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**PUNK ROCK'S IMPACT ON THE FALL  
OF COMMUNISM IN EAST GERMANY**

by

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March 2022

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**PUNK ROCK'S IMPACT ON THE FALL OF COMMUNISM  
IN EAST GERMANY**

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## ABSTRACT

The fall of the Berlin Wall in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany or GDR) on November 9, 1989, marked the symbolic end of the Cold War and the demise of communism in Europe. Although many would argue this was due to the triumphs of Western capitalism, the Eastern Bloc collapsed from the inside amid the cognitive dissonance of the oppressed lives of its citizens. Most notable among these were the youth of the punk rock subculture. Thus, this study aims to uncover the significant role that the East German punk movement, or *Ostpunk*, had on the collapse of the party-state. This study explores how a group of GDR youths who were dissatisfied with their government took to the streets with their music, fashion, and do-it-yourself attitude and contributed to change across Europe. This thesis examines the expectations of life under socialist rule, the punks' resistance to the societal norms, and the party-state's brutal methods used in an attempt to destroy the subculture. This study finds that the persistent protests of East German punks contributed to shaping the political environment that facilitated the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Relevant in the 2020s, the historical understanding of *Ostpunk* can inform the impacts that cultural movements, such as Black Lives Matter in the U.S. and the neo-Nazi movement in Europe, have on geopolitics.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FDJ	<i>Freie Deutsche Jugend</i> (Free German Youth)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IM	<i>inoffizielle Mitarbeiter</i> (unofficial informant)
MfS	<i>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit</i> (Ministry for State Security or Stasi)
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
WUNC	worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the communist regimes of the Warsaw Pact states, a subculture arose in the late 1970s among the youth who did not look or sound like the socialist realist ideal. It centered on punk rock. That is, the punk rock scene that had origins in the United States with anti-disco groups like the Ramones presently made its way across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom, where British bands like the Sex Pistols turned broad social satire into generation-defining political protest. It then evolved into a unique subculture in the Eastern Bloc that became an outlet for youth frustrated with the authoritarian regimes dictating their lives for a perfect future. Ultimately the scene posed real challenges to the legitimacy of, and even the prospects of, the communist system. In particular, with its rejection of conformity and participants' loss of faith in any kind of future.

### A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The aging party leaders in East Central Europe, more predominantly in the German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany), found themselves in the 1970s and 1980s with a new enemy of, to, and in the state: groups of youths with ripped clothing and bizarre haircuts—entirely unsuitable for the assembly line or even the collective farm—and blaring, off-tune music. This thesis asks how the fringe punk movement evolved in the GDR, and how it contributed to the revolution that led to the collapse of communism in East Germany?

### B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November, 1989, was an unexpected turn of events that marked the collapse of the communist regimes across East Central Europe.<sup>1</sup> While much is made of the pressures of a renewed Cold War and the U.S.-Soviet arms race of the Reagan era, the Eastern Bloc, in fact, mostly collapsed from the inside, amid the cognitive

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 361.

dissonance of the oppressed lives of the citizens.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, citizens of Second World Europe, especially young people—the expected embodiment of the glorious socialist future—abandoned the project and chose not to follow the party-state’s cookie-cutter life.<sup>3</sup> They took to their subcultures, with punk rock significant among them. To be sure, the music was a raucous refutation of parental and party-state values, but it also came to form a sustained protest and, thus, one of the forces that ultimately closed the curtain on communist Europe.

With various protest organizations, political populist movements, and authoritarian regimes across the globe today, this study seeks to explore how a group of youths who were dissatisfied with their government took to the streets with their music, fashion, and do-it-yourself (DIY) attitude and contributed to change across Europe. Understanding a civil society’s cultural influence in a social movement is important when analyzing various crises across the world today whether it is the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States standing against police brutality and oppression or European nationalist neo-Nazi organizations spreading their influence of white supremacy extremism, social movements can use music to influence state policies for good or for bad.

### C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Musicians have a way of affecting and influencing their listeners with their music.<sup>4</sup> The 1970s punk subculture migrated across the Atlantic from the United States to Western Europe and ultimately made its way east across the Iron Curtain and grew into a protest

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<sup>2</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 589–92.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Tim Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus: Punk Rock, Revolution, and the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2018); Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Jeff Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” in *Dropping out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc*, ed. Juliane Furst and Josie McLellen (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 207–32; William Jay Risch, ed., *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> James B. Briggs, “A Study of Musicology and Social Discourse in Mid-Twentieth-Century America” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/66596>.

movement.<sup>5</sup> This section will review and analyze the existing literature and theories of musicology and social movements to establish a connection between music and protest, a basis for this research in unravelling the question of punk’s protest movement and its relationship to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc socialist states.

## 1. Musicology

Existing fields of music study are generally divided between musicology and music theory. Musicology analyzes the historic and social aspect of music while music theory is a more technical field focusing on the development of sounds into music. Thus, the field of musicology is more relevant for this thesis than music theory. The main question among scholars in musicology is how music becomes popular within in the industry.

Tony Bennett et al.’s *Rock and Popular Music* studies music and politics in a global perspective, analyzing the relationship between various governments and rock music.<sup>6</sup> They argue that states’ responses vary across the spectrum. For example, this book shows how liberal democracies established broadcasting quotas for rock music to boost the industry for their homegrown artists.<sup>7</sup> While in contrast, other governments viewed rock music as “political dirtiness,” condemning the genre through censorship.<sup>8</sup> Peter Wicke and John Shepherd, in their chapter of *Rock and Popular Music*, explain that in socialist states, music was controlled under two main principles in order to maintain the ideals of socialist society: “grounded in traditional high-culture concepts of what constitutes ‘good art’” and “popular entertainers as ‘artists’ should be kept free from commercial influences.”<sup>9</sup> The authors argue that as soon as music showed signs of Western influence, it would be banned

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<sup>5</sup> Raymond A. Patton, *Punk Crisis: The Global Punk Rock Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*.

<sup>6</sup> Tony Bennett et al., eds., *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (New York: Routledge, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203991961>.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett et al., 9.

<sup>8</sup> Bennett et al., 9.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Wicke and John Shepherd, “‘The Cabaret Is Dead’: Rock Culture as State Enterprise—The Political Organization of Rock in East Germany,” in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, ed. Tony Bennett et al. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 27–28, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203991961>.

by the government, so only those musicians who aligned with the state's agenda were able to publicly continue their craft.<sup>10</sup> Thus, musicologists can use Robert Stebbins's theory on the motivation and commitment of professionals and amateurs to evaluate the commitment and motivation of musicians under various political contexts.

Stebbins's theory argues a difference in the nature of commitment between professionals and amateurs.<sup>11</sup> Professionals rely on their art for at least a majority of their income, whereas amateurs participate for their passion to the art rather than for money.<sup>12</sup> This allows an amateur to remain true to their art and avoid being influenced by industry or profit. He writes that a professional that is bound by contracts, money, and other investments has a long-term commitment to the industry and, thus, is motivated by profit. On the other hand, an amateur who does not have any of these constraints and is motivated by passion for music and has, according to Stebbins, value-based commitment.<sup>13</sup> Despite the deficit of monetary incentives, Stebbins suggests, amateur will be motivated "as long as their pursuits continue to be voluntary and enjoyable."<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, Simon Frith argues that amateur and professional musicians share the same commitment to the art despite their diverse or divergent motivations.<sup>15</sup> He claims that their musical commitment in regards to the time invested in learning and enhancing their skills are comparable despite what motivates them to play, money or passion.<sup>16</sup>

Frith, in a lecture at the University of Edinburgh in 2007, explains his theory regarding music categories.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to Stebbins's theory, Frith argues that music is divided into high and low music: pop music, to include rock and its various sub-genres, is

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<sup>10</sup> Wicke and Shepherd, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Robert A. Stebbins, *Amateurs, Professionals, and Serious Leisure* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1992), 51–52.

<sup>12</sup> Stebbins, 20–21.

<sup>13</sup> Stebbins, 51–52.

<sup>14</sup> Stebbins, 58.

<sup>15</sup> Simon Frith, "Why Music Matters," *The Critical Quarterly* 50, no. 1–2 (2008): 165–79.

<sup>16</sup> Frith.

<sup>17</sup> Frith.

equated to low music, as it is made to entertain and be commercialized as opposed to the high music in the classical sense composed for artistic purposes.<sup>18</sup> High and low music can further be associated with the target audience, with high music typically produced for the bourgeois or upper class. Low music is aimed at an audience of the non-elites, the majority of society. In simpler terms, Firth divides music between “the serious and the popular, art music and commercial music.”<sup>19</sup> Frith’s theory can be used to understand how music—high and low—impact society differently. Thus, punk music would fall under Frith’s category of low music, and he further advocates the study of low music to understand its development and influence, as many traditional musicologists do not consider the genre as music.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Social Movements

Punk’s impact on society from the Americas to Europe is noteworthy in understanding its relationship to political change. Travis Jackson describes punk as “the apotheosis of protest music” with the “lyrics, simplicity and sonic aggression of punk as outlets for their disaffection and disenfranchisement” of mainstream society.<sup>21</sup> He argues that punk music was young people’s outlet for their derision and disdain towards the mainstream.<sup>22</sup> In a study of student protests in the mid-twentieth century, Nella Van Dyke argues that the primary factor in a social movement’s mobilization is the political threat; the degree of that threat will determine the need for a cross-movement coalition to form across borders.<sup>23</sup> Understanding the extent of a political threat and correlating it with the coordination across the social movement enlightens the understanding how vast the punk movement was as a protest to the establishment.

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<sup>18</sup> Frith.

<sup>19</sup> Frith.

<sup>20</sup> Frith.

<sup>21</sup> Travis A. Jackson, “Falling into Fancy Fragments: Punk, Portest, and Politics,” in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. Jonathan C Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013), 157.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, 157.

<sup>23</sup> Nella Van Dyke, “Crossing Movement Boundaries: Factors That Facilitate Coalition Protest by American College Students, 1930–1990,” *Social Problems* 50, no. 2 (May 2003): 226–50, <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2003.50.2.226>. 244–245.

Such scholars as Charles Tilly and David S. Meyer address how social movements are successful in imposing change. They each developed a theory to measure the success of a social movement.<sup>24</sup> Tilly argues that a social movement comes to fruition under three circumstances: first, there must be a sustained campaign from the public against an authority; second, a social movement repertoire of gatherings and events must be present; the third is what Tilly refers to as WUNC displays (worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment) such as symbols and rhetoric that strengthen the message.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Meyer, argues that a social movement's success, or lack thereof, can be a culmination of its ability to mobilize, advance its agenda, form an alliance, use tactics and strategies, and effect change on policy.<sup>26</sup> Brent Briggs argues that music was a driving factor that "helped initiate and fuel the social movements that comprised the greater social discourse era of the mid-twentieth-century and codified belief systems that gave these movements long-term purpose."<sup>27</sup> According to Kathrin Fahlenbrach et al., beginning in the 1960s, mass media has played an integral part in supporting protest as it gives the public a tangible view of the problems.<sup>28</sup> With increased visibility—namely from radio and magazines—social movements could seamlessly cross physical borders and barriers, spreading their causes to a greater audience.

However, music as a form of media has been influencing movements since as early as the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> From the American anti-slavery folk music by the Hutchinson Family Singers in the 1800s to the more recent Chinese rock in support of Taiwan and Hong Kong, music impacts the public sphere and boosts the campaigns of social

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2004); David S. Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30, no. 1 (August 2004): 125–45, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110545>.

<sup>25</sup> Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004*, 3–4.

<sup>26</sup> Meyer, "Protest and Political Opportunities," 126.

<sup>27</sup> Briggs, "A Study of Musicology and Social Discourse in Mid-Twentieth-Century America."

<sup>28</sup> Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Erling Sivertsen, and Rolf Werenskjold, eds., *Media and Revolt: Strategies and Performances from the 1960s to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 12.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan C. Friedman, ed., *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

movements around the world.<sup>30</sup> In Jonathan Pieslak's study of the connection between music and extremist organizations, he argues "that music can catalyze the processes of social bonding" and that "the shared enjoyment of a genre or song, coupled with the affectation of collective solidarity achieved through communal experience and participation, frequently activate before people dedicate themselves to a set of radical beliefs."<sup>31</sup> He draws the correlation between radical and mainstream music.<sup>32</sup> Both use lyrics as a means of propaganda to message, influence, and attract the listener to their ultimate goal—be it radical extremism or commercial sales.<sup>33</sup> Understanding lyrics' influence on listeners can guide studies on the impacts which music and associated culture have on society.

In a study of 20<sup>th</sup> century social movements, Mary Kaldor describes a civil society as "the realm of culture, ideology and political debate."<sup>34</sup> In her comparative analysis of social movements across radical right and radical left states in Europe and Latin America, she argues that despite the differences in the type of regime, similarities exist in the social movements which fight for change.<sup>35</sup> In these cases, a successful change will only occur in a bottom-up approach, she argues, requiring the norms within society to evolve with the movement before change in the state can be implemented.<sup>36</sup>

James DeFronzo classifies social movements in two general categories: change-oriented (or liberal) and change-resistant (or conservative), based on whether the

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<sup>30</sup> Scott Gac, "God, Garrison, and the Ground: The Hutchinson Family Singers and the Origins of Commercial Protest Music," in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. Jonathan C. Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013), 20; Dennis Rea, "Ambushed from All Sides: Rock Music as a Force for Change in China," in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. Jonathan C. Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013), 374.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan R. Pieslak, *Radicalism & Music: An Introduction to the Music Cultures of Al-Qa'ida, Racist Skinheads, Christian-Affiliated Radicalism, and Eco-Animal Rights Militancy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), 197.

<sup>32</sup> Pieslak. 199.

<sup>33</sup> Pieslak. 199.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Kaldor, "The Idea of Global Civil Society," *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 79, no. 3 (2003): 583–93.

<sup>35</sup> Kaldor.

<sup>36</sup> Kaldor.

movement is fighting to change or to maintain an existing situation; sometimes a social movement will share aspects of both categories.<sup>37</sup> The women's right movement is an example of a liberal social movement, according to DeFronzo's classification, whereas a conservative movement can be the call to prevent the banning of prayer in public school.<sup>38</sup> Social movements can be further subcategorized, either as a revolutionary or a reform movement depending on if the goal is to cause total change in the institutions or just minor change in policy while keeping the larger structure in place.<sup>39</sup> The 1960s American civil rights movement was a reform movement, DeFronzo argues, as it called for a change in policy whereas the "communist-led Chinese revolution" was a revolution as it called for a drastic change in the structural institutions of the Chinese government.<sup>40</sup> Social movements vary in their ends, ways, and means; however, whether they are described as positive or negative is dependent on the viewer's position regarding the issue.<sup>41</sup> DeFronzo describes, "terrorism—the use of force to intimidate for political purposes—is often in the eye of the beholder, and one person's terrorist can be another person's freedom fighter."<sup>42</sup>

#### D. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis takes a historical approach, using existing literature on the prominent figures and bands in East German punk to include Tim Mohr's *Burning Down the Haus*, Raymond Patton's *Punk Crisis: The Global Punk Rock Revolution*, and Timothy Ryback's *Rock Around the Bloc*.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, the framework of the research design will be based on Benjamin Teitelbaum's *Lions of the North*, a book that analyses the spread of Nordic white supremacy extremism through music and pop culture in the 2010s. Although the end goals of Nordic neo-Nazis and the East German punks were vastly different, Teitelbaum's

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<sup>37</sup> James DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 21, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429494727>.

<sup>38</sup> DeFronzo. 21.

<sup>39</sup> DeFronzo. 22.

<sup>40</sup> DeFronzo. 22.

<sup>41</sup> DeFronzo. 22.

<sup>42</sup> DeFronzo. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*; Patton, *Punk Crisis*; Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc*.

study of the origins of neo-Nazi ideology, emergence of the music, and the influential artists in the dissident social movement can be generally applied to the study of East German punk.<sup>44</sup> Both movements are similar in that they defy the social norms of society and use music in their protests of their respective state's policies.<sup>45</sup>

This thesis analyzes the evolution of the punk rock subculture of the 1970s and 1980s. It starts with examining the hardships of life towards the end of communism in East Germany. This will include an analysis of the party-state's social policies regarding conformity through education and indoctrination of youth to become a contributing member of the socialist workforce. Further, this thesis will examine the emergence of *Ostpunk* (East German punk) and the subculture's resistance to conform through its music, aesthetics, and values. Finally, this thesis will evaluate the cause-and-effect relationship between the socialist regime's response to their newfound enemy-of-the-state and the punks' persistence through persecution and conclude with the ultimate implosion of the GDR.

## **E. THESIS OVERVIEW**

The thesis is broken into six chapters. The first chapter forms the introduction which explains the research question and highlights the present-day significance of the 1970s and 1980s punk subculture in East Germany along with an overview of existing literature. The second chapter discovers what life was like under socialist rule in the GDR by exploring the party-state's control over the daily lives of their citizens, emphasizing the roots of what Eastern punk was rebelling against. Chapter III then covers the emergence of the East German punk subculture and the characteristics which opposed the norms of society. Chapter IV analyzes the party-state's response to the punk scene and Chapter V uncovers the punks' fight for survival against attacks from the party-state and explains the how the punks contributed to the events which led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Finally, the conclusion examines how this research can be applied to social problems in the 2020s.

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<sup>44</sup> Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 27–28.

<sup>45</sup> Teitelbaum, 27–28.

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## II. LIFE IN SOCIALIST EAST GERMANY

Following the defeat of the Nazi regime in World War II and the division of Germany among the Allied victors, the German Democratic Republic—or East Germany—was established in 1949. This new country was founded by Stalin’s Soviet Union as a de facto puppet regime to Moscow. On the front-line of the Iron Curtain, the GDR was the Eastern Bloc’s model for socialism with its relatively high standard of living. But the ruling party in East Germany, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), also inherited a population who had, until recently, been sworn to defeat—if not eradicate—communism in all forms. The government was heavy on leaders who had spent the war years in a different kind of peril—in exile in Moscow. They did not have much in common with the average East German man or woman in the street, whom they now tasked with building socialism and keeping the peace.

Thus, the SED set about building a totalitarian party-state.<sup>46</sup> It quickly took control of the civil society to ensure the future success of socialism (and itself).<sup>47</sup> Therefore, far-reaching policies were implemented, first, to cleanse the society of their fascist past—the SED officially claimed the GDR as an anti-fascist state—and, second, to create a perfect society based on the collective needs of the whole. The BBC documentary *The Lost World of Communism* illustrates the reality of this transition by explaining, “the communists claimed they were building a socialist paradise,” however in reality, “most people think they created hell on earth.”<sup>48</sup> That is to say, the party-state’s priorities to implement change was motivated by their need to redirect society to socialist ideology—even if those policies came at the expense of the citizen’s freedoms.

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<sup>46</sup> Carolyn C. Höfig, “‘Organized Cheerfulness:’ A Regional Study of Popular Culture and Identity in the German Democratic Republic” (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation: A History of Germany, 1918–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 188–96.

<sup>48</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise* (2009; United Kingdom: BBC, 2009), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znb\\_X48WXUg&t=2677s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znb_X48WXUg&t=2677s).

To create the ultimate utopia, the state needed quiet and order; thus, the party leaders of the SED—Walter Ulbricht and later Erich Honecker—imposed cultural policies for East Germany to steer the rank and file accordingly. Through policies of conformity, directed primarily toward the younger generations, Mary Fulbrook maintains that the socialist leaders in the GDR expected to indoctrinate the young socialists into the future leaders of the East German party-state.<sup>49</sup> This chapter explores the establishment of socialism in Germany and the cultural policy regarding the rearing of children to fulfil a largely prefab life to include the education system, youth organizations, and expectations to enter the workforce and build socialism.<sup>50</sup> Section A will briefly outline the rise of East German socialism before Section B uncovers the cultural expectations of socialist life in the GDR.

## A. RISE OF EAST GERMAN SOCIALISM

Following the 1945 Allied defeat of the Axis powers in the Second World War, Europe was war-torn—unrecognizable from the pre-war era—thus, the victors would spend the next several decades reconstructing Europe physically, politically, and intellectually.<sup>51</sup> Fulbrook described the scene from the epicenter of the war in the former-Nazi Germany:

A demoralized population was living among ruins. The big cities that had suffered bombardment from the air were reduced to piles of rubble between gaunt, hollow shells of bombed out building, lone walls with empty windows forming a jagged skyline, the occasional intact building standing out starkly amidst the ruins.<sup>52</sup>

The defeated German territory was divided into four zones of occupation among the Allied powers of the United States, United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union. The Soviet Zone of Occupation encompassed what would later become the German Democratic

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<sup>49</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 115–17.

<sup>50</sup> Alan McDougall, “The Liberal Interlude: SED Youth Policy and the Free German Youth (FDJ), 1963–65,” *Debate: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 9, no. 2 (November 1, 2001): 123–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09651560120107188>.

<sup>51</sup> Westad, *The Cold War*, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 129.

Republic (GDR). This zone fell under the administrative control of Joseph Stalin and the communists of the Soviet Union. Thus, on the day Adolf Hitler killed himself, Stalin seized the initiative over the Western Allies by deploying, what James Hawes describes as, “a ready-made client administration of obedient German communists from Moscow” to Berlin.<sup>53</sup> This administration consisted of what Fulbrook describes as “small groups of German communists who had survived Stalin’s purges ... [and] were entrusted with the task of taking over the reins of power on the ground, seeking out like minded comrades and building a new and ‘better Germany.’”<sup>54</sup> The German people woke up to their state in ruins following a devastating defeat. Therefore, the communists immediately began their messaging campaign of anti-West propaganda to sway the German population towards Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Ongoing competition between the capitalist West and the communist East continued as the GDR was founded as a state.<sup>55</sup> Henry Turner writes that, over the following decades, East Germany found itself head-to-head in a political, economic, and social competition with their capitalist neighbor, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG or West Germany).<sup>56</sup> Turner argues that the competition resulted in Ulbricht implementing economic policies to increase industrial production, a change in policy which triggered the 1953 workers uprising in East Berlin.<sup>57</sup> He further details, in response to the uprising, the SED implemented repressive and hardline policies to eradicate individualist ideology from the civil society.<sup>58</sup> Social deterrence was used to persuade the masses to fall into the rank and file of the new socialist system, as the author states, “dissent or even disagreement with policies of the occupation regime was discouraged by denying offenders advancement in

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<sup>53</sup> James Hawes, *The Shortest History of Germany* (Devon, UK: Old Street Publishing Ltd, 2017), 189.

<sup>54</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Henry Ashby Turner, *The Two Germanies Since 1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 46–53.

<sup>56</sup> Turner, 108–15.

<sup>57</sup> Turner, 115–18.

<sup>58</sup> Turner, 124–29.

their careers, dismissing them from their jobs, or imprisoning them.”<sup>59</sup> Nonconformity to the socialist line of thinking was not tolerated—individualism was a threat to the party-state’s newfound status quo.<sup>60</sup>

## **B. CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS**

The socialist utopia envisioned by the party leadership required a top-down planned society; thus, the SED had to create and enforce new cultural norms and expectations.<sup>61</sup> For the sustainment of socialism in East Germany, according to Mike Dennis, the party instituted cultural policies to mold each citizen to fit within their predetermined role in society—be it on the collective farms or in the factories.<sup>62</sup> These policies set the boundaries of acceptable behavior in the GDR. Hans-Joachim Maaz argues that Ulbricht’s strategy was to perfect the socialist system by applying scientific methods to its social and economic process.<sup>63</sup> His messaging in the early years of the 1950s revolved around “building socialism,” by reforming East German education with the incorporation of the existing Stalinist Soviet system. Stalinism adapted the Leninist philosophy regarding the necessity for a forced re-education of the masses to his socialist ideology to completely eradicate the existing bourgeois ideology across society. Stalin often quoted Lenin:

It will be necessary under the dictatorship of the proletariat, we will have to re-educate millions of peasants and petty-proprietors, hundreds of thousands of office workers, officials and bourgeois intellectuals; to subordinate all these to the proletarian state and to proletarian leadership; to overcome their bourgeois habits and traditions.<sup>64</sup>

Maaz claims that similar to the Soviet society, East Germany appeared to be a “huge temple of a pseudo-religious cult,” with party leaders regarded as God-like beings—worshiped,

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<sup>59</sup> Turner, 47.

<sup>60</sup> Hans-Joachim Maaz, *Behind the Wall: The Inner Life of Communist Germany* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 53.

<sup>61</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 33–38.

<sup>62</sup> Mike Dennis, *German Democratic Republic: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Pinter Publishers Limited, 1988), 173.

<sup>63</sup> Maaz, *Behind the Wall*, xii.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism* (International Publishers, 1932), 48.

followed, and feared.<sup>65</sup> In 1958, Walter Ulbricht, issued the “Ten Commandments of Socialist Morality”:

1. Thou shalt apply thyself always to the international solidarity of the working class and all workers as well as for the unbreakable unity of all socialist countries.
2. Thou shalt love thy fatherland and always be prepared to defend the Workers’ and Peasants’ State with all thy strength and capability.
3. Thou shalt help eliminate the exploitation of man by man.
4. Thou shalt complete good deeds for Socialism because Socialism leads to a better life for all workers.
5. Thou shalt approach the construction of Socialism in the spirit of mutual assistance and comradely cooperation, respect the collective and take heed of its criticism.
6. Thou shalt protect and propagate public property.
7. Thou shalt consistently strive to improve thine efforts, be thrifty and strengthen socialist discipline at work.
8. Thou shalt raise thy children in the spirit of peace and Socialism to become people of well-rounded education, (with) strength of character and steeled bodies.
9. Thou shalt live cleanly and respectably and heed thy family.
10. That shalt practice solidarity with the peoples who struggle for their national liberation and defend their national independence.<sup>66</sup>

These policies served to build the foundation of culture in the GDR.

Reconstructing East Germany from the ruins of WWII required a totalitarian regime to instill fundamental change. Fulbrook argues that in order for the GDR to generate “a new kind of society” the party-state needed to fabricate “a new kind of human being.”<sup>67</sup> This new ideal human was not motivated by capitalist competition—putting one’s own interest above those of others—instead, a member of a unified community “who would subordinate individual wishes to the collective good.”<sup>68</sup> The cultural policies of the party, according to Maaz, were a “political expression of the disturbed minds of the new rulers,” using “psychological constriction [to] discharge itself in a system of coercion that affected

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<sup>65</sup> Maaz, *Behind the Wall*, 3–4.

<sup>66</sup> Höfig, “‘Organized Cheerfulness:’ A Regional Study of Popular Culture and Identity in the German Democratic Republic.”

<sup>67</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 115.

<sup>68</sup> Fulbrook, 115.

the everyday life of East German citizens” that “required above all obedience and lip service to the ideals of the state.”<sup>69</sup>

East Germany was based on the ideal of a perfect citizen with a unique personality, tailor-made for socialism. In the 1970s, the party-state officially characterized the “socialist personality” as:

Well-developed personality, who has a comprehensive command of political, specialist and general knowledge, possesses a firm class outlook rooted in the Marxist-Leninist worldview, is notable for excellent mental, physical and moral qualities, is thoroughly imbued with collective thoughts and deeds, and actively, consciously and creatively contributes to the shaping of socialism.<sup>70</sup>

The education system proved to be the most decisive policy to form the “socialist personality.”<sup>71</sup> It created a socialist culture of what Maaz describes as “extensive and continuous coercion, manipulation, construction, control, and punishment.”<sup>72</sup> The party-state, thus, controlled East German society through fear of repercussion—especially from the Ministry for State Security (MfS), more commonly known as the Stasi.<sup>73</sup>

## 1. Youth Indoctrination

The youth were the party’s most prized instrument to continue the legacy of socialist Germany for generations to come. The party leadership understood this as a critical factor in sustaining socialism. Rodden argues that this was represented in the motto “*Wer die Jugend hat, hat die Zukunft!*” (“Who has the youth, has the future!”).<sup>74</sup> According to Dennis, the party had the vision that “the 3 million young people aged 14–25 ... [were] to be faithful to the ideas of socialism and to protect socialism against its enemies.”<sup>75</sup> The

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<sup>69</sup> Maaz, *Behind the Wall*, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 115.

<sup>71</sup> John Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse: A History of Eastern German Education, 1945–1995* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>72</sup> Maaz, *Behind the Wall*, 53.

<sup>73</sup> Maaz, 13.

<sup>74</sup> Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Dennis, *German Democratic Republic*, 64.

party-state, thus, placed a heavy emphasis on the indoctrination of its young people. If the youth could buy into socialism from the beginning, they would see to its future success. Additionally, Keren Henderson describes this policy as a method to “create a generation of socialists who would further the regime’s goal through personal conviction.”<sup>76</sup> The party-state also implemented a law specifically governing youth policy called *Jugendgesetz* (juvenile law), which begins with:

The most important task in the formation of the developed socialist society is to bring up all young people to be citizens who are true to the ideas of socialism, who think and act as patriots and internationalists, and who strengthen socialism and staunchly defended against all enemies.<sup>77</sup>

As Carolyn Höfig (now Halladay) explains, “SED officials doubted the capacity of the unguided modest citizen to do the right thing with the freedoms of even the most ideal political order,” thus, East Germany “required a consequential program of political education, initiated from the top of an enlightened and almighty leadership.”<sup>78</sup> Raised as socialists, Fulbrook explains, the members of East German society were expected to conform to the societal limits set forth by the party-state, all for the betterment of future—the ultimate socialist paradise.<sup>79</sup>

Through education and social organizations, young people across the GDR were subjects of a systematic indoctrination into the rules and norms of socialism. Dennis characterized this system as “the socialization of children and young people [was] not envisaged as the prerogative of parents but as a cooperative effort between parents, school and state organizations.”<sup>80</sup> The education system, as Rodden writes, was given the “sacred task of socializing East German children.”<sup>81</sup> With state-messaging in the form of children’s

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<sup>76</sup> Karen Henderson, “The Search for Ideological Conformity: Sociological Research on Youth in Honecker’s GDR,” *German History* 10, no. 3 (October 1992).

<sup>77</sup> Henderson.

<sup>78</sup> Höfig, “‘Organized Cheerfulness’: A Regional Study of Popular Culture and Identity in the German Democratic Republic.”

<sup>79</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 120–23.

<sup>80</sup> Dennis, *German Democratic Republic*, 64.

<sup>81</sup> Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 13.

books and television programs, the SED seized the opportunity to fill the malleable minds of developing youth from an early age. From the classroom to leisure activities and entertainment, Fulbrook claims, the party-state controlled every aspect of life in order to produce future yes-men—willing to contribute without questions—to the workforce on the collective farms or in the factories.<sup>82</sup> Extracurricular activities were nonexistent outside of what the state prescribed. Fulbrook further asserts, “Education, the media, sports and leisure, even the family, were all to be controlled and manipulated by the state...*All* areas of life were observed, manipulated, controlled, in the interest of the alleged greater good of the whole.”<sup>83</sup>

Early phased indoctrination of children was both in and out of the classroom. On television, the state featured a stop-motion animation program titled *Unser Sandmännchen* (*the Sandman*), designed to be a role model for East German children, according to Marie Cronqvist.<sup>84</sup> He was the face of socialism, promoting the SED and the party’s socialist policies beginning from the 1950s and influencing the innocent minds of children while they are still young. The BBC describes the Sandman as “designed to send East Germany’s children happy to bed, and to win their hearts for socialism.”<sup>85</sup> Figure 1 is a depiction of the Sandman teaching his viewers about the triumphant Soviet space program, expressing the fundamental importance of a science-based society while showcasing the prospects in technology that a socialist society will bring to Germany.

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<sup>82</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 121–22.

<sup>83</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>84</sup> Marie Cronqvist, “From Socialist Hero to Capitalist Icon: The Cultural Transfer of the East German Children’s Television Programme *Unser Sandmännchen* to Sweden in the Early 1970S,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 41, no. 2 (2021): 378–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2020.1857923>; *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

<sup>85</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

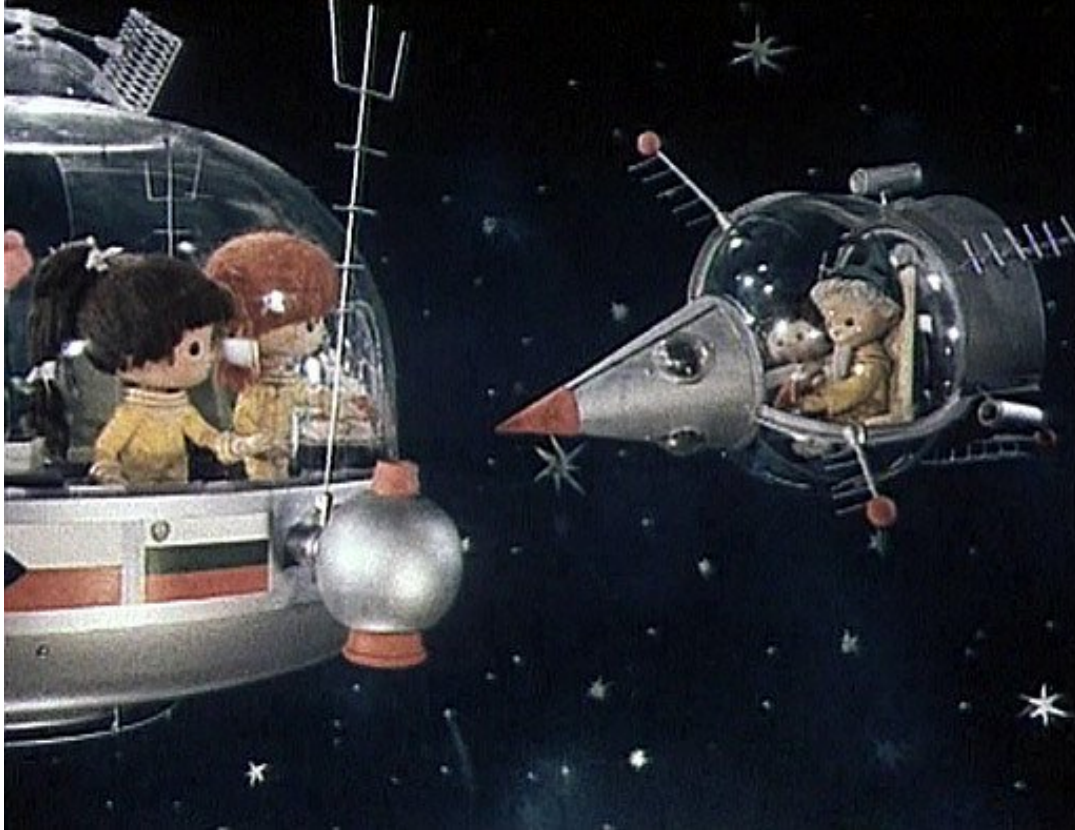


Figure 1. A still image from the East German children's television program *Unser Sandmännchen* (the Sandman).<sup>86</sup>

Additionally, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer concluded that children literature—also regulated by the party-state—included novels directed towards the youth who were radical and dogmatic in their portrayal of socialism.<sup>87</sup> Their study on the German literature found that:

Children and young adult characters are treated as socially important and rational, since they played a major part in the construction of the new state. These characters are regarded as potential leaders of the future, which is

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<sup>86</sup> Source: "Unser Sandmännchen in Space," *Plenty of Nothing* (blog). May 16, 2019, <https://lintel.typepad.com/plentyofnothing/2019/05/unser-sandm%C3%A4nnchen-in-space.html>.

<sup>87</sup> Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer, "How Radical Was Children's Literature in the German Democratic Republic? Socialist Children's Literature between Radicalism and Dogmatism," *Children's Literature* 49, no. 1 (2021): 23–39, <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.2021.0003>.

often reflected in their prominent role within a collective, at school, in a pioneer group, or at work.<sup>88</sup>

From state-controlled television programs to children's literature, young East German schoolchildren were taught the values of socialism from an early age.

The future leaders of socialism required an education system designed to set them up for a pre-determined place in society—mostly as the working class proletariat. As the schoolchildren of one generation would become the parents and mentors of the next generation, Fulbrook argues, the system required a close connection between the schools and the centrally planned society.<sup>89</sup> The state-run education system taught a curriculum that was prescribed by the SED. The party intended to shape the upcoming generations, as an investment to a prosperous socialist society.<sup>90</sup>

The education system in East Germany was run by the party-state with curricula controlled by the SED to shape a generation in their investment into the future of socialist society. Wilhelm Liebknecht, in 1872 speech at the Dresden Educational Society, warned of the use of education in an unfree state, he states,

The school is the mightiest instrument for liberation, and the school is the mightiest instrument for enslavement, depending on the nature and the purpose of the state. In the free state it is a means for liberation; in the unfree state the school is a means for enslavement.<sup>91</sup>

Rodden argues, East German students were denied from having the liberty of individual thought and the creative freedom necessary for innovation.<sup>92</sup> Any deviation from the state-ordered curriculum was punished by teachers, as Rodden illustrates:

A boy whose imagination ran wild, who drew flying horses in art class, would be reprimanded by his teacher for violating the canons of socialist

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<sup>88</sup> Kümmerling-Meibauer and Meibauer.

<sup>89</sup> Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 116.

<sup>90</sup> Fulbrook, 120–23.

<sup>91</sup> Wilhelm Liebknecht, *Voices of Revolt: Speeches of Wilhelm Liebknecht*, vol. VII (New York: International Publishers, 1928), 39, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/voices-of-revolt/07-Wilhelm-Liebknecht-VOR-ocr.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> John Rodden, "Report Card from East Germany," *Society* 47, no. 4 (July 2010): 343–52, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12115-010-9339-x>.

realism—and mocked by his classmates for his lack of a “scientific” consciousness. A girl who wrote an essay saying that she “values solitude” would be censured by her civics teacher as an example of individualistic, anti-social thinking.<sup>93</sup>

Psychological coercion, according to Maaz, was applied to students in the classroom through shaming, ostracizing, and isolation.<sup>94</sup>

The East German education system was designed to produce a contributing member of socialist society—someone to join the working class. Hayton writes that the state-run education system “was designed to transform youths into ‘socialist personalities’ who could then contribute to the historic victory of communism.”<sup>95</sup> He goes on to argue that the “textbooks and teaching methods meant to inculcate East German patriotism,” thus, teaching the “hatred of the Western enemy, and the superiority of socialism.”<sup>96</sup> The public school system was predominantly an elementary education consisting of a ten-year polytechnic program, Rodden claims. The curriculum included Marxist-Leninist theory, science, and practical skills for work in the factories.<sup>97</sup> For the majority of the East German youth, education ended there—only eleven percent matriculated to high school and less than seven percent to university.<sup>98</sup> Rodden further explained this phenomenon:

Because GDR leaders wanted to train technical people and didn’t believe that higher education made much sense except for a loyal communist elite, the emphasis wasn’t on intellectual growth or learning but on the acquisition of technical skills.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Rodden, *Repainting the Little Red Schoolhouse*, 14

<sup>94</sup> Maaz, *Behind the Wall*, 10.

<sup>95</sup> Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” 210.

<sup>96</sup> Hayton, 210.

<sup>97</sup> Rodden, “Report Card from East Germany.”

<sup>98</sup> Rodden.

<sup>99</sup> Rodden.

In addition to science and labor skills, the education system was saturated with state-mandated “ideological indoctrination” to ensure the future of East Germany was educated in the communist principles of East Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>100</sup>

Outside the schoolhouses, the party-state further controlled the narrative of the socialist personality in the youth’s public sphere with social organizations bore uncanny similarity to both the Soviet Union’s Lenin Pioneers and Hitler’s Nazi Youth.<sup>101</sup> The East German organizations were divided into three age groups: Ernst Thälmann Young Pioneers for six- to ten-year-olds, Ernst Thälmann Pioneers for ten- to fourteen-year-olds, and the Free German Youth (FDJ) for fourteen- to twenty-five-year-olds.<sup>102</sup> Figure 2 is a photograph taken at a Young Pioneers rally in Cottbus, in 1970, showing young children in their uniforms with Margot Honecker, the then-Minister of Education and wife of Erich Honecker.

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<sup>100</sup> Rodden.

<sup>101</sup> Anna Funder, *Stasiland: Stories From Behind the Berlin Wall* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 165; *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

<sup>102</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 127.



Figure 2. Minister of Education Margot Honecker at an FDJ rally in 1970 in Cottbus.<sup>103</sup>

These state-controlled organizations, according to Höfig, “replaced the independent organization of civil society and served to bind individual citizens to the official order,” additionally, these groups “provided the East German state with the means to penetrate and influence what remained of the private sphere.”<sup>104</sup>

The FDJ was the party-state’s apparatus to control the youth’s social time. Fulbrook states that this organization was “systematically designed to socialize, co-opt and channel youth in certain politically specified directions.”<sup>105</sup> As a method to monopolize the youths’ contributions to society, Allen argues, the SED used it to monopolize political power.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Source: Alexander Wendt, “Report: Gestohlenes Leben,” *FOCUS Magazine*, January 7, 2014, [https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/report-gestohlenes-leben\\_id\\_3505977.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/report-gestohlenes-leben_id_3505977.html).

<sup>104</sup> Carolyn C. Höfig, “‘Organized Cheerfulness:’ A Regional Study of Popular Culture and Identity in the German Democratic Republic” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1997), 45.

<sup>105</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 127.

<sup>106</sup> Bruce Allen, *Germany East: Dissent and Opposition* (Montréal ; Black Rose Books, 1991), 23.

A former Stasi officer, Hagen Koch, recalls his experience as a member of the Young Pioneers during an interview by BBC:

In August, 1952, eighty thousand young pioneers were invited to Dresden because we, the children had to carry on socialism. At the age of twelve, I was proud to attend the first pioneer meeting in Dresden. We knew about the Hitler Youth during the Third Reich, that they also wore neckties and played drums and trumpets, they wore uniforms. When the pioneer organization was founded, many adults were opposed because it reminded them of the Hitler regime. So, parents said ‘that’s not going to happen to our children, not again’ but my father was a teacher and so he had the task of recruiting children for the pioneer organization.<sup>107</sup>

Propaganda was used by the socialist party-state to indoctrinate the youth, invoking the memories of the horrific destruction of the Second World War, and heaping blame on “evil American imperialism.”<sup>108</sup> Koch further recalls his mindset in pledging his initial allegiance in 1952 to the communist party:

We made our first pioneer vow in Dresden. We, the children vowed we would do anything to avoid such an evil and terrible war in the future. Eighty thousand children said it together, that we promised. And I made that vow, not with my mind, but with my heart. Stalin was the great hero. He was a god to us. Stalin the intelligent! Stalin the wise! Stalin was the representative of the free world—the free world of socialism—and he was our role model. We would follow him unconditionally.<sup>109</sup>

Maaz explains that it was compulsory for the youth “to participate in rallies, functions, drives, contests, and programs.”<sup>110</sup> He further reflects that they had to “passively suffer the slogans, mottos and twisted truths and, at the very worst, parrot them.”<sup>111</sup> These youth policies were designed to create generations of “socialist personalities” to join the heroic ranks of the proletariat, and see to it that communism flourishes into the future.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise.*

<sup>108</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise.*

<sup>109</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise.*

<sup>110</sup> Maaz, *Behind the Wall*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Maaz, *Behind the Wall*, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Jeff Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” 210.

## 2. Socialist Work Ethic

East Germany was an *Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat* (workers' and peasants' state), as inscribed in the constitution.<sup>113</sup> Fulbrook argues that “education was ... not merely about instilling political conformity, but also about producing a highly skilled workforce for a modernising industrial society.”<sup>114</sup> The workforce was designated with an honorable status unlike the bourgeois-centric Western capitalists where the working class is considered substandard.<sup>115</sup> Although in the GDR the societal construct included “classes” of the Politburo and the intelligentsia, the proletariat was socialism’s center of gravity. Roughly 90 percent of pupils went directly into the workforce.<sup>116</sup> The party-state, according to Fulbrook, would often portray the working class as heroes in their propaganda campaign.<sup>117</sup> Nicholas Willet argues that “by manufacturing the mythology of a workers’ struggle,” the party-state glorified the actions of German communists during the Third Reich.<sup>118</sup> He goes on to say, “continuity of a struggle was paramount to their case so they could overcome the ubiquitous feeling of increasing Sovietization.”<sup>119</sup> Fulbrook explains that the GDR’s working class was bolstered through “statues and posters, pictures in children’s books.”<sup>120</sup> She goes on to say, “heroic battles against the inequalities of capitalism and the repressions of fascism were recounted in history books, in exhibitions and at memorials to the defeat of Nazism.”<sup>121</sup> Among those heroized was Ersnt Thälmann—namesake of the FDJ Pioneers—a leading German communist and political prisoner that was executed at the Buchenwald concentration camp under the Hitler regime.<sup>122</sup> Even party leaders would

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<sup>113</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 214.

<sup>114</sup> Fulbrook, 121.

<sup>115</sup> Fulbrook, 214.

<sup>116</sup> Rodden, “Report Card from East Germany.”

<sup>117</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 215.

<sup>118</sup> Nicholas A Willet, “The Inner Cold War: State Party Control and East German Society” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/42753>.

<sup>119</sup> Willet.

<sup>120</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 215.

<sup>121</sup> Fulbrook, 215.

<sup>122</sup> Fulbrook, 215.

claim themselves as members of the working-class to gain credibility among the masses.<sup>123</sup> This concept, Hayton claims, was “enshrined as the first article of the GDR constitution” designating that “work was both a goal and a responsibility of all GDR citizens.”<sup>124</sup> The disproportionate distribution across the classes caused the overemphasis of the industrial work force. Thus, the party would often use the employment rates in their anti-capitalist rhetoric. Hayton explains that the “full employment levels in the GDR were often proclaimed in contrast to the millions of unemployed in the FRG.”<sup>125</sup> Therefore the party-state emphasized that a contributing member of East German society received basic necessities—food and shelter—while citizens in the West suffered from poverty.

The workforce included every able-bodied East German. The party-state was responsible for raising children to be perfect socialists, so, the expectation was for both parents to commit themselves to full time work, Maaz argues. He further states that “most women (83.2 percent of the able-bodied female population) had jobs, an indication of the success of government propaganda in convincing mothers that their role lay in the workplace, not at home with their children.”<sup>126</sup> Willet argues, “No excuse was available to parents for opting out of work, unless a family wanted to highlight themselves as different and therefore non-conformist in the eyes of the government.”<sup>127</sup> Additionally, Jeanette Madarász explain that the “*modus operandi* was shaped primarily by official doctrine, economic requirements and social initiatives.” Thus, “it led the population to rely on the state for jobs and social security.”<sup>128</sup> The party-state crafted a system where citizens were groomed to fill the needs of the working class only to be reliant on the state for providing each household with the basic needs—food, water, shelter.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Fulbrook, 216.

<sup>124</sup> Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” 211.

<sup>125</sup> Hayton, 211.

<sup>126</sup> Maaz, *Behind the Wall*, 22.

<sup>127</sup> Willet, “The Inner Cold War: State Party Control and East German Society.”

<sup>128</sup> Jeanette Madarász, *Working in East Germany Normality in a Socialist Dictatorship 1961–79* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5.

<sup>129</sup> Madarász, 4–6.

## C. CONCLUSION

East Germany's socialist society was designed to produce contributing members of the working class—the proletariat. From the origins of the Soviet Occupation Zone following the defeat of Nazi Germany, the GDR's ruling elite—the SED party—placed an emphasis on building generations of socialists. The SED's theory was that these generations would carry on the legacy of Marxist-Leninist ideology to the future. The policies toward education, youth organizations, and work were strictly planned and required commitment from the citizens to enable a lasting and prosperous socialist utopia. Their vision was a perfect country without classes—without bourgeois tendencies. However, unbeknownst to the party leadership, a group of degenerate youths, inspired by Western culture finding its way across the Berlin Wall in the late 1970s, would not accept this predestined path drawn by the party-state. They refused to conform. Punk rock and its associated subculture challenged the party-state and posed a threat to the legitimacy of the party's totalitarian control of society. The next chapter details how the East German punk subculture challenged the social norms and how they became the top enemy of the state.

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### III. *OSTPUNK*: A SUBCULTURE THAT SHOCKED THE STATUS QUO

The punk scene in East Germany was the antithesis of what the socialist party-state prescribed as acceptable behavior in its citizens. Living in a state-controlled “utopia” came with social requirements and expectations to conform to one’s predetermined future. Many young East Germans were fed up with the rules and expectations of the socialist system—tired of walking the line. They broke free from the social norms and became punk, seeking freedom from the totalitarian control of the SED. Originally from the West, punk wafted over the Berlin Wall to East Germany in 1977.<sup>130</sup> The subculture shocked socialist society and the party-state with their anti-establishment and anarchist values, aesthetics, and music. They created a following and stood up to the system—finding themselves as an enemy of the state. Notwithstanding, East German punks were motivated by their motto, “*Stirb nicht im Warteraum der Zukunft*—Don’t die in the waiting room of the future.”<sup>131</sup> This chapter will explore the unique characteristics of East German punk through its origins, values, aesthetics, and music. It will find that punk originated in Western capitalist culture and evolved into an East German subculture that diametrically opposed the socialist personality prescribed by the GDR. Thus, threatening the party’s plan for a socialist paradise. A threat the SED took seriously.

#### A. PUNK TRAVERSED THE BERLIN WALL

In the 1970s, on the other side of the Iron Curtain, a cultural phenomenon arose in the United States and Great Britain as a result of economic crises.<sup>132</sup> According to Ryan Moore, American punk was the product of a struggling capitalist system—New York City saw unemployment rates increase while population decreased.<sup>133</sup> As a result, the middle

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<sup>130</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 3.

<sup>131</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, xvii.

<sup>132</sup> Ryan Moore, *Sells Like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1–10, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=865694>.

<sup>133</sup> Moore, 3.

class suffered. Frustrated with the situation, bands like the Ramones emerged and paved the way for the American punk subculture “with their leather jackets, mop haircuts, and streetwise personas.”<sup>134</sup> Their appearance and demeanor portrayed “a cartoonish sense of humor” that allowed them to spread the ideology of “minimalism and postmodern irony,” as New York City society struggled to cope with the hardships of the 1970s.<sup>135</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, the British economy dealt with similar setbacks that led to a lack of trust in the government.<sup>136</sup> Inspired by the Ramones, Malcolm McLaren—a British countercultural entrepreneur—imported the American punk subculture to the United Kingdom, thus mobilizing a strong youth following.<sup>137</sup> In 1976, the punk band Sex Pistols rattled the social norm of the music industry with their song “Anarchy to the U.K.”<sup>138</sup> Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones explained in an interview “actually we’re not into music, ...we’re into chaos.”<sup>139</sup> Thus, according to Raymond Patton, in a protest to the status quo, the Pistols coined the motto “No Future,” as they felt the mismanagement of British economy was leading to disastrous consequences for the future of the country.<sup>140</sup>

During the height of the Cold War, leaders in the Eastern Bloc saw punk as a uniquely Western problem. Thus, communist party leaders seized the opportunity to use Western punk as evidence that capitalism is failing.<sup>141</sup> Patton explains that to the “communist elites, punk could be scorned as a symbol of the decadence and decay of capitalism, or cautiously admired (from afar) as a form of anti-capitalist resistance.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Moore, *Sells Like Teen Spirit*, 1

<sup>135</sup> Moore, 1

<sup>136</sup> Moore, 8–10.

<sup>137</sup> Moore, 8–10.

<sup>138</sup> Patton, *Punk Crisis*, 3.

<sup>139</sup> Cyrus Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11.

<sup>140</sup> Patton, *Punk Crisis*, 4.

<sup>141</sup> Patton, *Punk Crisis*, 4

<sup>142</sup> Patton, *Punk Crisis*, 4

However, the same phenomenon that occurred in the United States and United Kingdom would eventually transpire across the Iron Curtain to East Germany in the late 1970s. Originating from West Berlin, radio stations broadcasted punk music to listeners across the Berlin Wall. Additionally, magazines and photo clippings containing punk content were smuggled—as contraband—across the checkpoints, between the two Berlins. Patton further explains, as “for anticommunists, punk could be seen either as a resource to harness for antigovernment rebellion or as a threat to the nation and its youth.”<sup>143</sup> On both sides of the Iron Curtain, punk became a means of expressing dissatisfaction with their respective systems.

Although *Ostpunk* had origins in the West, it was a distinct subculture with unique motivations. Cyrus Shahan argues, “Despite its British origins and similarly clear investment in chaos, German punk was not about miming the British.”<sup>144</sup> People in the socialist Second World did not experience the same hardships as in the capitalist First World. Tim Mohr explains that “the social conditions for punk in Britain didn’t exist in East Germany...there was no unemployment or homelessness, no anxiety about basic needs.”<sup>145</sup> The centrally planned utopia was predetermined and designed for a perfect future—eliminating the possibility of individualism and freedom to choose a path in life. Thus, Eastern punks adapted their Western counterpart’s ideology and coined their own motto, “Too Much Future.” In East Germany, according to Mohr, “your whole life was planned out for you almost from birth and it felt unbelievably stifling; there was no space, literal or philosophical, to live outside the system or even to express criticism of it.”<sup>146</sup>

*Ostpunk* diametrically opposed the social norms instilled by the state-controlled education system and youth organizations. Punks actively “resisted the pressure to conform” from the state-controlled programs designed to build them into a socialist puppet,

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<sup>143</sup> Patton, 4.

<sup>144</sup> Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977*, 11.

<sup>145</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 40.

<sup>146</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 40

a worker for the collective good.<sup>147</sup> Their appearance, music, and values challenged the party's systematic plan for a centrally controlled society. A society that was supposed to mature into a socialist paradise. Patton argues that the migration of punk—music, dress, and ideology—across the Berlin Wall was only possible by “brave pioneers inspired by news reports, smuggled records and fanzines, trips abroad, and foreign radio broadcasts,” enabling the movement of a subculture from the capitalist “free Europe” to the Eastern Bloc.<sup>148</sup>

## B. SHOCKING THE NORMS

Socialism in East Germany was the embodiment of anti-bourgeois philosophy.<sup>149</sup> The visual aesthetics across society resembled this ideology. The architecture, fashion, and lifestyle were necessity-based—usually dull in appearance and designed for functionality.<sup>150</sup> Figure 3 is a photograph of the former Stasi headquarters in Berlin. Olivia Giovetti describes it as “a fitting example of Stalinist architecture combined with East German modernism.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Mike Dennis and Norman Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 159.

<sup>148</sup> Patton, *Punk Crisis*, 4

<sup>149</sup> Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 257.

<sup>150</sup> Inger-Elin Øye, “The Feeling for Gray: Aesthetics, Politics, and Shifting German Regimes,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 51, no. 1 (2007): 112–34.

<sup>151</sup> Olivia Giovetti, “The History of East Germany As Told in 7 Buildings,” *Architectural Digest*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/the-history-of-east-germany-told-in-buildings-berlin-architecture>.



Figure 3. Former Stasi headquarters in Berlin.<sup>152</sup>

Anna Funder described the aesthetics of East Berlin as a “linoleum palace” lacking any indication of beauty or joy.<sup>153</sup> She goes on to describe her East Berlin apartment,

Altogether I can count five kinds of linoleum in this once grand apartment, and they are all, each one of them, brown. Degrees of brown: dark in the hallway, fleck in my bedroom, a brown in the other bedroom that may have once been another colour before succumbing to house rule, brown-beige in the kitchen and, my favorite, imitation parquetry-in-lino in the living room.<sup>154</sup>

William Risch claimed that “punk brought something new, shocking, chaotic, spontaneous, and, quite simply, fun” to an otherwise mundane, almost mechanical society.<sup>155</sup> Thus, the emergence of the punk youth in East Germany 1977 was a shock. Figure 4 depicts a young punk, Ratte, in his anti-social appearance next to an elderly East German woman dressed appropriately for a member of socialist society while on a train to Berlin in 1983.

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<sup>152</sup> Source: Giovetti.

<sup>153</sup> Funder, *Stasiland*, 51.

<sup>154</sup> Funder, 50–51.

<sup>155</sup> Risch, *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*, 163.



Figure 4. Ratte on a train to Berlin in 1983.<sup>156</sup>

Punk aesthetics was the antithesis of socialist aesthetics. Kate Gerrard described the East German Punks as a

subculture characterized by chaos, rapid change, and individualism, all of which was an affront to the Socialist Unity Party (SED) state ... the antithesis of the principles upon which society, youth, and music should be founded, those of collectivism and harmony required for the success and longevity of the socialist project itself.<sup>157</sup>

The punks deviated from the norms of socialism, shocking the ordinary citizens—and the party-state. According to Mohr, citizens on the street objected to the punk scene's challenge to socialism; they often cornered, intimidated, insulted, and beat up defenseless punks on the streets.<sup>158</sup> References to the Nazi-era atrocities were routinely made toward the punks.

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<sup>156</sup> "The East German Punks Who Helped Bring Down the Berlin Wall," *Dazed & Confused Magazine*, November 7, 2019, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/46734/1/east-german-punks-fall-of-berlin-wall-30th-anniversary>.

<sup>157</sup> Risch, *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*, 154.

<sup>158</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 24.

Mohr reports that they were told: “You should be sent to the gas chambers” and “It wouldn’t have taken Hitler long to get rid of the likes of you!”<sup>159</sup> Consistently assaulted by “defenders of the status quo”—“law-abiding citizens out for blood”—punks across the scene grew fearful of being alone in public.<sup>160</sup> Thus, they adapted a saying, “if the kids are united, they will never be divided” to strengthen the bond between punks, to ensure their own safety and survival, and to harness a common ground to grow their community.<sup>161</sup>

### 1. *Ostpunk*: Social Values

East German Punks lived outside the limits of acceptable social behavior.<sup>162</sup> They rejected—and were rejected by—society, their family, and the party-state.<sup>163</sup> The subculture encompassed a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos.<sup>164</sup> Jeff Hayton describes DIY as a “spirit [that] was a crucial factor mobilizing youths in the punk movement.”<sup>165</sup> He also says, “citizens often used DIY to overcome the limits of real-existing socialism: that anyone could simply stand up and participate if they desired was liberating in a society in which rewards for political conformity ruled.”<sup>166</sup> In a totalitarian society, where one’s role is predetermined, DIY ethos allowed punks to break away from the rank-and-file and resist the control of the East German police state.<sup>167</sup> The subculture created what Hayton calls, “something unique ... a source of resistance against the outside world, a world that only has constraints, rules, norms, uniformities, and quotas.”<sup>168</sup> Mohr argues that it fostered an

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<sup>159</sup> Mohr, 24.

<sup>160</sup> Mohr, 24.

<sup>161</sup> Mohr, 24.

<sup>162</sup> Mohr.

<sup>163</sup> Mohr.

<sup>164</sup> Jeff Hayton, “Crosstown Traffic: Punk Rock, Space and the Porosity of the Berlin Wall in the 1980s,” *Contemporary European History* 26, no. 2 (May 2017): 353–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777317000054>.

<sup>165</sup> Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013), <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/45351>.

<sup>166</sup> Hayton.

<sup>167</sup> Hayton.

<sup>168</sup> Hayton.

underground community, allowing punks to “live inside East Germany but outside the state.”<sup>169</sup> The propaganda-filled education and meaningless jobs of the proletariat where no place for a punk. Punks lived by a motto Mohr summarized as “Create your own world. Your own reality. DIY. Revolution.”<sup>170</sup>

The punk lifestyle diametrically opposed the socialist family values. Dennis claims, in East Germany, the family was designed “to perform the basic functions of reproduction, the socialization of children, and economic and emotional support for its members.”<sup>171</sup> Thus, marriage—and raising children—was critical in the party-state’s plans for the survival of socialism. In fact, most young punks abandoned their families.<sup>172</sup> For punks like Michael Boehlke—nicknamed Pankow—he came home with a punk-style haircut “spikey and purposefully fucked up,” and upon first sight, his father beat him and banned him from family meals, according to Mohr.<sup>173</sup> After continuous harassment from his parents, classmates, and neighbors, Pankow left his home—his family—and never returned.<sup>174</sup>

Although punk culture inherently opposed the concept of a traditional family marriage, in some cases, marriage helped protect punks from persecution. Legal protections between spouses provided opportunities for punks to traverse legal obligations, namely regarding work. Marriage was a loophole in the system, Mohr indicates, a loophole that protected punks from *asoziales Verhalten* (anti-social behavior), the crime associated with failing to work—criminally anti-social.<sup>175</sup> Punks like Jana Schlosser and Micha Horschig, of the band Namenlos, got married to protect Jana from legally having to work.<sup>176</sup> Thus, Micha became the household’s breadwinner in the eyes of the state.

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<sup>169</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 29.

<sup>170</sup> Mohr, xvii.

<sup>171</sup> Dennis, *German Democratic Republic*, 64.

<sup>172</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 27.

<sup>173</sup> Mohr, 27.

<sup>174</sup> Mohr, 28.

<sup>175</sup> Mohr, 15.

<sup>176</sup> Mohr, 128.

Without a family support system, punks created their own DIY family.<sup>177</sup> Often, punks would illegally “squat” rather than live in state-controlled housing situation. An example of punks squatting is depicted in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Punks attending a planning session at a squat.<sup>178</sup>

According to the *Encyclopedia of Punk*, squatting is:

Loosely defined as any semi-abandoned building or farmhouse where punks would live together, usually illegally, without paying rent ... squat [ing] has been an important element in punk culture, often serving as laboratories for methods of living in systems organizes by anarchist or communal principles of mutual self-interest.”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Hayton, “Culture from the Slums.”

<sup>178</sup> Source: “The East German Punks Who Helped Bring Down the Berlin Wall.”

<sup>179</sup> Brian Cogan, *The Encyclopedia of Punk* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 2010), 311.

In East Germany, squatting was concentrated among the punks in the urban areas of Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, and Halle.<sup>180</sup> A study of the punks' lifestyle by Niederländer showed that approximately 80 percent "lived either alone or in small groups and possessed little or no furniture. Their rooms were filthy and they spent most of their time drinking."<sup>181</sup> In these squats, the punks "were able to construct functioning alternative spaces to act out their dreams of independence and freedom."<sup>182</sup> It provided punks housing without party-state permission, a safe space for them to gather and express their anger towards the system, and socialize without fear of persecution.

Conforming to the group-think ideology of East German schools was not in line with punk ideology. From their appearance to their attitude, punks were routinely labeled as unfit for socialism by teachers. Hayton explains, "for youths attracted to punk, school, the FDJ, and state youth culture were an enemy to be despised because of its state-controlled nature and demands for total conformity."<sup>183</sup> One former punk explained in an interview "This whole upbringing to become a machine ... the whole state-run youth scene makes me sick. There is nothing there. So boring. When I think about our discotheques, I think: puke!"<sup>184</sup> The schools were a means of control by the party-state to produce obedient members of the collective workforce.

Another aspect of punk morals that shocked East Germany was their disdain for the proletariat—the collective workforce.<sup>185</sup> They refused to subject themselves to the mundane, day-to-day, monotony of work in the factories, on the farm, or whatever job they found themselves in.<sup>186</sup> Thus, as Mike Dennis argues,

To the chagrin of the SED, punks looked askance at regular employment and withdrew from the FDJ and the trade union organisation, the FDGB

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<sup>180</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 29.

<sup>181</sup> Dennis and Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, 161.

<sup>182</sup> Hayton, "Culture from the Slums."

<sup>183</sup> Hayton, "Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR," 210.

<sup>184</sup> Hayton, 210.

<sup>185</sup> Hayton, 211.

<sup>186</sup> Hayton, 211–13.

[Free German Trade Union Federation], thereby infringing not only the socialist work ethic and the officially enshrined duty to work but also undermining the use of the workplace as an instrument of state and party control.”<sup>187</sup>

A former East German punk, Thomas Bautzer, reflected on his work ethic while serving as a dockhand, he said, “I had to go to work, get up at 4.30 every day. 6 o’clock at the docks, every day the same idiot ... and repulsive old men who I had to spend the whole day with period it made me feel sick.”<sup>188</sup> Like Bautzer and others in the GDR, Chaos did not choose his career path. It was chosen for him by the state. Chaos was assigned an apprenticeship as a carpenter in 1981; he objected. As reported in Dennis’s book, “No matter what happens ... I will not end up like that, in that pack of lemmings, pissing my life away in this gray hellhole, everyone informing on each other, everyone working for nothing, and then kneeling over at seventy, no way, no fucking way.”<sup>189</sup> From apprentices to janitors, punks would constantly quit or be fired. Often, they would be reported to the party-state for violations of *asoziales Verhalten*.<sup>190</sup>

## 2. *Ostpunk*: Aesthetics

*Ostpunk*’s disdain for socialism was represented in adherents’ appearance. As reported in Hayton’s chapter, a member of the band Planos stated, “Attitude and appearances go together; one cannot separate them from each other.”<sup>191</sup> The visual aesthetics of punk in the GDR was inspired by photos of British punk in cutouts of smuggled magazines.<sup>192</sup> One of the original East German punks, according to Mohr, was a fifteen-year-old girl named Britta Bergmann—eventually known as Major within the scene.<sup>193</sup> A photograph of Major is seen in Figure 6.

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<sup>187</sup> Dennis and Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, 161.

<sup>188</sup> Mike Dennis, *The Stasi: Myth and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 162.

<sup>189</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 51.

<sup>190</sup> Mohr, 15.

<sup>191</sup> Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” 211.

<sup>192</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 11–12.

<sup>193</sup> Mohr, 9–11.



Figure 6. Major, one of the original East German punks.<sup>194</sup>

Her first exposure to the punk was from cutouts of magazines smuggled from West Germany in 1977.<sup>195</sup> Her initial reaction was a mix of shock and fascination.<sup>196</sup> A photo of the Sex Pistols “with their fucked-up hair and fucked-up skin and fucked-up clothing” influenced her to shave her head, rip her clothes, sew on home-made patches, and even affix a toilet bowl chain to her jacket.<sup>197</sup>

The Sex Pistols also influenced other punks in the similar ways. As recounted in Risch’s book, Pankow stated, “I was angry with my parents, angry with my school, angry

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<sup>194</sup> Source: “The East German Punks Who Helped Bring Down the Berlin Wall.”

<sup>195</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 9–11.

<sup>196</sup> Mohr, 11–12.

<sup>197</sup> Mohr, 11–12.

with the state ... but one day I saw a picture of Johnny Rotten from the Sex Pistols in Bravo magazine, and he seemed like the exact embodiment of how I felt. I went off and ripped up my jeans right then and there.”<sup>198</sup> These youth found an inner connection with the freedom and self-expression through fashion—a freedom the party-state had withheld from them.

Provocation through dress and appearance was at the forefront of the punk movement. It “separated the individual from the ‘normals’ in society,” says Hayton.<sup>199</sup> Mario Shultz—nicknamed Colonel—was one of the original punks. Recalling “the role of punks as provocateurs and outsiders,” he explained in an interview that it was the “capacity to shock” rather than make a political statement.<sup>200</sup> He went on, “We would have stuck a picture of Adolf Hitler or Lenin on our jackets, but only to shock people, not because we were communists or fascists. We were punks, we were outsiders, we wanted to shock.”<sup>201</sup> Some punks would go so far as displaying anarchist symbols and slogans on their attire. Micha Horschig was among the most prominent.<sup>202</sup> He was known as A-Micha—the “A” representing anarchy.<sup>203</sup> He would consistently attach home-made patches, usually something provocative written on it, like “*Haut die Bullen platt wie Stullen*” roughly translated to “beat the pigs to a pulp”—referring to the police.<sup>204</sup>

The DIY aesthetic was not limited to clothing. In addition, the punk aesthetic included hairstyle, body modifications and piercings. The Mohican style haircut, as sported by Jana of the band Namenlos in a 1983 photograph seen in Figure 7, was among the most prominent looks.

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<sup>198</sup> Risch, *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*.

<sup>199</sup> Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” 211.

<sup>200</sup> Dennis and Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, 161.

<sup>201</sup> Dennis and Laporte, 161.

<sup>202</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 20–24.

<sup>203</sup> Mohr, 22.

<sup>204</sup> Mohr, 22.



Figure 7. Members of the band Namenlos in approximately 1983.<sup>205</sup>

The Mohawk portrayed a blatant “f\*\*\* you” to the socialist system and its strict roles for each citizen in society. Punks often used shaving cream as a styling product and dyed their hair in unnatural colors. The bizarre and outlandish hairstyle was entirely unsuitable for working in the assembly line or even the collective farm. Other punks cut their hair “short and rough to distinguish [themselves] from hippies and workers.”<sup>206</sup> Furthermore, punks gave themselves piercings with safety pins and various hardware—not designed for bodily use— all over their body to include nose, ears, cheeks.<sup>207</sup> This aesthetic made punks less amenable to socialist work. Howes explains, “punks staged themselves as an unproductive, slovenly, unkempt, and discombobulated assemblage of

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<sup>205</sup> Source: “The East German Punks Who Helped Bring Down the Berlin Wall.”

<sup>206</sup> Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” 211.

<sup>207</sup> Hayton, 210–14.

pierced skin, useless adornment, and garbage.”<sup>208</sup> He goes on to say, “Punks therefore inscribed their disengagement from the productive space around them on their bodies, highlighting their non-belonging by presenting a chaotic and useless appearance in public.”<sup>209</sup>

Anywhere they went, punks were identifiable—their appearance unmistakable.<sup>210</sup> Howes argues that punk aesthetics was meant to be observed.<sup>211</sup> He writes,

From the mutilation of bodies and their positioning in space, to the manipulation of spaces through the positioning of mutilated bodies, punks positioned themselves within a space-constituting dynamic whose other participants—passers-by, the Stasi, other punks—had no choice but to see them.<sup>212</sup>

Their mere presence in public was a protest to the existing system, to the regime, to the party.<sup>213</sup> As a group, Mohr explains, the punks were persecuted, singled out, and attacked by their neighbors, their family, and by the party-state.<sup>214</sup> Dedicating themselves to the punk scene brought them into an underground community, a family of likeminded dissidents.<sup>215</sup> However, it also painted a target on their backs. A target the party-state—through the Stasi—would expend all efforts and resources to destroy.<sup>216</sup>

### 3. *Ostpunk: The Music*

Music was an audible outlet for *Ostpunk*'s protest of the tyrannical SED. It was the scene's most effective way of spreading their message—and it was fun. Bands formed up

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<sup>208</sup> William Seth Howes, “Punk Avant-Gardes: Disengagement and the End of East Germany” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2012), [https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/91534/howesws\\_1.pdf?sequence=1](https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/91534/howesws_1.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>209</sup> Howes.

<sup>210</sup> Howes.

<sup>211</sup> Howes.

<sup>212</sup> Howes.

<sup>213</sup> Howes.

<sup>214</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*.

<sup>215</sup> Mohr.

<sup>216</sup> Mohr.

across the country when various punks met each other at squats or gatherings.<sup>217</sup> Band names were—purposefully—just as provocative as the punks who formed them.<sup>218</sup> Dennis and Laporte note the most prominent bands as: *Schleim-Keim*, *Planlos*, *Wutanfall* and *Rosa Extra*, which are respectively translated to Slimy-Germs, No Plans, Tantrum, and “the latter the name of an East German sanitary towel.”<sup>219</sup>

Eastern punk’s inspiration was delivered through Western-based radio stations as punk songs broadcasted across the Iron Curtain.<sup>220</sup> Youth across the GDR and the Eastern Bloc listened and were influenced.<sup>221</sup> The music motivated them; it gave them a feeling of belonging—a purpose.<sup>222</sup> They wanted to stand up, scream, and make music directed at what they saw were failures of the socialist system they lived in.<sup>223</sup> A punk known as Colonel recalled his attraction to the provocative by expressing, “The start was that I liked the music. I did not quite understand the English texts, but this ostentatious existence as an outsider, this capacity to shock, that pleased me.”<sup>224</sup> Punk rock defied the expectations of music, from the rhythm to the lyrics.

Dennis and Laporte characterized punk music as “primitive unmelodic lines of music to the accompaniment of screamed vocals and cacophonous drumming.”<sup>225</sup> Brian Cogan enthusiastically confirms, “Rhythms were hyper-speedy, guitars discordant, and the lyrics were plain old pissed off. ... Anger and rebellion were the order of the day. ... The most shocking thing about punk was the mayhem of the pit where a bloody nose or a broken bone was a badge of honor.”<sup>226</sup> The music that the punks produced was chaotic. It was

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<sup>217</sup> Mohr; Hayton, “Culture from the Slums.”

<sup>218</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*; Dennis and Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*.

<sup>219</sup> Dennis and Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, 159.

<sup>220</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*.

<sup>221</sup> Mohr.

<sup>222</sup> Mohr.

<sup>223</sup> Dennis and Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, 161.

<sup>224</sup> Dennis and Laporte, 161.

<sup>225</sup> Dennis and Laporte, 162.

<sup>226</sup> Cogan, *The Encyclopedia of Punk*, vii.

meant to spark the inner rage growing towards society. Mohr recalls a punk's reaction to *Schleim-Keim*'s drummer Otze's performance at a concert in the summer of 1982.<sup>227</sup> He writes, "It sounds like they're slaughtering a fucking pig. ... It's like Otze is trying to use his drumsticks to pummel the entire shit pile that is this country."<sup>228</sup>

The lyrics of punk music blatantly highlighted what punks viewed as the hypocrisy, failures, and shortcomings of socialist policies. Hayton argues that the young punks believed that the music "could divorce them from the lies propagated by the SED by actively re-imagining a community that rejected oppression as a means of social and state organization."<sup>229</sup> An outlet for frustration and aggression, punks sang—or screamed—off tone, off tempo, and off rhythm. Mohr argues, "To the uninitiated, the music sounded primitive, abrasive, even inept. ...Two minutes of breakneck chords and some word fragments screamed over the top."<sup>230</sup> He goes on to say it is understandable because "when people find themselves in distress, in an emergency, they don't form perfect sentences, they just *scream*."<sup>231</sup> *Wutanfall*'s song used proactive language to describe the failing infrastructure in the GDR:

*Jauchegruben wie Elster und Pleisse  
Wasserkis ybd stinkend nach Dreck und Scheisse*

Cesspools like the Elster and Pleisse rivers  
Waterless and stinking of filth and shit <sup>232</sup>

An additional example is *Schleim-Keim*'s song "Prhüggleknaben" or "Baton Boys"—a cry for freedom from the tyranny and oppression by the SED:

*Wie wollen nicht mehr, wie ihr wollt  
Wir wollen unsere freiheit  
Wir sind das volk, wir sind die macht  
Wir fordern Gerechtigkeit  
Wir sind das Volk, wir sind die Macht*

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<sup>227</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 104.

<sup>228</sup> Mohr, 104.

<sup>229</sup> Hayton, "Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR," 209.

<sup>230</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 117.

<sup>231</sup> Mohr, 117.

<sup>232</sup> Mohr, 117.

We don't want the way you want it anymore  
We want our freedom  
We are the people, we are the power  
We demand justice  
We are the people, we are the power<sup>233</sup>

Namenlos, like others, made their music in a sound-proofed basement. They let out their frustrations, screamed their true feeling and created lyrics such as “*Aufgepasst, du wirst bewacht vom MfS* (Watch out, you're being surveilled by the Ministry for State Security).”<sup>234</sup> Later, they added additional lyrics to the song to highlight what they saw as the similarity of the Stasi to Hitler's Schutzstaffel (SS).<sup>235</sup> In June, 1983, Namenlos played this song in a concert and the reaction from the punks in the crowd was exhilaration.<sup>236</sup> They took over the dancefloor with their iconic pogo-style dance “which one jumps up and down in the same place while holding the body stiff.”<sup>237</sup> Mohr describes the scene as punks “surged forward and started to pogo...a swirl of colorful hair, pogoing and shoving and loving the show.”<sup>238</sup> The pogo was iconic to punk music. Punks used their music, lyrics, and dance to mock the party-state and voice their “contemptuous of the aridity” state-sanctioned culture.<sup>239</sup> With its provocative lyrics that slandered the party-state, this song embodied the punk ethos in resisting the expectation of obedient lip service to the party leadership.

### C. CONCLUSION

The party had a plan. A plan for the survival of the Eastern Bloc's way of life. Punks did not see themselves fitting into the SED's plan. They refused to bow to the totalitarian control of the party-state regarding the expectations of socialist culture—values, aesthetics, or music. Although inspired by the West's punk scene, *Ostpunk* had its

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<sup>233</sup> Mohr, 231–32.

<sup>234</sup> Mohr, 97.

<sup>235</sup> Mohr, 97.

<sup>236</sup> Mohr, 146.

<sup>237</sup> Risch, *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*.

<sup>238</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 146.

<sup>239</sup> Dennis, *The Stasi*, 162.

own unique motivations. The militant, order-following life in the GDR lacked the freedom of individual thought and choice. Thus, punks took to the streets with their fashion and their music, letting the state and society know they were unwilling to conform. Their refusal to conform sparked an interest from the party-state. It painted a target on their backs. A target that the party-state—through the Stasi—would expend all efforts to destroy.

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## IV. STATE RESPONSE

In a system where everything is political, the East German punks' refusal to conform to the party-state's prescribed social and aesthetic norms had existential implications to the East German state. Thus, through its Ministry for State Security (MfS)—the Stasi—the party-state enacted extreme policies to eradicate punk and their subculture from the GDR. On the pretext of criminalization based on appearance alone, the Stasi arrested, interrogated, imprisoned, and tortured youth who were determined (or deemed) to be punks. Additionally, the party-state's sprawling surveillance program turned to the task of monitoring the activities of the punks through an extensive program of informants. In this regard, the persistence of the punks demonstrated—and perhaps exacerbated—the infirmities and deformities of Berlin's social-control ambitions. This chapter will examine the GDR's response to who they saw as political terrorists which threatened the SED's totalitarian system.

### A. ENEMY OF THE STATE: THE STASI'S PRIME TARGET

Through the 1950s and early 1960s, the East German party-state had already dealt with a cultural threat by so-called “Western” inspired music. This phenomenon seemed to have been crushed through the policies of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany in 1965. The 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum aimed to align cultural production with the party-state and its social ambitions. In removing Western influences, the new policies were meant to solidify socialist realism, narrowly defined as the one right answer. Originally convened to address the East German economy, the plenary session shifted its focus to the filmmakers, musicians, and artists in an attempt to solidify state control of art and culture and eliminate all aesthetic trends other than socialist realism.<sup>240</sup> Höfig argues, “The 11th session, which has since earned the appellation ‘the clear cut’ (*der Kahlschlag*), also saw the SED assert a new and absolute authority over every aspect of the

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<sup>240</sup> Höfig, “‘Organized Cheerfulness’: A Regional Study of Popular Culture and Identity in the German Democratic Republic.”

arts, a process that would continue for another decade.”<sup>241</sup> This policy required all film, music, and art be approved by the SED. The party-state would, thus, cancel any work deemed to have, according to Höfig, “inadequate optimism and over-ambitious criticism.”<sup>242</sup> She further asserts that the party-state of the GDR perceived any “anti-socialist” form of the arts as a threat to the future of the SED’s power, legitimacy, and vision of socialism.<sup>243</sup> Additionally, Jim Morton characterizes the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum as a “milestone in the story of East Germany,” a “death knell for creativity in East Germany,” and a “major blow to the country’s artistic community [that] changed the way the creative community interacted with and responded to the government.”<sup>244</sup> The policies of the 11<sup>th</sup> plenum required the arts to meet the ideological standard of socialist realism. Thus, the emergence of *Ostpunk*, a decade later, became an existential threat to socialism by flouting the regime-stabilizing rules of this “clear cut” plenum.

East Germany’s main organization to combat the growing punk movement was the Stasi’s Main Department XX. It was established in 1969 for the enforcement and monitoring of what Dennis explains as, “cultural policy” based on the “reflection of the SED’s concern over the appeal of the Prague spring for the East German cultural intelligentsia.”<sup>245</sup> In collaboration with local police forces and an extensive system of secret informants, the Stasi’s Department XX’s mission was to “combat political ideological diversion and political underground activity” as the party-state viewed culture and politics as intertwined.<sup>246</sup>

By the 1980s, punks found themselves at the top of their list.<sup>247</sup> Although punks formed a minority among East German society, their ability to mobilize a youth following

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<sup>241</sup> Höfig.

<sup>242</sup> Höfig.

<sup>243</sup> Höfig.

<sup>244</sup> Jim Morton, “The 11th Plenum,” *East German Cinema Blog* (blog), August 24, 2013, <https://eastgermancinema.com/2013/08/24/the-11th-plenum/>.

<sup>245</sup> Dennis, *The Stasi*, 32.

<sup>246</sup> Dennis, 116.

<sup>247</sup> Dennis, 116.

concerned the SED. In 1981, there was an estimated 1,000 punks supported by more than 10,000 punk “sympathizers” in East Germany, according to Dennis and Laporte.<sup>248</sup> They further argue that the Stasi Department XX, by the mid-1980s, “reckoned that about 400 groups of various kinds and a broad spectrum of young people were of ‘operative interest’ on account of their ‘negative decadent’ and ‘hostile negative’ traits.”<sup>249</sup> As Jeff Hayton explains, the East German punk movement was not about numbers as much as it was about presence—being seen and being heard. He argues, “As more and more punks gathered in public, authorities became increasingly aware of the ways in which the subculture challenged the foundations of East German identity and state policy.”<sup>250</sup> Thus, the party-state feared that the punk aesthetics that inspired resistance and independent thought would poison the minds of the future generation, thus, producing a population comfortable with challenging the status quo of the socialist ideology.

## **B. CRIMINALIZING YOUTH**

Persecution of punks began in earnest because of the onset of *Ostpunk* in 1977. From their appearance alone, these young Germans were persecuted not only by police but also by their fellow citizens. Journalist Silke Wunsch recalls accounts of punks, some three decades after the Berlin Wall fell, “Youngsters who ventured outside with a mohawk haircut and a dog collar around their necks were spat on or stopped by the police for no good reason—they were sometimes arrested if they boarded trains.”<sup>251</sup> Appearance became politicized by the party-state; thus, the police had authority to detain the youth, as “a Mohican hairstyle was sufficient for punks to be hauled in and their hair cut off by police officers.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Dennis and Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, 159.

<sup>249</sup> Dennis and Laporte, 159.

<sup>250</sup> Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 416.

<sup>251</sup> Silke Wunsch, “‘You Should Be Gassed’: What It Meant to Be Punk in East Germany,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 11, 2019, <https://p.dw.com/p/3Sg3e>.

<sup>252</sup> Dennis and Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany*, 160.

The party-state implemented policy change directed at containing the punk threat. In the summer of 1983, the Stasi leader Erich Mielke issued a directive called “*Härte gegen Punk*” (hardness against punk).<sup>253</sup> Howes explains that the party-state used this policy for “arrests, preventative detention, prison sentences, military impressments, and, in a few cases, expulsion from the GDR.”<sup>254</sup> He further argues they “were all designed to intimidate and harm those the Stasi had identified as punks.”<sup>255</sup> The *Härte gegen Punk* policy legitimized the use of extreme tactics, as Ruth Benton describes, to “target the punk subculture more aggressively with the intent of destroying it.”<sup>256</sup> She further argues that these extreme tactics were a means for the Stasi to sabotage the punk scene’s momentum through an attack on the self-confidence and personal relationships among the punk youths.<sup>257</sup>

Howes discusses two Stasi reports from 1984 and 1986 in which the party-state indicated that “punk constitutes a breach of the territorial integrity of the GDR.”<sup>258</sup> These documents declared that punks’ appearance was in itself an expression of political opposition.<sup>259</sup> Howes further explains this phenomenon as “the punk-physiognomic principle,” that is, the punks looked like a political threat; so, any person who looked like a punk was—in the eyes of the party-state—a political threat.<sup>260</sup> Figure 8 shows a scan of

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<sup>253</sup> Seth Howes, “DIY, IM EIGENVERLAG: East German Tamizdat LPs,” *German Politics & Society* 35, no. 2 (2017): 26–47, <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2017.350203>.

<sup>254</sup> Howes.

<sup>255</sup> Howes.

<sup>256</sup> Ruth A Aardsma Benton, “Punks in the Church: The Relationship Between the Punk Subculture and Church in East Germany” (Master’s Thesis, Western Michigan University, 2018), [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters\\_theses/3435](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/3435).

<sup>257</sup> Benton.

<sup>258</sup> Howes, “Punk Avant-Gardes.”

<sup>259</sup> Howes.

<sup>260</sup> Howes.

what Colin Marshall describes as a “circa-1985 internal guide used to identify the ‘types of negative decadent youth cultures in the German Democratic Republic.’”<sup>261</sup>

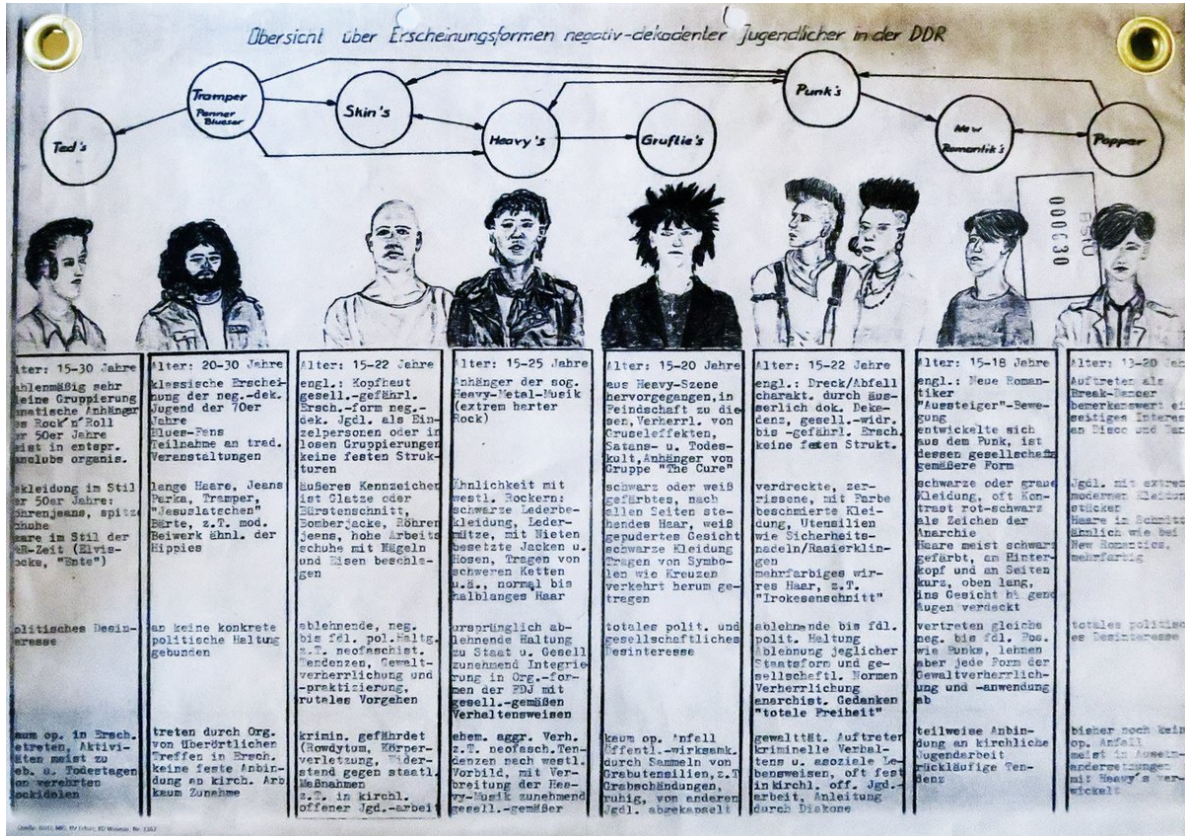


Figure 8. A 1985 Stasi guide for identifying dissident youth.<sup>262</sup>

Under the column labeled “Punk’s,” the guide describes the group as:

- Age: 15 – 22 years.
- English: Garbage/trash.
- Characterized by documented decadence, society-adverse to - threatening. No firm structures.
- Filthy, torn, paint-sprinkled clothing, utensils like safety pins/razor blades, multi-coloured, scraggy hair, Mohawk (“Iriquois” [sic] haircut).

<sup>261</sup> Colin Marshall, “The East German Secret Police’s Illustrated Guide for Identifying Youth Subcultures: Punks, Goths, Teds & More (1985),” *Open Culture* (blog), February 2, 2019, <https://www.openculture.com/2019/02/east-german-secret-polices-illustrated-guide-for-identifying-youth-subcultures.html>.

<sup>262</sup> Source: Marshall.

- Deprecative to hostile political attitude, rejection of all state forms and societal norms. Glorification of anarchist thoughts, “total freedom.”
- Violent appearance, criminal actions and antisocial ways of life, often regulars in public church youth groups, instructed by deacons.<sup>263</sup>

Howes equates the Stasi’s blanket criminalization of punks to (emphasis in the original) “a visual *phenomenon*, like black mold, the recognition of whose specific instantiations was possible through the circulation of study of typical (typifying) images.”<sup>264</sup> He further explains, “like black mold, they threatened ... most every structure, no matter how sound, within the Stasi’s representation of East German public space.”<sup>265</sup> The preconception that all punks were prone to violent, criminal acts led the party-state to implement extreme measure in combating the state’s enemy.

Physical violence and intimidation were the prime tactics employed by the Stasi. They frequently beat and tortured punks in their custody. A personal account by one former punk describes an interaction with the secret police as a horrific, bloody experience:

The police stormed in, they locked us all in a room, then chose one and took him into the kitchen where he was beaten up by several pigs. They grabbed the next one and dragged him into the kitchen. By the time it was over they had beaten up and taken away everybody, including the girls. During the journey to the police station they were beaten on the back seats of the huge numbers of police vans that had turned up and then for half the night in the police station they were threatened and beaten. I came home late that day and found the flat in a catastrophic state. The whole kitchen, cupboards, curtains, cooker, walls, and even the ceilings, were spattered with blood. ... The people who had been beaten up were between 15 and 18 years of age.<sup>266</sup>

Being punk meant sacrificing personal safety and security. Additionally, it put one’s family at risk of harassment and persecution by the party-state.<sup>267</sup> Mohr writes that a punk could be expected to be “arrested and interrogated on a daily basis,” and, in addition, “your

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<sup>263</sup> Marshall.

<sup>264</sup> Howes, “Punk Avant-Gardes.”

<sup>265</sup> Howes.

<sup>266</sup> Dennis, *The Stasi*, 163.

<sup>267</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 24.

parents lost their jobs and your brother or sister was booted out of school and you were banned from your hometown or imprisoned and and and, and [sic] all because you spoke your mind, you objected, you failed to conform—you listened to the wrong music.”<sup>268</sup>

However, many punks continued to participate in the subculture notwithstanding the harassment, threats, and abuse of the secret police. Persecution evolved to prosecution as the party-state’s legal system was used to charge and imprison punks who continued to defy the state’s restrictions. On August 11, 1983, the members of the band Namenlos were arrested in what Mohr describes as the beginning of “the shock and awe phase of the Stasi’s war on punk.”<sup>269</sup> The interrogation of the band members was focused on the lyrics of one song that they performed at the church concert in June, 1983, namely the song comparing the MfS to the Nazi SS.<sup>270</sup> The next the day, the band was placed in pretrial confinement for six months.<sup>271</sup> Their arrest warrant accused the band of “perform [ing] lyrics during a concert as a ‘punk music group’ that portrayed the societal conditions of the [GDR] as un-free and slandered the Ministry for State Security as a surveillance organ.”<sup>272</sup> In February, 1984, the band members were found guilty at trial and sentenced from one to one and a half years in prison.<sup>273</sup> By comparison, the punks in Namenlos were awarded stronger punishments than other activists who spoke out against the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>274</sup>

### C. SURVEILLANCE BY STASI OFFICERS AND INFORMANTS

The party-state incorporated various tactics and procedures to eliminate the growing punk threat. In addition to the physical harm inflicted on punks, the party-state incorporated tactics of psychological stress. Through an elaborate web of secret informants,

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<sup>268</sup> Mohr, 24.

<sup>269</sup> Mohr, 154.

<sup>270</sup> Mohr, 156.

<sup>271</sup> Mohr, 157.

<sup>272</sup> Mohr, 157.

<sup>273</sup> Mohr, 171.

<sup>274</sup> Mohr, 171–72. According to Mohr, the GDR courts sentenced peace activists Reinghard Schult, Hans-Jörg Weigel, and Bärbel Bohley received an eight-month sentence, eighteen-month probation, and six-week detainment, respectively.

the Stasi seized on a critical vulnerability—the punks’ trust among each other—in an attempt to tear apart the subculture from the inside.<sup>275</sup> These tactics were based on a *Zersetzung* strategy, loosely translated to bio-degradation.<sup>276</sup> Benton described this as a means for the Stasi to sabotage the punk scene’s momentum through an attack on the self-confidence and personal relationships among the punk youths.<sup>277</sup>

The Stasi created an elaborate surveillance system to monitor and spy on their own citizens in the name of maintaining socialism. The GDR earned the title of “the most perfect surveillance state of all time” by the media in 1989, according to Funder.<sup>278</sup> In this perfect surveillance state, East Germans were subjected to continuous monitoring by the government. The BBC documentary titled *The Lost World of Communism* revealed the extent of the party-state’s surveillance.<sup>279</sup> The film reveals that the Stasi recorded and documented every aspect of daily life, from public encounters to the most intimate sexual relations.<sup>280</sup> According to the documentary, “No act was too intimate to be observed.”<sup>281</sup> Funder’s research explains that the Stasi also kept “smell samples” of their subjects for identification by trained canines.<sup>282</sup> She further discovered that the secret police collected the samples by burgling into an apartment and stealing used undergarments to capture a person’s unique scent, then transferring the scent to a jar.<sup>283</sup> In addition, Mohr reveals that the Stasi would force detainees to wipe themselves with a cloth that would further be used

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<sup>275</sup> Benton, “Punks in the Church.”

<sup>276</sup> Benton.

<sup>277</sup> Benton, “Punks in the Church.”

<sup>278</sup> Funder, *Stasiland*, 57. Funder also writes that by the end of the 1980s, roughly 97,000 Stasi officers and 173,000 IMs monitored the entire population of 17 million people. Funder equates this to one Stasi employee or informant for every 63 citizens. Moreover, according to Funder, the ratio increases to one in 6.5 if part-time IMs are included. By comparison, Funder notes, Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union employed only one secret police officer for every 2,000 and 5,830 people, respectively.

<sup>279</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

<sup>280</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

<sup>281</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

<sup>282</sup> Funder, *Stasiland*, 8.

<sup>283</sup> Funder, 8.

as a smell sample.<sup>284</sup> Figure 9 is a Stasi surveillance photo of two punks, with the phrase “*Nazis raus!*” (Nazis out!) noted in the margin.

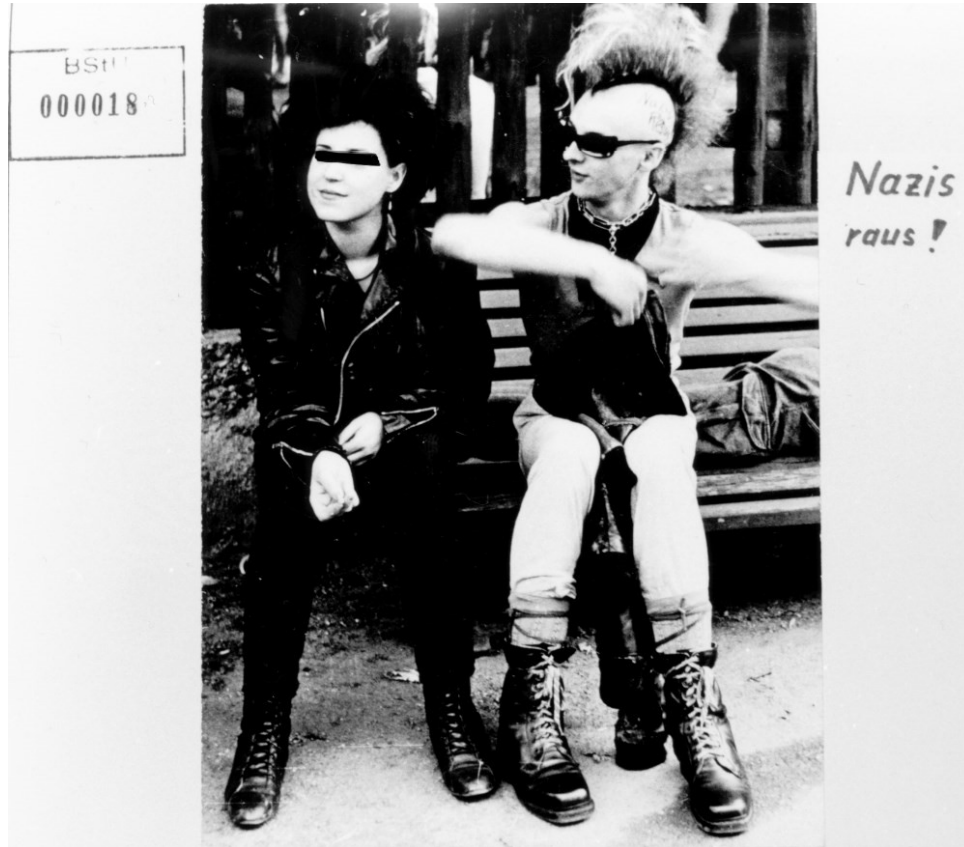


Figure 9. Stasi surveillance photo of two punks.<sup>285</sup>

The use of *inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* (IM)—unofficial informants—created an elaborate web of spies across the country. The SED developed a system in which citizens reported their neighbors’ supposed misconduct to party-state authorities. Jens Gieseke describes East Germany as “a nation of traitors.”<sup>286</sup> Infiltrating the youth subcultures with Stasi informants was one of the means used to combat the growing threat of the rebellious

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<sup>284</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 154.

<sup>285</sup> Source: “The East German Punks Who Helped Bring Down the Berlin Wall.”

<sup>286</sup> Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany’s Secret Police, 1945–1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 77.

punk scene. The extensive use of human intelligence in the form of the covert operatives—IMs—was part of Stasi doctrine. Three Stasi officers wrote in a Ministry for State Security University doctoral dissertation:

The ability to penetrate the thought processes of others can only and exclusively be done by humans themselves. Despite highly developed devices and mechanisms to relieve and sometimes replace the physical and mental work of human beings, there is nothing in the age of modern technology comparable to the art and capacity of a human being to probe into the train of thoughts of another. ... There is and will be no equivalent substitute to the Unofficial Collaborator working along these lines.<sup>287</sup>

However, recruitment of informers was an obstacle for the Stasi.<sup>288</sup> The younger Germans who were more willing to support the Stasi's information operation against the punks mostly came from the Free German Youth—the young socialists that already bought into the system.<sup>289</sup> These young people would often be rejected by the punks as unauthentic, making it virtually impossible to infiltrate from the outside.<sup>290</sup> Thus, the Stasi shifted to a tactic of *herausbrechen* (prying out) by pressuring select punks with blackmail and threats of criminal prosecution.<sup>291</sup> In some cases, this tactic persuaded—or forced—existing punks to turn on their fellow dissidents and become a Stasi IM.<sup>292</sup> Hayton explains that most punks who became IMs received benefits—mostly money—from the Stasi.<sup>293</sup>

The Stasi's strategy of infiltrating the punk scene with IMs proved to be successful in the early 1980s. Hayton further asserts that “from very early on, punk was completely penetrated by the Stasi with groups of youths containing one or more informers while bands were filled with members writing multiple reports from different angles about the same events, unbeknownst to one another.”<sup>294</sup> Notable in this regard was the band *Wutanfall*,

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<sup>287</sup> Gieseke, 79.

<sup>288</sup> Gieseke, 106.

<sup>289</sup> Gieseke, 106.

<sup>290</sup> Gieseke, 106.

<sup>291</sup> Gieseke, 106.

<sup>292</sup> Gieseke, 106.

<sup>293</sup> Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” 218.

<sup>294</sup> Hayton, 214.

whose lead singer, Chaos, was targeted by the secret police's Department XX. The band was noted by Stasi officials as "the 'favorite and best known' punk group," their surveillance showed that "punks travel to their shows from across the entire country."<sup>295</sup> As the band's front man, Chaos was personally declared by the party-state as "public enemy number one."<sup>296</sup> His Stasi file included detailed information regarding his movements, meetings, and conversations across the country from Leipzig to Berlin.<sup>297</sup> The Stasi infiltrated *Wutanfall* and collected this private information by flipping Chaos's best friend and bass guitarist Zappa as an IM.<sup>298</sup> Through consistent pressure and threats from the party-state, Zappa turned on Chaos, agreeing "not to undertake anything against socialism" and to fully cooperate with the MfS.<sup>299</sup> He was assigned a Stasi codename—Captain—and, thus, was at the mercy of the Stasi, reporting everything he saw, heard, and knew to the authorities.<sup>300</sup>

The Stasi used the information gathered by Zappa against Chaos during detainments and interrogations. Chaos recalls the consistent and excessive force used to intimidate and threaten him to cease his participation in the punk subculture. Referring to a 1983 encounter Chaos had with the Stasi, Mohr describes the gruesome scene:

They put a bag over Chaos's head and drove around for a while before dragging him out of the car and marching him into some woods... Then, still hooded, [he] was savagely beaten and kicked. ... When it was over, he was covered in hematomas, splattered with blood. They took him, trembling and battered, into the Stasi station house and made him sign a statement attesting that he had been well treated during his detainment.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 123–24.

<sup>296</sup> Mohr, 124.

<sup>297</sup> Mohr, 123–24.

<sup>298</sup> Hayton, "Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR," 218; *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

<sup>299</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

<sup>300</sup> *The Lost World of Communism: A Socialist Paradise*.

<sup>301</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 125.

They made an example of him to the rest of the punks—and East German society.<sup>302</sup> The Stasi showed what Mohr writes as, “the ugly reality of what could happen if you strayed from the official path”<sup>303</sup> Chaos was a Stasi success case. The Stasi officers pushed him to his breaking point—he gave up on punk.<sup>304</sup>

#### D. CONCLUSION

The re-Stalinization of East German culture following the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum in 1965 was thought to have been “the clear cut” solution in solidifying the party-state’s control within the arts. It was supposed to prevent any form of music from expressing dissent towards the party-state’s prescription of cultural expectations. The emergence of the punk scene proved the party leadership wrong. Thus, the SED found itself with an existential threat—political terrorists—in the form of punk music. To protect their political interests, the totalitarian regime implemented extreme measures to subdue the punks. Starting with the *Härte gegen Punk* policy of 1983, the GDR criminalized the punk subculture and infiltrated the scene through extensive surveillance and the collaboration of punk informants. The punk phenomenon seemed to have been defeated; however, this was only temporary as the punk movement continued to thrive, leaving the party-state with a cultural uprising to quell.

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<sup>302</sup> Mohr, 126.

<sup>303</sup> Mohr, 126.

<sup>304</sup> Mohr, 126–27.

## V. THE SYSTEM'S COLLAPSE FROM BELOW

East German punks were stubborn, persistent, and resilient. The 1983 *Härte gegen Punk* policy's attempt to destroy the subculture was a challenge to the youth movement's dedication. This policy by party-state leadership backfired. Rather than eliminating their "enemy of the state," the Stasi's crackdown motivated the punks to increase their presence. Under the protection of the Protestant Church, the punks mobilized the community and continued to resist the party-state. In an effort to control the chaos, the SED shifted their anti-punk strategy from elimination to integration. In a later effort to control the chaos, the SED shifted their anti-punk strategy from elimination to integration. This relaxation of policy also backfired. It actually weakened the party's totalitarian control of the proletariat. This concession of political space, according to Hayton, "highlights precisely those cracks that had begun opening in state socialism."<sup>305</sup> It allowed mass mobilization of protests against the Honecker regime in 1989.<sup>306</sup> In this way, the punks ultimately helped shape the political and social environment that contributed to the dissolution of East Germany as a communist state. Ultimately, punks were the success story among East German society. They proved to ordinary citizens that it was, as Mohr writes, "possible to resist and to survive."<sup>307</sup> In the end, they helped change the perspective of East German civil society.

This final chapter will show how *Ostpunk* directly contributed to the revolution that led to the collapse of communism in East Germany. It will further explore how his study can be used in the geopolitical environment of the 2020s

### A. OSTPUNK OVERCOMES HÄRTE GEGEN PUNK

The SED's *Härte Gegen Punk* policy in 1983 initially had a swift effect on punks in East Germany. The brutal methods used by the party-state to destroy the subculture were initially effective.<sup>308</sup> According to Hayton, "Bands were broken up, punks numbers

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<sup>305</sup> Hayton, "Culture from the Slums."

<sup>306</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 366.

<sup>307</sup> Mohr, 266.

<sup>308</sup> Hayton, "Culture from the Slums."

declined and existing scenes were corrupted.”<sup>309</sup> The first generation of punks—the founders of the movement—were degraded. They were imprisoned, drafted, or quit. Hayton goes on to write, “However, the successes of ‘*Härte gegen Punk*’ were only temporary.”<sup>310</sup> In the end, the policy had the reverse effect. Hayton further argues, “Instead of destroying punk, [*Härte Gegen Punk*] had in fact made the genre more dangerous by driving its members into the opposition movement.”<sup>311</sup> The movement needed to find sanctuary in response to the party-state’s harsh attacks. Thus, punks retreated to the protestant church. Not for religion, but for protection.

The party’s policy regarding churches opened an opportunity for the punk scene to grow and thrive in East Germany. Since 1949, the party-state, according to Benton, “allowed the churches to remain a part of society” because “they recognized that the churches offered benefits to society as the socialist character of the nation was being established.”<sup>312</sup> Although contrary to Marxist-Leninist ideology, the anti-fascist position of the church supported the party’s de-Nazification of post-war Germany.<sup>313</sup> Additionally, in 1978, the SED enacted the Church-State Agreement, which, as John Burgess notes, “defined the church as an independent organization not under direct control of the party, a unique position not accorded to any other group in the society.”<sup>314</sup> This policy protected the church from state surveillance; thus, the church became a safe space for punks—not for religion but for sanctuary.

It was in the church where the punk ethos was reignited. Punks used the churches as places to gather and collaborate, to practice their music, and to plan the next event. Oddly enough, it was similar to how they had used squats. Figure 10 is a photograph of

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<sup>309</sup> Hayton.

<sup>310</sup> Hayton.

<sup>311</sup> Hayton.

<sup>312</sup> Benton, “Punks in the Church.”

<sup>313</sup> Benton.

<sup>314</sup> John P. Burgess, “Church-State Relations in East Germany: The Church as a ‘Religious’ and ‘Political’ Force,” *Journal of Church and State* 32, no. 1 (1990): 17–35.

punk A-Micha and Deacon Lorenz Postler, a member of the East German clergy who housed and safeguarded the punks in the mid-1980s.



Figure 10. A-Micha with Deacon Lorenz Postler, a member of the clergy who housed and safeguarded the punks in the mid-1980s.<sup>315</sup>

The church became the new center of gravity for the punk movement. As punks continued to organize concerts and gatherings under the protection of the church, the Stasi—through their system of informants—continued their efforts to track and monitor the punks.

The legitimacy of East German socialism began to degrade in the aftermath of a political catastrophe stemming from a punk event hosted in a church on October 30, 1987.<sup>316</sup> The *Zionskirche* concert in Berlin, with an estimated 2,000 people in attendance,

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<sup>315</sup> Source: “The East German Punks Who Helped Bring Down the Berlin Wall.”

<sup>316</sup> Dennis, *The Stasi*, 167.

was surrounded by the Stasi and local police forces. A group of neo-Nazi skinheads—a rival group of dissidents—attacked the punks leaving the venue. Tim Mohr describes the event:

They started punching the first people they encountered while shouting things like ‘Seig Heil,’ ‘Heil Hitler,’ and ‘Jundenschweine’ which translates as ‘Jewish pigs.’ ... At first, absolute shock paralyzed the concert crowd. Screaming, running. Panic. ... People outside screamed for help from police. There was no need to call them—a concert like this, with Stasi foreknowledge, attracted a huge police presence. Squad cars were parked all around the church. Uniformed and plainclothes officers stood around, along with conspicuously inconspicuous Stasi operatives. There was even an ambulance nearby, at the ready ... an emergency call went out to headquarters from police station around the church. The response from headquarters: No intervention necessary ... none of the police did a thing period none of them reacted. The law enforcement officers of this officially anti-fascist state stood by as skinheads shouted Nazi slogans and pummeled people on the street.<sup>317</sup>

Dennis claims that the skinheads attacked the unarmed punks with bottles and bicycle chains until the punks fought back and outnumbered the skinheads.<sup>318</sup> According to Hayton, the fact that the Stasi had “watched the assault without intervening seemed to suggest to victims at the time that the regime at least tacitly supported the Skinheads.”<sup>319</sup>

The SED found itself in a political dilemma as this event caused the Honecker regime to publicly acknowledge that Nazism still existed in the so-called anti-fascist state of the GDR.<sup>320</sup> Furthermore, not only did the party-state lose credibility regarding Nazism in East Germany, the attacks at *Zionskirche* drew the state’s legitimacy into question.<sup>321</sup> As Hayton claims, “vigilante justice flout [ed] the state monopoly on force” and it “had the

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<sup>317</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 267.

<sup>318</sup> Dennis, *The Stasi*, 167.

<sup>319</sup> Hayton, “Culture from the Slums.”

<sup>320</sup> Hayton.

<sup>321</sup> Jeff Hayton, “Krawall in Der Zionskirche: Skinhead Violence and Political Legitimacy in the GDR,” *European History Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2015): 336–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691415571535>.

potential to set a dangerous precedent.”<sup>322</sup> To strengthen the regime’s control of the state, the SED needed to de-politicize the punks.

## **B. INTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY**

The dissolution of the party-state’s totalitarian control of society was attributable to the party’s concessions regarding punk culture in East Germany. In 1988, the party-state reversed course on its official policy towards punks. It became apparent to the SED that punk, as a subculture, could not be suppressed. Thus, the party implemented a program, “*die anderen Bands*” (the other bands), allowing for punks to apply for permits and be authorized to perform at official events. Referencing FDJ-operated youth clubs (*Jugendklubs*), as Hayton writes, “a resolution calling for the integration of ‘outsider’ youths especially into FDJ-*Jugendklubs* that legalized punk’s place in East German society.”<sup>323</sup> Rather than fighting to destroy punks and their music, the party-state decided that their best strategy was to integrate the subculture into society, thus, giving the party-state the ability to control and regulate the punk genre. Simpson explains that the previously persecuted punk groups became more accepted in society through the “hospitable environment” fostered by the FDJ and other organizations such as Amiga, state-run music company.<sup>324</sup> She further argues that “by the late 1980s it became clear that the State’s attitude toward punk had changed, that is, some concessions or exceptions were made to the previous silencing of the music.”<sup>325</sup>

The new policy also opened the possibilities for punks to explore greater avenues of expression.<sup>326</sup> Hayton explains that “previously restricted musical outlets such as recording became accessible to punk bands.”<sup>327</sup> He elaborates, “Earlier punk bands were confined ... to performing on church stages, now punks could play in the thousands of

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<sup>322</sup> Hayton.

<sup>323</sup> Hayton, “Culture from the Slums.”

<sup>324</sup> Patricia Anne Simpson, “Germany and Its Discontents: Die Skeptiker’s Punk Corrective,” *Journal of Popular Culture* XXXIV, no. 3 (2000), [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.2000.3403\\_129.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.2000.3403_129.x).

<sup>325</sup> Simpson.

<sup>326</sup> Hayton, “Culture from the Slums.”

<sup>327</sup> Hayton.

FDJ-Jugendklubs and even draw a state salary once officially registered.”<sup>328</sup> Figure 11 is a photo of young Germans enjoying a state licensed punk concert in Berlin in 1988.



Figure 11. Punks at a state licensed concert in Berlin 1988.<sup>329</sup>

By this time, punk began to enter the GDR’s mainstream media. From radio to records to public concerts, the genre crept its way into the official society of East Germany. According to the Hayton, the SED’s policy argued that punks “both in their outward appearances and in their behavior do not manifest [themselves] in extreme form.”<sup>330</sup> Additionally, Hayton reports that this policy indicated that “there are youths who change their outward appearances only during leisure time and devote themselves only briefly and less intensely to the groupings.”<sup>331</sup> In other words, the depoliticization of punk

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<sup>328</sup> Hayton.

<sup>329</sup> Source: “The East German Punks Who Helped Bring Down the Berlin Wall.”

<sup>330</sup> Hayton, “Culture from the Slums.”

<sup>331</sup> Hayton.

appearance—the same bizarre clothing and hair that the *Härte Gegen Punk* policy targeted—opened the door for integration into socialist life.<sup>332</sup>

The intent of the party-state’s shift of policy was to depoliticize and normalize the punks in GDR society. This included state-run organizations as a local FDJ youth club official declared, according to Hayton, that in his youth club “everyone has their chance” to participate.<sup>333</sup> This official went on to say, “Clothes and hair that sticks down or up are at best an aid but on no account a criterion for deciding who is admitted and who must be turned away.”<sup>334</sup>

The swift and unexpected change in policy, however, had the opposite effect than what the party leadership expected. In fact, it weakened the political position of the SED. The ability for the party leadership to centrally control society began to erode as local entities became confused about the official policy. Hayton described various instances such as music managers refusing to play punk on their programs and local FDJ groups rejecting punks’ participation.<sup>335</sup> Though, the event that crippled the party-state the most, according to Hayton, was in Dresden in October, 1988.<sup>336</sup> He indicates that the media—both Eastern and Western—had reported on “Dresden police assaulting punks, fining others for their appearances, and banning them from the inner-city.”<sup>337</sup> The reemergence of *Härte Gegen Punk* by local police in Dresden further delegitimized the party-state. The hard shift in policy aimed to depoliticize and integrate the punks created confusion across society; it demonstrated a weakened party-state that lost control of society—the so called socialist “utopia” it was meant to create.

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332 Hayton.

333 Hayton, “Krawall in Der Zionskirche.”

334 Hayton.

335 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums.”

336 Hayton.

337 Hayton.

### C. PARTY-STATE'S AUTHORITY DIMINISHES

The end of communism in East Germany, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall, was a result of a revolution from within the so-called centrally controlled society. Mohr argues this revolution was based on a foundation laid by the punks.<sup>338</sup> Their resistance to the party-state in the 1970s and 1980s created an environment in which ordinary citizens felt safe to join protests against the party-state.<sup>339</sup> He writes (emphasis in the original), “By early October [1989], the groundwork laid by the punks and other activists influenced by the punk mentality was becoming a magical, spontaneous, mass uprising, being joined by people from all walks of life, all now chanting ... *We are the people.*”<sup>340</sup> On October 9, 1989, a mass mobilization of an estimated 100,000 protesters took to the streets of Leipzig.<sup>341</sup> This diverse group that stood up for their rights were, according to Mohr, “no longer just punks and freaks ... but grandmothers and shift workers, the bedrock of society.”<sup>342</sup> Fulbrook indicates that the day prior to the protest, “Erich Mielke ordered a state of red alert for the GDR security forces.” However, as Fulbrook continues, “A decision was made” by Secretary of Security Egon Krenz “to refrain from forcible intervention.”<sup>343</sup> This effectively avoiding a German version of the June, 1989, Tiananmen square massacre in China, a recent catastrophe fresh on the minds of SED decision makers, according to Fulbrook.<sup>344</sup> Thus, the protesters proceeded to demonstrate—peacefully.

The peaceful protest in Leipzig showed, for the first time, a freedom for the proletariat to express their disdain towards the repressive government without repercussions by the police or Stasi. Less than two weeks following the successful protest, the Politburo ousted Erich Honecker as party leader in what Fulbrook calls a “palace

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<sup>338</sup> Mohr, *Burning Down the Haus*, 324–25.

<sup>339</sup> Mohr, 324–25.

<sup>340</sup> Mohr, 325.

<sup>341</sup> Mohr, 325.

<sup>342</sup> Mohr, 326.

<sup>343</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 256.

<sup>344</sup> Fulbrook, 256.

revolution.”<sup>345</sup> Honecker was then replaced by Egon Krenz, who would impose political reforms in order to regain the party’s legitimacy and power—which ultimately had the reverse effect.<sup>346</sup> According to Fulbrook, the easing of policy in final months of the GDR’s existence had “a clear effect on the snowballing process of mass mobilization.”<sup>347</sup> She further argues that, contrary to the party-state’s intention of “clinging to power under altered colours,” the concessions made by the SED showed “a regime which was clearly losing control of developments.”<sup>348</sup> This loss of control was evident on November 9, 1989, when Günter Schabowski, an SED spokesman, announced changes to the East German travel policy.<sup>349</sup> The overwhelming response by the media caused him to misspeak, thus declaring the Berlin Wall open and obsolete—effective immediately.<sup>350</sup> At this point, the party lost complete control. Four months later, the first-ever free elections took place in the GDR, marking the end of four decades of the SED’s totalitarian control.

#### D. CONCLUSION.

As the Stasi continued their assault on *Ostpunk*, the dissident youth group retreated to the Protestant Church for sanctuary. It was through the church where punks thrived and mobilized under the *Härte Gegen Punk* policy and establishing a greater following. Eventually, the party-state’s efforts towards eliminating the punk movement exposed the public to a growing neo-Nazi Skinhead problem in the so-called anti-fascist state. This produced a political fallout that sparked a change in policy regarding punks—from annihilation to integration. However, this strategy eventually failed to control the social movement. Thus, it provided an opportunity for ordinary citizens of the civil society to safely mobilize in mass protest. These series of events facilitated the eventual collapse of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989.

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<sup>345</sup> Fulbrook, 257.

<sup>346</sup> Fulbrook, 257–65.

<sup>347</sup> Fulbrook, 258.

<sup>348</sup> Fulbrook, 258–59.

<sup>349</sup> Fulbrook, 259.

<sup>350</sup> Fulbrook, 259.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

The German Democratic Republic dissolved from the pressures of the civil society within its borders. At the heart of this revolution was the punk subculture of the 1970s and 1980s, where young people abandoned the socialist project and expressed their disdain for the regime's values. Stemming from American and British punk, the punks of East Germany transformed their broad social satire into a generation-defining political protest. They demonstrated their refutation of socialist realism with a DIY attitude, ripped clothing, bizarre haircuts, and blaring, off-tune music.

The party leadership deemed this group of youths an existential threat to their authoritarian regime—political terrorists. This study examined the expectations of life under socialist rule and how punks, frustrated with the lack of individualism, created an alternative subculture to challenge their society's status quo. In doing so, the punk movement survived the SED's extreme polices designed to destroy them. Furthermore, the persistence of the punk movement slowly softened the regime's control and paved the way for the mobilization of the civil society in protest towards the party-state. Therefore, transforming the geological environment in Europe.

Punks began as a group of youths seeking a new way to express their frustrations. As the party-state implemented policies to criminalize punk behavior, the subculture became political. Thus, the punks, their appearance, their culture, and their music were used to foster political change in East Germany. Joseph Nye argues that music and culture can be methods of political soft power. He writes, "Popular entertainment often contains subliminal images and messages about individualism, consumer choice, and other values that have important political effects."<sup>351</sup> In his book *Soft Power*, he accounts Ben Wattenburg's view on popular culture, saying that "it is that content, whether reflected

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<sup>351</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 47.

favorably or unfavorably,” that attracts the audience.<sup>352</sup> Wattenburg further argues, “That content is more powerful than politics or economics. It drives politics and economics.”<sup>353</sup>

Understanding the impacts that music cultures have on social movements is relevant in today’s global security environment. In Europe, this study can be applied to the growing nationalist and extreme right-wing parties enter mainstream politics. The Generation Identity and the Sweden Democratic Youth are among the prominent neo-Nazi youth groups. Teitelbaum indicates that “music and the discourses surrounding it thus offer insight into this shrouded population as it transitions from a marginal subculture into a powerful political and cultural force.”<sup>354</sup> Although their messaging and intentions differ, the origins of the modern neo-Nazi hate music and *Ostpunk* are similar.

Furthermore, this study has shown that soft power—through music and subculture—can affect the mobilization of a civil society and lead to political change. In the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement, that began in 2013, stemmed from what Bryan Ballantyne described as the public outrage of the acquittal of “George Zimmerman, who was on trial for the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, at a bar in Oakland, California.”<sup>355</sup> Initiated by a single social media post, the movement has grown over the years, mobilizing into a civil society fighting against excessive force used by the state against members of the community. Much like the GDR punks in the late 1980s, this movement continues to protest and fight for political change across the United States. Thus, by understanding the history of the East German punks, how they challenged—and contributed to the change of—a totalitarian regime, can inform the knowledge regarding the effects that subcultures have on geopolitics across the world.

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<sup>352</sup> Nye, 47.

<sup>353</sup> Nye, 47.

<sup>354</sup> Teitelbaum, *Lions of the North*, 3.

<sup>355</sup> Bryan J Ballantyne, “Social Movements and Social Media: Surveillance and Unintended Consequences” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2017), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/56855>.

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