their political epistemics, even if they share with them more tangible goals like the preservation of the *Palast*.

In Part IV, the conclusion, I return to the central question of this study: the tension between an orientation toward the past and the unfolding of pragmatic activities in the new state that the OKV people reject. Are OKV organizations indeed a bunch of *Ewiggestrigen*, or “people stuck in the past”, stubbornly refusing to accept the present and clinging to a heritage that has completely outlived itself? Or is the memory of the past, and partly also its re-enactment, not perhaps a peculiar way to make yourself at home in the present? That the OKV is not a threat to the German constitution has been acknowledged by German state security agencies; and the age of the activists makes any turn to more contentious policies unlikely. The OKV is harmless, in spite of its members’ partly militant rhetoric and propaganda; and it is exactly their ideological attachment to the GDR that precluded any meaningful alliance formation that could have converted the numerical strength of the OKV into effective political pressure. I therefore conclude that aside from the pragmatic goal-oriented activities of the OKV and its branches, the major function of all OKV associations is self-preservation, and this in the double sense: preserving the organizational forms (which is difficult, since their professed ideology and their focus on the interest of a decreasing group of activists precludes them from attracting new members, or even sympathizers), and preserving the personal sense of dignity, of individual achievement in a state that projected itself as a harmonious collective. Together, these difficulties account for the self-isolation of the OKV: only in a controlled environment that is insulated as much as possible from contrary opinions can OKV members continue to live according to a worldview that is rejected by the vast majority of society. The OKV resents its

marginalization imposed from outside, but, paradoxically, it also embraces this marginalization as a strategy for organizational and epistemic survival.

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