

**Integration of East German
Resettlers into the Cultures and
Societies of the GDR**

Doctoral Thesis of

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DECLARATION

I, Aaron M.P. Jacobson, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

ABSTRACT

A controversy exists in the historiography of ethnic German post-WWII refugees and expellees who lived in the German Democratic Republic. This question is namely: to what extent were these refugees and expellees from various countries with differing cultural, religious, social and economic backgrounds integrated into GDR society? Were they absorbed by the native cultures of the GDR? Was an amalgamation of both native and expellee cultures created? Or did the expellees keep themselves isolated and separate from GDR society? The historiography regarding this controversy most commonly uses Soviet and SED governmental records from 1945-53. The limitation of this approach by historians is that it has told the refugee and expellee narrative from government officials' perspectives rather than those of the Resettlers themselves. In 1953 the SED regime stopped public record keeping concerning the Resettlers declaring their integration into GDR society as complete. After eight years in the GDR did the Resettlers feel that they were an integrated part of society? In an attempt to ascertain how Resettlers perceived their own pasts in the GDR and the level of integration that occurred, 230 refugees and expellees were interviewed throughout the former GDR between 2008-09. These interviewees represented several homeland origin groups and lived in a variety of localities including small, rural villages; middle-sized, established towns; and huge industrial centers. The results of these interviews have been analyzed in conjunction with primary archival sources and the secondary literature.

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ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS

BArch	Bundesarchiv, Berlin branch
SAPMO	Stiftung Parteien und Massenorganisation der ehemaligen DDR
BLHA	Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Potsdam
BdV	Bund der Vertriebenen
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
LHA	Landeshauptarchiv Sachsen-Anhalt, Magdeburg
LDPD	Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands
MLHA	Mecklenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Schwerin
NDPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands
NKVD	Narodny commissariat vnutrennich
SBZ	Sowjetische Besatzungszone
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SachsHStA	Sächsischen Hauptstaatsarchiv, Dresden
SMAD	Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland
Stasi	Staatssicherheitsdienst der DDR
ThHStAW	Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar
ZVU	Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939 approximately 18 million ethnic Germans lived throughout Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe.¹ The homelands of these people spanned from Yugoslavia in the south to the Baltic countries in the north. They lived from today's western Poland to the Caucasus Mountains in the east. The majority of these ethnic German groups developed their own cultures, dialects and customs over centuries all the while being surrounded by and living among various other ethnic groups and cultures. The lives of these 18 million ethnic Germans changed forever when from 1939-1950 they formed part of the largest population expulsions in human history.

Population transfers in the form of deportations or expulsions from one area to another are documented throughout written record. Examples of these population transfers include the expulsion of the Jews from Judea by the Babylonians in 597 B.C.E.; Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes scattering hundreds of thousands of Huguenots all over the world;² and the expulsion of ethnic Nepali from Bhutan in the 1990s. The majority of people affected by such events share in common personal and group stories of pain, suffering, disease and death.

¹ Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945*, (München: Siedler Verlag, 2008), p. 22-23.

² Marion Frantzioch, *Die Vertriebenen: Heimmnisse, Antriebskräfte und Wege ihrer Integration in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, (Berlin: Reimer, 1987), p. 46.

The regions of Central and Eastern Europe have experienced innumerable invasions and confrontations over the centuries between Celts, Romans, Germans, Huns, Slavs and other ethnic groups. This tide of warfare resulted in a continuous fluidity of borders and cycles of ethnic reprisals.³ The Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom drafted plans during conferences in Teheran and Yalta to end these cycles once and for all. In August 1945 the Allies decided in Potsdam to put these plans to move several ethnic groups to their own nation-states into action.⁴

Thus began the transfer of ethnic Germans from all over Europe to Occupied Germany. This process was often accompanied by death, horror, starvation and violence. One group among these millions is called the *Flüchtlinge* or refugees. This term most often refers to those ethnic Germans who fled the advance of the Soviet Army on the Eastern Front between 1944 and 1945. These refugees originated mostly from East Prussia, Pomerania, Warthegau/Poland, East Brandenburg and Silesia. Another group is called the *Vertriebene* or expellees. This term refers to ethnic Germans who were expelled from their homeland areas in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania and Hungary. It is in this chaotic setting that approximately 7.5 million refugees and expellees arrived in the future Federal Republic of Germany.⁵ An additional 4.3 million settled in the area of the future German Democratic Republic where they were known as *Umsiedler* or Resettlers.

³ Raymond Pearson, *National Minorities in Eastern Europe, 1848-1945*, (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1983), p. 4-6.

⁴ Mathias Beer, *Flucht and Vertreibung der Deutschen*, (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 2011), p. 48-51.

⁵ Philipp Ther, "A Century of Forced Migration: the Origins and Consequences of 'Ethnic Cleansing'", in Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, (eds.), *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), p. 60.

Review of secondary literature

Historical research relating to the lives and experiences of ethnic German refugees and expellees were affected by politics and policies during the Cold War. In West Germany, expellee historiography began with the extensive compilation of refugee and expellee experiences by Theodor Schieder and associates. The Ministry for Refugees, Expellees and War Victims in Bonn funded this work which they published in 1954 under the title *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*. The government's support for this research was part of a larger plan by Chancellor Adenauer to gain political support among the refugees and expellees.⁶ The government later published part of this compilation in English in an effort to garner sympathy in Western countries for German suffering during and after World War II. Chronicled rapes, pillaging and murders perpetrated by Soviets, Poles and Czechs against ethnic German refugees and expellees provided a great deal of material for this purpose.

West German refugee and expellee historiography continued to progress in the following decades concentrating in specific areas. Hans Schoenberg, Ian Connor, Rainer Schulze and other historians and authors researched and published works regarding the refugee and expellee influence on the economic development of Bavaria and other regions; their integration into small, formerly pro-Nazi villages in southern West Germany; and other studies of their settlement patterns.⁷ Continued focus on the hardships experienced by refugees and expellees culminated in some works and some members of the public putting forward the idea that the

⁶ Pertti Ahonen, *After the Expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe, 1945-1990*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 94.

⁷ Hans W. Schoenberg, *Germans from the East: a study of their migration, resettlement and subsequent group history since 1945*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1970).

suffering of German refugees and expellees was somehow equal to the suffering of Jews during World War II.⁸

The seminal works regarding GDR refugee and expellee historiography came after the *Wende* or political changes in 1989-90. Lutz Niethammer, Dorothee Wierling and Alexander von Plato conducted interviews in 1987-88 for their work *Das Volkseigene Erfahrung*.⁹ Alexander von Plato noticed that 31% of the 161 interviewees in their research project were refugees or expellees.¹⁰ He published several of these interviews, along with additional commentary by Wolfgang Meinicke, in 1991 under the title *Alte Heimat: Neue Zeit - Flüchtlinge Umgesiedelte Vertriebene in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR*. As a collection of Resettler perspectives about their lives in the GDR this work is insightful and thought-provoking. Unfortunately, this study has a number of weaknesses that negatively impacted von Plato's conclusions and results.

The first limitation of this study is the reality that the interviews were conducted in the GDR while still under a dictatorship. Niethammer, Wierling and von Plato were sometimes accompanied to interviews by *Betreuer* or government-appointed guides and often the interview partners were assigned to the research group rather than being chosen randomly. These circumstances potentially had significant effects on the willingness of Niethammer's interviewees to be as open and candid about their experiences as one would hope. There is also

⁸ Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche*, 1963 as quoted in Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: the search for a usable past in Federal Republic of Germany*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003), p. 190.

⁹ Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato and Dorothee Wierling, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR: 30 biographische Eröffnungen*, (Berlin: Rowohlt Verlag, 1991).

¹⁰ Alexander von Plato, in Wolfgang Meinicke and Alexander von Plato, *Alte Heimat-neue Zeit: Flüchtlinge Umgesiedelte Vertriebene in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR*, (Berlin: Verlags-Anstalt Union, 1991), p. 85.

the potential that interview partners assigned by the SED regime might have been chosen for having opinions and perspectives that supported the SED and its policies.

Another impact on the utility of the project is its limited scope. Niethammer had previously completed research based in the industrial Ruhr valley in West Germany and this is potentially why he decided to focus on the industrial areas of the GDR. The fact that the interviewees came solely from Eisenhüttenstadt, Bitterfeld and Karl-Marx-Stadt (Chemnitz) meant that the results disproportionately represented the experiences of the industrial working class. This focus on three industrial cities of the GDR essentially ignored refugee and expellee life experiences in other areas such as agricultural villages, small towns and non-industrial cities.

In 1996, 1999 and 2003 Manfred Wille and colleagues (Steffi Kaltenborn, Gerald Christopeit and Manfred Jahn) published the most comprehensive compilation of GDR government documents regarding the Resettlers. Their works *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR II Massentransfer, Wohnen, Arbeit 1946 –1949* and *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente III Parteien, Organisationen und die ‘Umsiedler’ 1945-1953* copied and reprinted sources pertaining to refugees and expellees from all state archives of the former GDR: Brandenburg in Potsdam; Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in Schwerin; Saxony in Dresden; Saxony-Anhalt in Magdeburg; and Thuringia in Weimar. This compilation is very useful as the documents follow the Resettlers after their arrival in the Soviet Zone and include descriptions of what life was like in SBZ refugee camps and Resettler successes and failures in the SED’s *Bodenreform* (land reform) and *Neubauern* (New Farmer) programs. While these are exceptional tools in beginning to

understand the Resettler experience in the SBZ and GDR the weakness of the compilation is that most sources were written from Soviet and SED bureaucrats' viewpoints rather than from the perspectives of the Resettlers themselves.

In 2004 Michael Schwartz published one of the largest works in GDR Resettler historiography. His 1,247-page treatise, *Vertriebene und "Umsiedlerpolitik": Integrationskonflikte in den deutschen Nachkriegs-Gesellschaften und die Assimilationsstrategien in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1961* thoughtfully combined secondary works and his conclusions with additional archival sources. The great weakness of Schwartz's research was his reliance on SED governmental documents. Any opinions, thoughts or feelings regarding the Resettler experience were recorded through the bias and potential animosity of SED officials. What made Schwartz's book exceptional is his discovery in secret government documents that the SED continued to monitor Resettler activities throughout the 1960s. For years archival research regarding GDR refugees and expellees was limited to an end date of 1953 due to an SED ban on public discussion of the Resettlers. Schwartz's book pushed Resettler historiography past the 1953 boundary and confirmed the continued existence of Resettlers in GDR society.

In 2009 Heike Amos proved that this existence and government interest in the Resettlers continued past the 1960s in her book, *Die Vertriebenenpolitik der SED: 1945-1990*. Amos canvassed *Staatssicherheitsdienst* (Stasi) files covering decades and discovered that the SED government had the Stasi secretly observe Resettlers and their activities until the demise of the dictatorship.

Amos's study and many others in GDR Resettler historiography are very thorough, well-written historical works. The limitation of the majority is that the secondary literature relies almost exclusively on archival sources that consist of SED government reports and documents. Resettler life and all factors pertaining to it are told almost exclusively from the perspective of Soviet and SED bureaucrats and officials. One can gain great knowledge and information from these books, such as how much government aid was given to how many Resettlers in which *Bezirk* or administrative district, but that is the limit.

The question remains: what were the Resettlers' experiences in the GDR like from their own points of view? Do Resettlers remember receiving any government aid and what did they do with it? How did the Resettlers cope with the hatred, persecution and discrimination meted out by native locals? Did GDR Resettlers follow the government ban on *Heimat* (homeland) organizations¹¹ or did they find subtler, more secret ways to organize and help one another? What was it like to be a part of the dominant religion in their old homeland and then become the religious minority in the GDR? Did the Resettlers ever truly feel that they were an integrated part of GDR society? The answers to the majority of these questions cannot be found in government reports written by Soviet or SED officials.

A few works which attempt to fill these gaps include Ute Schmidt's study, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien: eine Minderheit Südosteuropa (1814 bis heute)*. Schmidt's work is well researched and helpful, but the limitation of her research is its sole focus on Bessarabian Germans. This

¹¹ Stefan Donth., *Vertriebene und Flüchtlinge in Sachsen 1945-1952: Die Politik der Sowjetischen Militäradministration und der SED*, (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2000), p. 325.

choice to concentrate on only one Heimat group tells only part of the Resettlers' story in the GDR.

Dagmar Semmelmann's oral history project in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg is another example of an attempt to research Resettler perspectives regarding life in the GDR. This study focused on the political attitudes and motivations of refugees and expellees. The limitations of this project include the size of the interviewee pool, only 15 Resettlers were interviewed, and the reality that all were employed in the local iron foundry. With so few refugees and expellees interviewed and the industrial working class being over-represented it is impossible to make macro-level generalizations about the Resettler experience in the GDR.¹²

These unanswered questions and gaps in Resettler historiography leave those interested in GDR refugees and expellees wanting more. This research project has been carried out in an attempt to help fill some of these gaps, namely: to record Resettler perceptions about their lives in the GDR and to attempt to discover the levels of social, economic, political and religious integration interviewees achieved during the GDR period.

Terminology

Finding the most appropriate term to use when referring to GDR refugees and expellees in this research project proved difficult. The majority of GDR Umsiedler find the term "Umsiedler"

¹² Dagmar Semmelmann, "Zur Integration aus lebensgeschichtlicher Sicht: Eingliederungsverläufe von Flüchtlingen und Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR dargestellt am Sonderfall Eisenhüttenstadt, in Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz, (Hrsg.), *Geglückte Integration?: Spezifika und Vergleichbarkeiten der Vertriebenen-Eingliederung in der SBZ/DDR*, (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999).

pejorative and its use would be unacceptable. Additionally, it was found through the interviews that the term “refugee” by itself would not be appropriate as this left out expellees and other interviewees who had never experienced the *Flucht* or flight westwards. The same situation existed with the lone term “expellee”.

The search for a proper term for the interviewees became further complicated after interviewing several *Heimkehrer* or German prisoners of war. These interviewees had neither experienced the flight nor the expulsions, but they, like the refugees and expellees, were not able to return to their homeland regions. This was also the case for some interviewees who were *Evakuierte* or *Ausgebombte*. These people were Germans who had been evacuated from cities and industrial centers in Germany during World War II and were living in the regions of the Soviet Zone as the war ended. Some who originated from Stettin, Breslau and other German cities east of the Oder River were not able to return to their homeland regions.

The interviewees fell into a variety of categories and to refer to them all as refugees or expellees would not suffice. The term “Displaced Persons” would have been ideal, but this term is used to refer to people in different circumstances including survivors of concentration camps and former forced laborers. Due to these circumstances the English translation of the term “Umsiedler” or “Resettler” is used throughout this work to refer to all those who could not return to their homeland regions and lived in the GDR.

Aim of this study

In his book, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990*, Jan Palmowski used oral history interviews to explore the relationships of power between GDR citizens and the SED regime. He was particularly interested in how average people in the GDR co-opted SED national concepts of “Heimat” and applied and practiced them in their own personal lives. He claimed that “a further important area that would have significantly enriched this study is a closer examination of the expellee communities, notably how these were integrated into, and how they identified with, the heimat offered to them after 1945...especially at a micro-level.”¹³

The aim of this study is to discover on both micro and macro levels the degree of Resettler social, economic, religious and political integration into the local cultures and societies of the GDR. This will be accomplished through analyses of the Resettlers’ responses to questions involving their arrival and settlement experiences in the GDR; education and employment; family and private life; political and religious choices; and their reasons for remaining in the GDR rather than fleeing to West Germany.

The findings of this research will support or contradict several concepts and debates in GDR and German historiography. The first debate concerns the Totalitarian theory and how it has been applied to GDR history during and after the Cold War. This research project argues that the Totalitarian theory is not sufficient in its explanation of the SED regime’s interactions with GDR citizens. The Totalitarian theory purports a tyrannical, dictatorial, all-powerful and all-intrusive SED regime whose power and legitimacy, to quote a critic of the theory, rested solely on

¹³ Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 17.

“Russian bayonets”.¹⁴ This regime is alleged to have controlled and affected every aspect of GDR citizens’ lives.

The opposite was discovered when Richard Bessel and associates found areas of everyday life where the SED was limited in its influence and control. Bessel and others asserted in *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* that the SED was limited in its power to stop the rise in crime and criminality in the GDR; that the SED was unable to change attitudes and practices among scientists and engineers in the GDR; the SED could not stop the traditional autonomy among higher education professors in the GDR; and despite the SED’s desires for uniformity in agriculture throughout the GDR, continued differences between Brandenburg, Saxony and Mecklenburg existed.¹⁵

Jürgen Kocka in *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* further explained that:

Alles in allem erweist sich die Gesellschaft der DDR in hohem Maß als künstliches Produkt politischer Herrschaft, von dieser ermöglicht, durchformt und abhängig.....Falsch wäre es nämlich anzunehmen, daß die Herrschaft von Partei und Staat die Gesellschaft total prägte und determinierte. Vieles in ihr war älter als dieser Staat. Staatlich-parteiliche Steuerung und Durchdringung stießen ständig auf Grenzen. So manche ältere Tradition

¹⁴ Mary Fulbrook, “Methodologische Überlegungen zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR“, in Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen (Hrsg.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 281-282: “Die Betrachtung der DDR-Geschichte unterliegt zahlreichen vortheoretischen Urteilen...Im Gegensatz zur BRD sei die DDR ein »Unrechtsstaat«, eine totalitäre Diktatur, ein Teilstaat ohne nationale oder auch nur materielle Legitimität. Wenn die DDR aber so schlimm war, darum – so die schlichte schwarz-weiß Logik – mußten alle, die nicht als üble Täter »dafür« waren, entweder passive Opfer oder aktive Helden der Opposition gewesen sein – ein Bild, das so sicherlich nicht stimmt...Armin Mitter und Stefan Wolle, »Untergang auf Raten«. Die These von Mitter und Wolle lautet: Die SED-Herrschaft ruhte letztendlich nur auf »russischen Bajonetten«. Damit anderen Worten: Das diesem Buch zugrundeliegende Konzept der ostdeutschen Diktatur ist zu statisch.“

¹⁵ Bessel and Jessen (Hrsg.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur*.

lebte weiter, indem sie sich gegenüber herrschaftlichen Rekonstruktionsversuchen als immun erwies und zum Teil mit neuen Aufgaben ausgestattet wurde.¹⁶

The results of this project will confirm what Kocka, Bessel and others claimed regarding the limits to SED power and influence and repudiates those who assert that GDR citizens' engagements with and reactions to the SED regime were based solely on Soviet military power.¹⁷

This work will address a similar discussion involving the Repression theory. Mary Fulbrook in *Grenzen der Diktatur* wrote, "Die >Repressionsthese< der DDR-Geschichte begreift die Diktatur im Kern als die Herrschaft einer dünnen Schicht übler Gestalten an der Spitze, die die große Masse unschuldiger Helden und Opfer unterdrückt."¹⁸ The findings of this study will establish that the interviewees did not perceive themselves in the GDR as either heroes or victims. They reported that they lived "normal lives" in the GDR with its negative, positive and neutral aspects.¹⁹

The answers gleaned from Resettler interviews will be useful in the current debate regarding those who claim Germans were victims during and after WWII. Bill Niven explained in *German Victimhood at the Turn of the Millennium* how:

The political functionalisation of memory in the GDR and the FRG resulted in the distorted and manipulative representation of themes such as bombing and expulsion; in

¹⁶ Jürgen Kocka, "Eine durchherrschende Gesellschaft", in Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka and Hartmut Zwahr (Hrsg.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994), p. 550.

¹⁷ Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED Staat: Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft, 1949-1990*, (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1998), p. 83; 634-637.

¹⁸ Fulbrook, in Bessel and Jessen (Hrsg.), p. 291.

¹⁹ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

some cases, it resulted in silence. Particularly in the GDR, where subjects such as the rape of women by the Red Army could not be addressed because to do so would have been to contradict the official history, according to which the Soviet soldiers who entered eastern Germany in 1945 were liberators and socialist patriots. 1990 thus represented a significant moment of depoliticisation, a chance, indeed, for an articulation of German suffering as suffering.²⁰

The majority of interviewees expressed that for them personally the era after 1989 was a type of awakening. It was during this period that they felt what was once forbidden, speaking publicly about their hardships and experiences, was suddenly permissible. After the Wende the Resettlers joined Heimat groups; made journeys back to their former homelands in greater numbers; and began to publicly share poetry, songs and stories about the old Heimat and their flight and expulsion experiences.²¹

The majority of the Resettlers expressed in the interviews that they felt they were victims. Anger, pain and confusion over family and friends being raped or murdered and having their belongings and property plundered were common. There was a curious element present, potentially from years of SED political education, in several Resettlers' representations of their own victimhood. Many of the interviewees stated that over time they eventually understood why the Poles, Czechs and Soviets had committed these atrocities against them. They asserted that it was in response to what the Nazi regime had done against the peoples of Europe that these

²⁰ Bill Niven, "German Victimhood at the Turn of the Millennium", in Bill Niven (ed.), *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.4.

²¹ Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau L., born in 1912 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

hardships and the loss of their old Heimat were warranted as an atoning payment for these crimes.²²

With GDR refugees and expellees demanding to be heard after 1989, building memorials to their fallen dead, the enlargement of the European Union to include countries which expelled millions of ethnic Germans after World War II and the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (Federation of Expellees) continuing to plan the construction of a Center Against Expulsions in Berlin, it appears that the concept of Germans as war victims continues to grow in political importance and relevance.

This work will also contribute to the *Ostalgie* debate or the claim that some former GDR citizens tend to see the GDR in an unrealistically positive way. Interviewee answers will confirm what secret SED opinion polls regarding citizens' satisfaction with life in the GDR found in the 1960s and 1970s: people were generally happy living in the GDR.²³ This is especially true when interviewees were able to compare their lives in the GDR with the unemployment, depression and uncertainty that many experienced after 1990 in a reunited Germany.²⁴

²² Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

²³ Thomas Ahbe, *Ostalgie: Zum Umgang mit der DDR-Vergangenheit in den 1990er Jahren*, (Sömmerda, Thüringen: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2005), p. 59.

²⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 59: "I also carried out some interviews with residents of Eisenhüttenstadt aged between fifty and seventy-five in July 2004, and was surprised by the similarity of the sentiments expressed, which were, if anything, even more positive than those of Semmelmann's interviewees – perhaps a consequence of a further decade or so of experience of unified Germany...older residents interviewed in 2004 recalled what they saw as excellent childcare and educational provision, social and cultural facilities that were genuinely for the people' (Volk), and a real sense of community spirit, with people willing to help each other when in personal difficulties, or to put time and energy into communal building schemes...For these residents, the sense of community more than made up for what they saw as far less significant disadvantages of pre-1989 life: the paucity of 'southern fruits', the relative lack of telephones, the long wait for a car. In place of these purely material possessions, they prized more highly aspects such as enhanced 'law and order', with police ready to discipline rowdy or work-shy youngsters; the ways in which the work collective would help out when a Sorgenkind (a young person giving cause for concern) failed to turn up for work, or when a colleague's marriage was in trouble; and the cheap and enjoyable holidays in the FDGB-owned holiday facilities on the Baltic island of Rügen, or the trips to destinations in Eastern Europe, most often to Czechoslovakia or Hungary."

Theoretical Framework

Jan Palmowski employed John C. Scott's concept of a "public transcript" in his book *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990*.²⁵ The public transcript consists of the public rules of engagement with regards to any subject in relationships of power. The public transcript as the official public codes of conduct reinforces the dominant group's eligibility and will to rule with threats often in the form of physical violence. When the dominated follow the codes and rules of the public transcript, most often out of fear of reprisal, and do not openly challenge the dominant in public, the dominant allow the dominated their own private "hidden transcripts".

Hidden transcripts refer to areas where individuals are given to act and think for themselves. Despite its name the hidden transcript does not only involve activities in the individual's private life and sphere, but also in aspects of one's public life. In order to explain this concept Palmowski gave the example of citizens who were able to publicly protest environmental degradation in the GDR by simply saying "I am just a GDR citizen who cares about our environment...By publicly acknowledging what the state wanted to hear, individuals created spaces in which they could pursue their own, private meanings."²⁶

These private meanings depended greatly upon the energy and desires of the individual GDR citizen. This study will show that even though Heimat characteristics and the environment of the

²⁵ John C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

²⁶ Palmowski, p. 12-13.

GDR had tremendous effects in Resettlers' lives, it was ultimately the motivations, use of agency and choices individual Resettlers made that were responsible for the degrees of integration they achieved. Ute Schmidt found in her research regarding GDR Resettlers from Bessarabia that these personal choices and practices or "informal sub-structures" allowed individual Bessarabian Resettlers to maintain their cultural identity despite the SED's efforts to eradicate their "particularist" identities and traditions.²⁷ Within the construct of the hidden transcript the individual Resettler chose to create, follow or ignore personal informal sub-structures such as cultural, social and traditional Heimat practices. Additionally, within the construct of the public transcript and its formal sub-structures such as May Day parades, plays, concerts and local Brigade activities the individual Resettler chose over time whether or not to internalize and accept the GDR as their new socialist Heimat.²⁸ The consequences of an individual Resettler's exercise of agency within the hidden and public transcripts in the GDR prevented, encouraged, slowed or stopped that individual Resettler's integration into local cultures and GDR society as a whole.

This study will employ the theoretical concepts of the public transcript and hidden transcript when analyzing interviewee memories and representations of their pasts in the GDR. The results will demonstrate on micro and macro levels the levels of social, economic, religious and political integration the majority of Resettlers had achieved in GDR society. Were Resettlers able to use informal sub-structures in the private and public transcripts to maintain their original identities and cultures? This was found to be the case and resulted in the "inner distance"²⁹ that many

²⁷ Ute Schmidt, "Drei oder viermal im Leben neu anfangen müssen: Beobachtungen zur ländlichen Vertriebenenintegration in mecklenburgischen "Bessarabier-Dörfer", in Hoffmann and Schwartz, (Hrsg.), p. 320.

²⁸ Palmowski, p.7, 26-28, 88-89 and 97.

²⁹ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schawartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

Resettlers had between themselves and the SED regime. Just as Palmowski found in his interviews with GDR natives,³⁰ the majority of Resettler interviewees who participated in this project rejected the “socialist Heimat” that the SED offered them.

Methodology

Given that the predominant focus of secondary works describing the Resettler experience came from government officials, a key goal of this work was to find out more about Resettler perceptions and subjective memories regarding their lives and integration into GDR society. In order to avoid previous weaknesses of secondary works regarding location and socio-economic variety, such as Donth’s research of Resettlers in Saxony³¹ or von Plato’s interviews only involving industrial cities, it was decided to interview Resettlers in as great a variety of areas as possible. Oral history interviews were conducted throughout all the *Bezirke* or former administrative districts of the GDR. Interview partners were found in large cities such as Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern; medium-sized towns like Greiz, Thuringia; and small villages such as Egel, Saxony-Anhalt.

There were difficulties finding potential interview partners in the beginning. Senior centers and homes for the elderly were contacted in Brandenburg and Thuringia, but to no avail. After receiving negative answers from 18 senior homes in Erfurt, Thuringia a positive answer came from Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg. Six Resettlers were interviewed there in February 2008 and further interviewees were found through referrals.

³⁰ Palmowski, p. 20.

³¹ Stefan Donth, *Vertriebene und Flüchtlinge in Sachsen 1945-1952: Die Politik der Sowjetischen Militäradministration und der SED*, (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2000).

The system of referrals proved fruitful in terms of numbers. Contact was made with a *Kreisgruppe* (a Heimat group whose members all came from the same county) leader in Berlin whose members originally came from the same area in East Brandenburg, now part of today's Poland. This group leader encouraged members of her organization to participate in this project. A few group members took part themselves and then arranged for their friends, workmates and colleagues to be interviewed. The potential weakness with this method of finding interviewees is that since so many people were friends or acquaintances the answers to the research questions could unfairly represent people with similar opinions regarding Resettler integration in GDR society. This potential for an overabundance of similar viewpoints and attitudes could affect the ability to generalize the findings of this study.

Contact was then made with the *Landsmannschaften* (homeland organizations) for Resettlers from specific areas, e.g. Sudeten Germans, Bukovina Germans, Danube Swabians, Germans of Danzig and others. Not all *Landsmannschaften* were contacted to participate and not all contacted groups responded. Thus, the Siebenbürgen Saxons, Baltic Germans and Dobrudscha-Bulgarian Germans are not represented in this study. The *Landsmannschaften* who answered the request to participate arranged for contact to be made with local branch leaders. These local leaders then organized interviews with their members. Additionally, I attended and spoke in September 2008 at a nation-wide meeting of the East Prussia *Landsmannschaft* in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. I introduced this research project to the 2,000 attendees and afterwards several dozen GDR Resettlers agreed to be interviewed.

It was important to ensure a degree of geographical variety where the interviewees resided. Several contacts had been made initially in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and interviews conducted there, but the southern regions of the former GDR, i.e. Saxony and Thuringia were entirely missing. As efforts in Thuringia had brought no results, the local Bund der Vertriebenen associations were contacted and asked if their members would be interested in participating. Dozens of interviews were conducted in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia due to Bund der Vertriebenen participation. This finding method is a potential weakness of this research project due to the possibility that BdV members might have similar opinions and views about their lives in the GDR and thus skewing the results of this research. Nevertheless, the findings remain sufficiently striking to be indicative of certain prevalent patterns of opinion, without being able to claim that they are completely representative of the Resettler population of the former GDR as a whole.

There was a variety of ways in which the interview itself was conducted. Audio recordings were made of all interviews and written notes were taken of what was deemed to be especially pertinent to the research project. The first thirty interviews were initially in-depth, open-ended life story narratives. This was done in order to elicit greater details from Resettlers about what they considered was important in their lives in the GDR. These interviews were generally, but not exclusively, one-on-one interviews in the person's home.

The first interviews lasted on average about 1.5 hours, with some lasting as long as four hours. The interviewees were specifically told that they need not share their flight or expulsion experiences, as the focus of the project was their lives in the GDR. Nevertheless, the majority of

the interviewees found it necessary and very important to speak about these experiences. After the interviewees expressed whatever they desired, a list of questions was largely followed asking the Resettlers about their political lives; education; work experiences; religiosity; questions of identity; Heimat traditions followed; and why they or their families chose to remain in the GDR. The interviews that followed these first thirty tended to be much shorter in duration.

In some cases group interviews were carried out. While those who arranged Bund der Vertriebenen or Landsmannschaften interviews were requested to allow for private, one-hour interview sessions with each Resettler, there were some areas where this did not occur. There were at times anywhere from five to eight people seated around a large table who wanted to be interviewed together as a group. This could partially be due to the fear some had of being interviewed alone by a complete stranger. This was evident when my hostess in Burg Stargard, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern began to leave the room and the interviewee, Frau W. shouted “Lässt Du mich allein?!”³² The fact that some Resettlers were interviewed in a group is a weakness of this study due to the potential effect that the presence of others might have on the quality and integrity of the answers given during the interviews. However, this situation did not occur everywhere, and has to be taken into account in this kind of research. Slim, Thompson, Bennett and Cross stated:

In some societies, a one-to-one interview may not be acceptable, particularly for women, and one or more observers will need to be present. This can serve the additional function of testing and cross-checking information as observers interrupt to challenge or correct the interviewee. However, it can also mean that information is distorted. In some

³² Interview on 10/11/2008 with Frau W., born in 1924 in Sudetenland, living in Burg Stargard, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

situations observers can act as censors and indeed may be there specifically to intimidate: husbands observing wives; parents observing children.....Groups can bring out the best and the worst in people. Sometimes, by taking the focus off individuals, they make them less inhibited, but the opposite can occur just as easily. A group may subtly pressurize people towards a socially acceptable testimony or a mythical representation of the past or of a current issue which everyone feels is 'safe' to share and which may be in some sense idealised.³³

There are advantages and disadvantages to every type of interview situation and these circumstances can affect the results of an oral history interview in a number of ways. After arriving at the interviewees' homes there often was an unexpected son, friend or relative in the living room. The interviewee used this person as a form of protection or assurance against the unknown American who was interested in GDR Resettlers.³⁴ Other times the interview occurred in a perfect atmosphere such as with Frau T. in Potsdam where it was just the interviewer and interviewee sitting and talking as long as was needed.³⁵

Problems with Oral History as methodology

A multitude of factors can affect one's memories. Traumas experienced during the flight and expulsions, repression and humiliation during the GDR era and other negative experiences could have had huge impacts on the memories of interviewees.

³³ Hugo Slim and Paul Thomson, with Olivia Bennett and Nigel Cross, "Ways of Listening", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006), p.145 and 147.

³⁴ Interview on 12/11/2008 with Frau G., born in 1938 in Slovakia, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

³⁵ Interview on 20/10/2008 with Frau T., born in 1925 in East Prussia, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.

Just as psychological and mental traumas can affect people's memories the physical characteristics of the brain and mental processes can change memories over time. In the process of memory creation there are more details of an event available in a person's short-term memory when compared to the long-term memory of the same event.³⁶ The brain does not handle the massive amounts of information it receives on a daily basis. This physical reality means that in the creation of long-term memory one forgets a great deal of what one has experienced, heard, felt and thought.³⁷ This forgetting of the majority of what one experiences in life affects everyone and would have impacted Resettler memories.

In addition to the physical necessity of forgetting, the brain over several years goes through a process of memory consolidation. Consolidation is essential in the creation of long-term memory and is accomplished through the acts of remembering and retelling certain events repeatedly over time. What happens during memory consolidation is a "...complex and creative process of story reconstruction. Although elements of the original story will reappear, the remembered account is almost never the same as the original, or indeed of any previous recounting."³⁸

³⁶ Donald A. Ritchie, "Introduction: The Evolution of Oral History", in Donald A. Ritchie (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 15. "Most oral histories have been conducted long after the events, when the people had the benefit of hindsight, and when later experiences caused them to revise their earlier stories."

³⁷ Alistair Thomson, "Memory and Remembering in Oral History", in Ritchie (ed.), p. 83. "Furthermore, a vast proportion of experiences, which are initially registered in short-term memory, are not processed into long-term memory...Mental good health requires us to forget much more than we remember."

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86. "...a complex and creative process of story reconstruction. Although elements of the original story will reappear, the remembered account is almost never the same as the original, or indeed of any previous recounting."

This process of long-term memory consolidation explains one of many reasons why “memory can change over time.”³⁹ This is especially true as this oral history project was completed in the interviewees’ later years. The time period between the events reported by the Resettlers and when the interviews occurred allowed the process of memory consolidation to create the specific memories that were shared during the interviews. In other words, the probability is very high that the specific events remembered and shared by the interviewees during the interviews would have differed in some respects had they been shared a few years earlier or after.

Another aspect involving time that could have potentially influenced Resettler memories and responses is the era in which the interviews took place. 2008-09 was a unique period of self-reflection for many former GDR citizens. With the 20-year anniversaries of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the GDR and unification with West Germany looming it is possible that this time period could have affected the interviewees in many ways. After years of remembering, private retelling and long-term memory consolidation regarding their pasts, Resettler memories were unique to that specific time. The interviewees were also in a position in 2008-09 to compare their lives in the GDR to their horrific flight and expulsion experiences and the economic woes they experienced in the 1990s in a newly reunified Germany.⁴⁰ Given this possibility of comparison, the majority of the interviewees reported that their “normal lives” in the GDR were mostly positive and worth living.⁴¹

The faulty and constantly evolving nature of memory has created in some historians a wariness of using oral history interviews in research projects. Robert Perks wrote:

³⁹ Ritchie, in Ritchie (ed.), p. 12.

⁴⁰ Ahbe, p. 26.

⁴¹ Interview on 18/03/2009 with Herr T., born in 1936, lived in East Brandenburg, living near Cottbus, Brandenburg.

At the core of criticisms of oral history in the early 1970s was the assertion that memory was distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age, by the personal bias of both interviewer and interviewee, and by the influence of collective and retrospective versions of the past.⁴²

Researchers were sufficiently concerned with age-related problems of memory, but the possibility that interviewer and interviewee could taint the whole process and create a work of fiction was worse.

This potential for creating fiction went one stage further when historians contemplated the results of research projects such as Mark Roseman's study of Jews from Essen, Germany. Roseman found how the simple act of hearing a story several times can create a false memory in the listener. This false memory can become so real to the hearer of the story that this person will believe that an incident which happened to someone else actually involved them.⁴³ This situation is troublesome when one considers that the telling and retelling of flight and expulsion experiences, especially with fellow Resettlers, could have created false memories in those interviewed for this project.

⁴² Thomson, in Ritchie (ed.), p. 79.

⁴³ Mark Roseman, "Surviving Memory: Truth and Inaccuracy in Holocaust Testimony", in Perks and Thomson (eds.), p. 230-235. "In exploring patterns of discrepancy in the memory of German-born Jewish Holocaust survivor Marianne Ellenbogen...Roseman's study conveys the psychic difficulty of remembering 'unbearable reality' and the need to impose control on memory and on the moments that caused such pain...It is clear from Marianne's diary that she received the letter only once Ernst's transport was already under way. There is, therefore, no doubt that the Krombachs spent their last night in Essen in their apartment and that Marianne was not with them the whole time. She visited them in the evening at the flat – that was where she met Jacobs but later she must have gone home. Later, I found in the published reminiscences of former Essen Jews an account by Hanna Aron of the deportation of her boyfriend, also to Izbica, on a subsequent visit it seems extremely likely that Hanna Aron told Marianne the story of her farewell from her lover and that at some point she must have adopted the account as her own."

There are a plethora of other factors and issues that could have affected the interviews, the interviewees and their responses. The physical environment and the temperature of the interview space can affect interview results.⁴⁴ The lighting of the room and presence of noises or other distractions can also affect an interview. Researchers found that the recording device used can affect an interview as well, e.g. large and imposing might make an interview partner more reticent, while one that is small and non-intrusive could result in a more open and forthcoming interviewee.⁴⁵ Additionally, the interviewer can affect the interview just in being who they are. Gender, race, physical build and the age of the interviewer can potentially make interviewees more closed or open.

Then one must consider the reality of what an interviewee is willing to share and what she or he is not willing to share and to what degree. “Oral history narrators (interviewees), like anyone else engaged in talking to another person, consciously self-edit for a wide variety of reasons, but faced with prospect of digital fame, some may be tempted to elaborate their roles, while others may be less forthcoming.”⁴⁶

Even though age, trauma and all previously discussed factors can affect memory, these possibilities do not make all memories invalid. This is especially true regarding what interviewee perceptions and opinions can tell researchers about a given subject. Alistair Thomson stated that “...the so-called unreliability of memory, was also its strength, and that the subjectivity of memory provided clues not only about the meanings of historical experience, but

⁴⁴ Mary Kay Quinlan, “The Dynamics of Interviewing”, in Ritchie (ed.), p. 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 28-32.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

also about the relationships between past and present, between memory and personal identity, and between individual and collective memory.”⁴⁷

Oral history is a vital tool in recovering information and perceptions that might otherwise be lost completely. Daniel James explained “oral sources can also take us beyond the limits of existing empirical data...in particular, oral testimony enables us to approach the issue of agency and subjectivity in history.”⁴⁸ Because of oral history’s ability to record and express Resettler subjectivities and perceptions when SED government documents usually did not, oral history interviews were chosen as the main research method in this project.

The nature of the sample

230 Resettlers were interviewed throughout all the former GDR Bezirke and East Berlin. 46.1% or 104 of the 230 interviewees were women, while 53.9% or 124 were men. Regarding age, the oldest interviewee was born in 1912 and the youngest in 1945. This made the average interviewee 12-years old in 1944-45 when the majority of the Resettlers experienced the flight and expulsions.

The following was observed regarding homeland origins: 34.3% or 79:230 were Sudeten Germans; 18.7% or 43:230 were East Prussians; 10.4% or 24:230 were Pomeranians; 10% or 23:230 were Silesians; 7% or 16:230 were East Brandenburger; 4.8% or 11:230 were Bessarabian Germans; 3% or 7:230 were Bukovina Germans; 3% or 7:230 were Danube

⁴⁷ Thomson, in Ritchie (ed.), p. 80.

⁴⁸ Daniel James, “Listening in the Cold: The practice of oral history in an Argentine meatpacking community”, in Perks and Thomson (eds.), p. 85-86.

Swabians; 2.2% or 5:230 were Carpathian Germans; 0.8% or 2:230 were Germans from Poland; 2:230 West Prussians; 1:230 was a Saxon (now Poland); and 1:230 came from Volhynia.

Notably a Heimat region could not be assigned to 3.9% or 9:230 of the Resettlers due to this information simply not being reported⁴⁹ or as some had a complicated or non-traditional Heimat category. An example of this situation is Frau L., living in Dresden, Saxony. Frau L.'s father was from the Rhineland and her mother from central Germany. Frau L.'s father got a new job in Stettin, Pomerania, where Frau L. was born in 1937. Frau L. and her mother were evacuated from Stettin in 1943. While culturally she was not a Pomeranian, she was an evacuee and would be perceived as belonging to the Resettlers by GDR residents.⁵⁰

Most Resettlers were interviewed in or near their place of residence, but on a few occasions the interview occurred away from home. This was the case with Frau W. resident of Strassfurt, Saxony-Anhalt who was interviewed in her sister's apartment in East Berlin.⁵¹

While it was the norm for the interviewees to have lived in a temporary site upon arrival in the Soviet Zone, most did find a permanent home afterwards. The only other time that the majority of the interviewees left the area where they settled was during their educational years either at a university or technical training school. After their educational training most interviewees returned to their original areas of settlement in the GDR. Regarding where the 230 Resettlers settled and lived most of their lives during the GDR era, the following was reported: 33.9% or 78:230 lived in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern; 12.2% or 28:230 settled in Saxony-Anhalt; 11.7% or

⁴⁹ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Herr S., born in 1926 in Poland, living in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt.

⁵⁰ Interview on 16/12/2008 with Frau L., born in 1937 in Pomerania, living in Dresden, Saxony.

⁵¹ Interview on 31/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1945 in Sudetenland, living in Strassfurt, Saxony-Anhalt.

27:230 lived in Saxony; 11.7% or 27:230 settled in Thuringia; 7.4% or 17:230 lived in Brandenburg; and 5.7% or 13:230 of the interviewees settled in East Berlin

There was a group of interviewees, 17.4% or 40:230, who had several places of residence in the GDR. An example of this multi-residence group is Herr M. born in 1938 in Pomerania. He arrived in a Resettler camp near Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in December 1945. His family settled nearby in Prerow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. He received his educational training in Greifswald and found employment afterwards on Usedom Island. He later worked in a *Volkseigener Betrieb* (government factory) in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt for several years until he was drafted into the Army. After his discharge he received a further educational qualification and was employed as a scientist in Rostock for almost ten years. After Rostock he was offered a job in the government's Transportation Department in East Berlin where he worked until 1990.⁵²

The following non-exhaustive lists include the names of areas where interviewees lived as of 2008-09:

Brandenburg: larger cities – Cottbus, Oranienburg, Potsdam and Wittenberge; medium-sized towns – Eisenhüttenstadt, Königs-Wusterhausen; and small villages/municipalities – Schönwald.

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern: large cities – Neubrandenburg, Rostock, Schwerin and Stralsund; medium-sized towns – Barth, Burg Stargard and Gustrow; and small villages/municipalities – Friedland, Heiligendamm, Mühl Rosin and Prerow.

⁵² Interview on 10/10/2008 with Herr M., born in 1938 in Pomerania, living in Berlin.

Saxony: larger cities – Chemnitz, Dresden and Leipzig; medium-sized towns – Auerbach, Meissen and Radeberg; small villages/municipalities - Liegau-Augustusbad.

Saxony-Anhalt: larger cities – Bitterfeld (Sandersdorf), Halle and Magdeburg; medium-sized towns – Wernigerode; small villages/municipalities – Egeln, Harkerode.

Thuringia: larger cities – Erfurt, Weimar; medium-sized towns – Altenburg, Greiz, Sondershausen and Suhl; small villages/municipalities – Elxleben.

These 230 Resettler interview partners lived during the SED regime in a variety of geographical locations and in areas that differed from each other in population, culture and tradition (Saxon vs. Brandenburg), economy (industrial vs. agrarian) and lifestyle (urban vs. rural).

Summary

There are many well-written and thought-provoking studies in GDR Resettler secondary literature. The main weakness most of these secondary works have is their concentration on showing Resettler life and integration in the GDR from a top-down perspective. This situation is due to the secondary literature's reliance on archival sources which tend to be government documents written by SED regime officials. These research decisions have resulted in significant gaps in GDR Resettler secondary literature regarding issues of everyday life and Resettler opinions and feelings regarding their integration into the local cultures and societies of the GDR. This work contends that in order to advance GDR Resettler historiography it is

necessary to go to the source of the GDR Resettler experience that rarely has been utilized – the GDR Resettlers themselves.

CHAPTER ONE

ORIGINS and BESSARABIAN GERMANS

A misconception created by utilizing the phrase “12 million ethnic German refugees and expellees” is to potentially view German refugees and expellees as one homogenous group. When one speaks about the integration of these people without taking into account the enormous variety among the Heimat groups, one could falsely think that integration of these people occurred at the same moment and under the same circumstances. It is essential to acknowledge the variety of differences among these several million ethnic German refugees and expellees as individual Heimat group characteristics greatly affected the way, time and level of integration that individual refugees and expellees experienced in the GDR. Each of the various refugee and expellee groups developed their own cultures, dialects, mentalities, social systems, customs, foods and histories over centuries.⁵³ Philipp Ther highlighted these differences when he wrote, “a Bessarabian German might have as much in common with a Sudeten German as a Bavarian farmer with a merchant from Hamburg.”⁵⁴

The reason it is essential to acknowledge and understand the great variety of differences among these several million ethnic German refugees and expellees is due to the significant influence individual Heimat characteristics had on refugee and expellee choices and activities within the

⁵³ Beer, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene: Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945-1956*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), p. 259.

public and hidden transcripts. The varying use of informal sub-structures individually and as a group within the public and hidden transcripts, influenced by Heimat origins, consequently affected the integration of the refugees and expellees in the GDR and FRG.

Another issue when considering the integration of these millions of ethnic Germans is the additional misconception that they are a group of people who suddenly came into existence in 1944-45. Richard Evans opined that “the topic of the expellees is bedevilled by the fact that people take 1944/45 as their starting point...”⁵⁵ The narratives of millions of these people began several years prior to the flight and expulsions of 1944-45. These additional experiences consequently uniquely affected personal and macro-level integration of millions of refugees and expellees into the cultures and societies of the GDR.

An example of these unique experiences came from an interviewee from Volhynia. Frau H. claimed that when her family was transferred during the Nazi regime’s Heim-ins-Reich program to Poland, that she and her family lived in a Nazi resettlers’ camp for four years due to their family receiving an appropriated Polish mill which did not have living quarters on the premises. Four years of living in temporary accommodation, accompanied by random Polish partisan attacks, weather, hygiene and other problems took a psychological and physical toll on these people. Frau H. recounted how later she and her family were captured and interned by Polish partisans while her father was taken by Soviet troops and sent to a work camp in the Soviet Union. Frau H., her mother and siblings were kept in Poland until 1949 when they were sent to Saxony to join her father who had been released by Soviet authorities.⁵⁶ Frau H.’s narrative as

⁵⁵ Richard Evans, private email exchange with author, 06/02/2004.

⁵⁶ Interview on 27/10/2008 with Frau H., born in 1927 in Volhynia, living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg.

an expellee did not begin in 1944-45 and these additional unique experiences affected her integration into GDR society differently when compared to other interviewees who had not lived through these events.

Background to Expulsions

For centuries Central and Eastern Europe experienced multiple migrations of various ethnic groups. These migrations created in those previously inhabiting the area siege mentalities,⁵⁷ and later migrations of Bulgars, Avars and others only intensified the situation. Due to this heightened mix of paranoia and competition a continuously unstable territorial administration occurred in Central and Eastern Europe. This fluidity of borders among ethnic groups led to constant land grabs and population movements. Scholars proffer the ethnic German *Ostsiedling* and *Drang nach Osten* as being prime examples.⁵⁸

The Allies decided at the close of World War I to end the practice of empire in continental Europe. They set about to create nation-states by applying the principle of national self-determination.⁵⁹ The result of this experiment was to create various blocs who supported and were against the Versailles Treaty. The pro-bloc consisted of newly “liberated” peoples such as the Czechs, Lithuanians, Serbs and Poles who were happy to have their own independent states. The anti-group consisted of the elites who had lost their economic and social power in these areas, namely Hungarians, ethnic Germans throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and their kin-states Germany, Austria and Hungary. German and Hungarian resentment against the Versailles

⁵⁷ Raymond Pearson, *National Minorities in Eastern Europe, 1848-1945*, (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1983), p. 15.

⁵⁸ Franztioch, p. 21.

⁵⁹ Ther, in Ther and Siljak, (eds.), p. 49.

Treaty grew when the newly liberated peoples began to subject the former elites and other ethnic groups to nationalization programs (e.g.: Czechization) and other abusive treatment.⁶⁰ The former elites clamored for redress in the League of Nations, but to their consternation the solutions and help they sought did not materialize. It is in this environment that Hitler's racist wars began and why so many of the former elites, Slovenes and Hungarians, and disadvantaged minorities, Ukrainians and Croats, were willing to cooperate with the Nazis in order to redress perceived wrongs and abuse.⁶¹

Over 50 million people died worldwide during WWII. In addition to this horrendous loss of life, approximately 30 million people including Poles, Ukrainians, Chechens and other ethnic groups were deported, expelled or displaced from their original homelands.⁶² Ethnic Germans made up were the largest portion of these post-war population transfers.

The following list shows some of the refugee and expellee groups, their origins and their destinations after World War II:

Ethnic Germans sent to "Occupied Germany":

3,250,000 from Silesia
2,900,000 from Sudetenland
1,950,000 from East Prussia
1,950,000 from Pomerania
1,100,000 from Posen
250,000 from Yugoslavia

⁶⁰ Pearson, p. 143.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 217.

⁶² Ther, in Ther and Siljak, (eds.), p. 43.

200,000 from Hungary
50,000 from Romania

Ethnic Poles:

3,000,000 'Central Poland' Poles to E. Prussia/Pomerania/Silesia.
2,100,000 Poles from former Poland/interned in USSR, to Silesia/E. Prussia.
266,000 Poles originally sent to Siberia (1939), sent back to Poland (1946).

Ethnic Ukrainians:

482,000 Polish Ukrainians to Ukrainian SSR.

Ethnic Belorussians:

33,000 Belorussians deported to USSR from '1946' Poland.

⁶³

Summaries of Heimat Group Origins

The following chapters are summaries of the backgrounds and histories of three Heimat origin groups. These three groups were chosen as they show clearly how specific and unique characteristics of each Heimat group could and did affect the integration of Resettlers into GDR society.

BESSARABIAN GERMANS

⁶³ Ibid., p. 1.

The area known as Bessarabia consists largely of fertile steppes located in today's Moldova, Romania and Ukraine, bordering the Black Sea. The Russo-Turkish wars fought towards the end of the 18th century decimated the region's former population.⁶⁴ Tsar Alexander I sought to re-establish farming on Bessarabia's rich soil by recruiting ethnic German farmers from Württemberg, Baden, Prussia and the Duchy of Warsaw.⁶⁵ Herr S. an interviewee from Bessarabia reported that his ancestors arrived in the region in 1813 and that Tsar Alexander I recruited German farmers to show the local nobility that more could be produced and accomplished by free farmers than serfs.⁶⁶ The Tsar gave several concessions to German immigrants including tax exemption for ten years, exemption from military service, autonomy and freedom of religion. Between 1814 and 1842 approximately 9,000 German settlers arrived in the area.⁶⁷ The ethnic German settlers of Bessarabia were known as industrious and religious farmers with an almost complete literacy rate.⁶⁸

The situation began to change towards the end of the 19th century for the Bessarabian Germans. Tsar Alexander III enacted several "Russification" policies which attempted to assimilate Catholics, Jews, ethnic Germans and other minorities by mandating learning the Russian language, giving preeminence to the Russian Orthodox Church and by attempting to destroy

⁶⁴ Hannes Hofbauer and Viorel Roman, *Bukowina: Vergessenes Land; Bessarabien: Zwischen Westeuropa, Russland; Moldawien und der Türkei*, (Wien: Promedia Verlag, 1997), p. 55-56.

⁶⁵ <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=56#bessarabien> (accessed: 25/08/2014)

⁶⁶ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶⁷ <http://www.bessarabien.de/geschichte/auswanderung.htm> (accessed: 10/09/2014)

⁶⁸ Ute Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien: eine Minderheit Südosteuropa (1814 bis heute)*, (Köln: Böhlau Verlag GmbH, 2004), p. 72.

ethnic institutions.⁶⁹ This is one of the first of several efforts by governmental forces to control and change Bessarabian German society and culture. It is at this time that Bessarabian Germans began to hone personal and group organizational and resistance skills, most often related to their historic pasts as religious refugees and their ethnic minority status in Bessarabia.⁷⁰ These skills would later be utilized by the Bessarabian Germans in their interactions with Bessarabia's post-WWI Romanian government.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the chaos that followed, Bessarabia was annexed by the Romanians.⁷¹ The relationship between Bessarabian Germans and the nationalist Romanian authorities worsened throughout this period. Ethnic Germans and other minorities in Bessarabia were the targets of several government programs whose aim was assimilation of these various groups. These "Romanization" policies included several actions, one of which was changing the language of instruction in Bessarabian schools to Romanian.⁷² This policy was confirmed by Herr S. who as an ethnic German child was required to attend school where the language of instruction had been changed from German to Romanian. Herr S. was still able at 88-years old to sing the Romanian national anthem during our interview together.⁷³ While Bessarabian Germans followed Romanian directives within the public transcript, significant changes coalesced in the hidden transcript.

⁶⁹ Hofbauer and Roman, p. 70-75.

⁷⁰ Michael Schwartz, *Vertriebene und "Umsiedlerpolitik": Integrationskonflikte in den deutschen Nachkriegs-Gesellschaften und die Assimilationsstrategien in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1961*, (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2004), p. 619. "Bis zum Ende der DDR existierten in Mecklenburg Dörfer, in denen Volksdeutsche Vertriebene, etwa aus Bessarabien, eine gruppenbezogene Autonomie zu konservieren vermochten. Die in Jahrhunderten erlernte Tradition, das dörfliche Gruppenleben zu bewahren und zugleich dem jeweiligen fernen Staat zu geben, was des Staates war, hatte sich offenbar auch unter dem DDR-Regime bewährt."

⁷¹ Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, p. 59.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

The tension between ethnic Germans and the Romanian government grew to the point that Bessarabian Germans lost all hope of working with the new Romanian administration. It is in this situation, familiar due to their experiences with the Russians, that Bessarabian Germans turned even more inward and sought aid and solutions from among themselves.⁷⁴ One result of this process was that the Bessarabian Germans were able to deepen and intensify their previous resistance skill sets acquired over decades of interactions with the Russian government. These refined and substantial resistance and organizational skills were brought with the Bessarabian Germans to the Soviet Zone and were used in the public and hidden transcripts in the GDR.

After intense frustration with the Romanian nationalist government, the Bessarabian Germans eventually looked to Nazi Germany for aid.⁷⁵ The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a secret agreement signed between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in August 1939. This pact was a non-aggression treaty between the two powers and provided for the division and annexation of Poland. This agreement additionally provided for the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans from the Baltic States, Volhynia, Galicia, Bessarabia and other areas.⁷⁶ The Soviets seized these territories and the ramifications of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact took immediate effect in the lives of ethnic Germans from these regions.

Heim-ins-Reich Evacuations

⁷⁴ Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, p. 61.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Reichling, *Die deutschen Vertriebenen in Zahlen: Teil 1 – Umsiedler, Verschleppte, Vertriebene, Aussiedler 1940-1985*, (Bonn: Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen, 1986), p. 21-22.

Over 125 years the Bessarabian Germans had created and organized 150 communities. The pact arranged for the removal of approximately 93,000 ethnic Germans from Bessarabia with only 1,000 remaining after the Soviet annexation.⁷⁷ The majority chose to return to “Greater Germany” via wagons, trucks and ships to *Umsiedlerlager* (resettler camps) in Saxony, Bavaria and Austria.⁷⁸

Almost all the Bessarabian Germans interviewed for this project experienced the evacuations from Bessarabia in what Nazi authorities called the *Heim-ins-Reich* program. The aim of this program was to resettle almost one million ethnic Germans who had been evacuated from lands annexed by the Soviet Union to Poland and other areas,⁷⁹ but not all evacuees were aware of the details of the program or their final destination. Herr N.’s family owned a vineyard in Bessarabia and were winemakers. They had been specifically told that would be resettled in Alsace and given a vineyard there to own and work. After spending a year in a Nazi resettler camp in Bavaria Herr N.’s family was resettled in Poland.⁸⁰

The confusion and stress related to not knowing the exact details of what was happening to one’s family was difficult enough, but Bessarabian Germans’ lives became further chaotic when after the evacuations they experienced Nazi regime resettler camps. Several interviewees reported that their families lived interminably in these camps, sometimes for up to two years⁸¹ and were

⁷⁷ Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy 1939-1945*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), p.254.

⁷⁸ Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, p. 165-166.

⁷⁹ Koehl, p. 95-100.

⁸⁰ Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thüringen.

⁸¹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

delighted to leave.⁸² These experiences mirror what many of these Resettlers would go through once they arrived in the post-war Soviet Zone.

These “resettlers” as they were known in the Nazi regime were then to claim and work farms appropriated from Polish families. Given their pious religious background many Bessarabian Germans were mortified when they realized that the farms had been stolen from Polish families.⁸³ Some interviewees noticed that the beds in their new homes were still warm from the previous Polish owners.⁸⁴ It is important to recognize that hundreds of thousands of GDR Resettlers were known as Umsiedler or resettlers prior to their flight and expulsion experiences,⁸⁵ as these additional unique experiences would later affect their integration into GDR society.

Frau L. was born in Kreis Ackermann in Bessarabia in 1928. She reported her experiences during the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations and aftermath in the following manner:

...in 1940 wir hatten...in Eigenfeld gewohnt und von daraus sind wir dann hierausgemacht...der hat Hitler uns alle Heim-ins-Reich geholt...die Männer und die grossen Burschen die sind mit den Pferdewagen gefahren. Sie haben die ganze Gepäck auf die Pferdewagen geladen und dann sind bis...der Donau, der Hafen gefahren...und wir die Frauen und die Kinder sind mit den LKW's gefahren, bis Galatz ist der Hafen. ...Wir sind auf Schiffe verladen worden und sind auf der Donau gefahren, bis Serbien....Da sind wir alle raus, in den Büsse und dann wurden wir in eine grosses Lager gefahren....Das

⁸² Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁸³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁸⁴ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

⁸⁵ Beer, p. 41-45.

war so eine riesen Zeltstadt...Gab's einen riesen, grossen Zelt.... Da könnte man essen was man wollte....Nach drei Tage sind wir...mit den Zug gefahren nach Graz...und sind wir weiter gefahren, welche wurde hier ausgeladen, und anderen hier ausgeladen. Wir waren in den Sudetengau...am 22. November sind wir angekommen in den Lager und da waren wir für ein ganzes Jahr. Und da aus sind wir weiter gemacht. Wir sind nach Polen gemacht, in der Nähe von Litzmannstadt...Gab's eine Baracken im Wald, und da hatten wir für drei Wochen gewohnt....und daraus sind wir verteilt auf unsere Landwirtschaft....das war 17 km von Posen weg. Und da waren wir zwei Jahre...weil das so ein schlechten Boden war, wir wurden wieder umgesiedelt zu einem Dorf 6 km von Posen weg, und da haben wir gewohnt bis Februar 1945 und wir weg müssten.....da kam einer von den SA "in zwei Stunden....wir müssen weg".⁸⁶

Frau L.'s testimony is meaningful and pertinent to the question of Resettler integration in the GDR due to its illustrating how the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations were one in a stream of chaotically-linked events for many Bessarabian Germans. Her life in camp after the camp, on farm after farm was a childhood that was interminable and traumatizing. These psychologically damaging experiences later affected many Bessarabian Germans' to even attempt to integrate into GDR society, especially during their early years in the SBZ.

Another aspect that made the Heim-ins-Reich experiences of the Bessarabian Germans even more difficult was that their fathers, brothers and sons were often drafted into the German military. Herr W.'s father was drafted and died in 1944 in Italy leaving his mother to work the

⁸⁶ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau L., born in 1928 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

Heim-ins-Reich farm they controlled and care for her four children by herself.⁸⁷ These aspects of the Heim-ins-Reich program added to the upheaval and feeling of perpetual impermanence that many Resettlers endured. These events later played a role in interviewees' abilities and willingness to use informal sub-structures in the public and hidden transcripts of the GDR. This reality consequently affected Bessarabian German integration into GDR society on a personal and group level.

Flight and Expulsions

As the Soviet Army advanced in 1944-45 most Bessarabian Germans fled and joined the refugee wagon trains of the flight. It is estimated that from the original 93,000 who left Bessarabia approximately 10% perished due to the war, the flight and expulsions.⁸⁸ In the post-WWII period approximately 20,000 of the Bessarabian survivors settled in Württemberg. An additional 26,000 Bessarabian Germans settled in American Zone; 24,000 in the British Zone; and 13,000 in the Soviet Zone.⁸⁹

As the details of flight and expulsion experiences can be found in a number of secondary works, experiences that interviewees endured and that consequently affected their integration into GDR society will be shared and analyzed. Frau V.'s family fled the Soviet Army from their Heim-ins-Reich settlement along the Baltic Sea and arrived in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg in May 1945. During a horrific interaction with Soviet troops Frau V. lived through the trauma of having her

⁸⁷ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁸⁸ <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=56#bessarabien> (accessed: 25/08/2014)

⁸⁹ <http://www.bessarabien.de/geschichte/neubeginn.htm> (accessed: 03/09/2014)

sister abducted and sent to Siberia as a laborer.⁹⁰ Herr W. experienced the intense cold and fear of the flight as an 11-year old boy. Herr W.'s father had been killed in the war and thus his mother was forced to flee in a horse-drawn wagon by herself. They eventually arrived in Mecklenburg,⁹¹ but the traumas of these experiences lived on within the psyches of these and other interviewees. The continued presence of these traumas in the memories of Bessarabian Germans impeded their integration for several years into the local cultures of the Soviet Zone.

An interesting advantage to being a Bessarabian German was the ability to speak other languages including Russian.⁹² This ability often preserved the lives of Bessarabian German POWs as they were often treated better by Soviet troops and received special privileges when compared to other prisoners. Frau S. commented that her father as a POW in Novosibirsk had an advantage in that he could speak Russian and was made a translator within the prison system. This allowed Frau S.'s father to gain special privileges and helped him survive to see his family again.⁹³ The mere fact that a Bessarabian German POW could survive when others died meant a great deal to that particular family's integration into GDR society through added income and security, as well as greater interactions with locals their father knew.

These experiences involving the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations and the flight and expulsions in 1944-45 confirm what was repeated by the majority of Resettlers - fatigue, upheaval, confusion and bewilderment for those who endured these events. This chaos, confusion and fatigue

⁹⁰ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁹¹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁹² Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, p. 532.

⁹³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

affected several interviewees' desires to later utilize sub-structures in the public and hidden transcripts of the GDR. After experiencing these crises some Resettlers were so tired and disillusioned that they had no desire to integrate into GDR society;⁹⁴ others were so tired and disillusioned that they had no resolve to fight the assimilative pressures and policies of the SED regime.⁹⁵ These choices based on the traumas experienced consequently quickened, slowed or stopped an individual Bessarabian Resettler's integration into the cultures of the GDR, and thus affected their integration as a group.

ARRIVAL and SETTLEMENT

After the horrors of the flight, expulsions and other displacement experiences the suffering of the Bessarabian German Resettlers did not cease after their arrival in the Soviet Zone. This sub-chapter will discuss Bessarabian German arrival and settlement in the SBZ and their often negative reception by locals. Resettler involvement with Soviet and SED officials and government programs will be investigated as well as interviewees' feelings regarding these programs. How aware were they of the governmental department, *Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler*, which was specifically created to care for and help the Resettlers? Did government actions such as the *Umsiedlerwoche* of 1948, the *Gesetz zur weitem Verbesserung der Lage der ehemaligen Umsiedler* of 1950 or the *Bodenreform* affect Bessarabian Germans' lives and consequently their integration into GDR society?

⁹⁴ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich camp in Saxony, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. This was more the case with Frau K.'s parents.

⁹⁵ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

Soviet and SED authorities' preparation

The Bessarabian Germans found themselves among the millions of Resettlers interacting with Soviet and SED administrations completely unprepared for their arrival. This lack of readiness and chaos regarding what to do with the Bessarabian Germans and the remaining millions of Resettlers is recorded in the following report by the provincial government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern:

- 1) über die Bevölkerung in der Gegenwart sind nur wenige und mangelhafte Zahlen vorhanden. Den Plan ist deshalb die amtlichen Zahlen aus dem Jahre 1939 zugrunde gelegt.
- 2) Mecklenburg-Vorpommern hatte 1939 auf 24.641,53 qkm 1.479.037 Einwohner...
- 3) Es sind in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern bereits viele Flüchtlinge vorhanden. Ihre Zahl, die amtlich nicht feststeht, wird auf 500.000 geschätzt....
- 4) Wo sind die 3 Millionen Flüchtlinge unterzubringen? Im Augenblick ist nicht entscheidend dafür die Frage: Wo werden wir die Menschen ansiedeln? Es ist auch nicht entscheidend die Frage: Wo wird die Möglichkeit bestehen, den Menschen in Industrie und Handwerk Arbeit zu schaffen? Das erfordert eine eingehendeDas bedeutet, daß die Menschen zunächst auf die großen Güter, in die Dörfer und die Landstädte zu bringen sind, und daß die wenigen großen Städte...
- 5) ...In die großen Städte ist nur wenig gelegt worden, weil dort die Ernährung Schwierigkeiten macht. Für die Stadt Neubrandenburg ist überhaupt keine Belegung vorgesehen, weil die Stadt sehr stark zerstört ist. Für Wismar, Rostock und Stralsund

sind aus dem gleichen Gründe nur verhältnismäßig geringe Flüchtlingszahlen errechnet.⁹⁶

Thousands of Bessarabian Germans were eventually settled in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and part of this massive influx of new arrivals. The Resettlers had huge impacts on the Soviet Zone as the area's population increased by 17.8% from its 1939 census level.⁹⁷ Despite a devastating war with great loss of life, the Soviet Zone actually experienced a post-war population increase due to the arrival of the Resettlers.

In order to care for and organize the settlement of Bessarabian Germans and other Resettlers, Soviet authorities created the Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler (Central Administration for German Resettlers) in September 1945.⁹⁸ The ZVU functioned at both regional and local levels with several offices being assigned to care for and integrate the Resettlers. Rudolf Engel, head of the ZVU, shared his feelings about the purposes and work of the ZVU:

Das Umsiedler-Problem ist in ein neues Stadium getreten. Im Verlaufe des Jahres 1945 war der Zustrom der Umsiedler aus dem Osten und aus dem Süden regellos und unorganisiert. Die Betreuung dieser unregelmässig und stossweise ankommenden Massen, die unter schlechten Bedingungen bei uns eintrafen, war nicht einfach. Die ‚Volkssolidarität‘ im Lande Sachsen, die ‚Thüringer Aktion‘ und die Hilfsaktionen der Provinzen Sachsen, Mecklenburg und Brandenburg beweisen, dass die Mehrheit unseres

⁹⁶ MLHA. Rat des Kreises Stralsund, Nr. 189, Bl. 9-11, as recorded in Manfred Wille (ed.), *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, p. 99-100.

⁹⁷ Manfred Wille, "German Refugees and the New States: Compelling the Assimilation of Expellees in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and the GDR", in Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, (eds.), p. 265.

⁹⁸ Peter-Heinz Seraphim, "Die Heimatvertriebenen in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone", (Bonn, Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen, 1955), p. 8.

Volkes begriff(en) hat, dass die Umsiedler nicht mehr Schuld an ihrem Unglück sind als alle anderen und dass sie als Opfer faschistischer Raubpolitik die schwerste Bürde zu tragen haben. Diese Menschen, dies alles verloren haben, Heimat, Haus und Hof, die öfter in einer erbarmungswürdigen Zustände zu uns kommen, bedürfen als erste unserer Hilfe. Sie jetzt in Arbeit und Wohnung zu bringen, ihnen wieder Mut zum Leben geben, eine neue Heimat zu schaffen, ihnen einen Platz beim Aufbau des neuen demokratischen Deutschland einzuräumen, das ist unsere Hauptaufgabe.⁹⁹

One of the first ways in which ZVU and Soviet authorities tried to integrate the refugees and expellees was by creating the term “Umsiedler” or resettler. This was to help signal to Resettlers and locals that they did not have to continue wandering; the SBZ was to be their new home.¹⁰⁰

It is significant to the Bessarabian German narrative that much of their early years in the Soviet Zone were similar to their experiences during the Nazi’s Heim-ins-Reich program – being referred to as resettlers; living in resettler camps; being assigned land parcels that had been confiscated by the dictatorship in charge at the time. For many of the Bessarabian Germans their arrival in the Soviet Zone was a repetition of experiences they had only four years earlier. Their fatigue and weariness after experiencing the Nazis regime’s program intensified due to the chaos they lived through after their arrival in the SBZ. These negative situations and perceptions consequently affected their desires to integrate into local societies.

⁹⁹ Barch, DO/2 101, ZVU, ‘Ein Jahr Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler’, Bl. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Philipp Ther, “Expellee Policy in the Soviet Occupied Zone and the GDR: 1945-1953”, in David Rock and Stefan Wolff (eds.), *Coming Home to Germany? Integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic*, (New York: Bergbahn Books, 2002), p.60.

The ZVU along with SED authorities built a series of Resettler camps for the ethnic German refugees and expellees. Frau S. and her family arrived in a Resettler camp near Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern after fleeing their Heim-ins-Reich allotment in Poland.¹⁰¹ Frau S. and other Bessarabian Germans described the Resettler camps as horrible places. When asked what she did during her time there Frau S. answered “gehungert” due to the two small potatoes each Resettler received each day. Frau S. told how due to the awful circumstances in the Resettler camp she witnessed 50 Resettlers die on a daily basis.¹⁰² Once again, trauma after trauma. What would be the effects of the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, war years in Poland and then the flight on Frau S.? What would have been the added shock and psychological trauma to a 13-year old girl witnessing hundreds of her fellow Resettlers dying during her stay in a SED Resettler camp? These experiences would remain with Frau S. and other Resettlers for the rest of their lives and affected their enthusiasm and desire to integrate into GDR society and accept the socialist Heimat the SED offered.

Some of the Resettlers found work in the camps with Resettler employment reaching 30% in camps in Saxony.¹⁰³ The greatest help in the camps at the outset were the religious charitable organizations. The churches served as the backbone of welfare services in the Resettler camps when it seemed the ZVU lacked the organizational capability to supply and run the camps. Soviet and SED authorities quickly moved to limit and eventually rescinded permission given to the churches to perform charitable work in the camps. The government went as far as forbidding

¹⁰¹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Donth, p. 325.

churches from performing religious services in several Resettler camps.¹⁰⁴ As with other government directives, this ban was not enforced uniformly.

SMAD and the SED proffered as its secular alternative to the charity of the churches, the Volkssolidarität. This governmental welfare organization was instrumental in prying the Resettlers away from dependence and loyalty to the churches via Caritas and other religious welfare societies. Due to epidemics across the SBZ SMAD officials issued orders in 1946 that all Resettler and POWs without exception were to be taken to ZVU camps and there quarantined for a minimum of two weeks.¹⁰⁵ This created a crisis situation for the ZVU and Volkssolidarität as the number of camps doubled to more than 600 by the end of 1946.¹⁰⁶

The Resettler camps were not created just to care for Bessarabian Germans and other refugees and expellees. They also served as a political instrument to try to win and indoctrinate the hearts of the Resettlers.¹⁰⁷ In the early days of the camps other political parties were allowed to organize camp activities and speeches. The SED quickly changed the balance of power in their favor by monopolizing all aspects of camp free time through the Volkssolidarität, FDJ (Free German Youth) and other SED organizations.¹⁰⁸ Several activities were organized in the camps, including political speeches and meetings all with the focus of encouraging Resettler participation in SED plans for Germany's socialist future.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 326.

¹⁰⁵ Barch, DO 2/107, Bl. 21.

¹⁰⁶ Barch, DO/2 101 Bl. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Rainer Schulze, "The Struggle of Past and Present in Individual Identities: the Case of German Refugees and Expellees from the East", in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 39.

¹⁰⁸ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato p. 43-45.

Surviving the Resettler camps did not mean that life automatically got better for the Bessarabian Germans. There were many more obstacles they would face. One of the first hardships for Resettlers was the extreme lack of housing in the Soviet Zone. After the traumas of the flight, expulsions and SED quarantine camps, hundreds of thousands of Resettlers were housed in barns, one-room dwellings and stables. These dreary accommodations were considered by Soviet and SED authorities to constitute, for propaganda purposes, viable housing options for the newly arrived Resettlers.¹⁰⁹ This traumatic housing situation was confirmed by Frau S. who claimed that after she and her family left the horrid situation in the Resettler camp, including hunger and death, that she, her mother and siblings lived in a cow stall for one year. After one year they moved into a chicken coop and lived there for an additional two years until her father returned as a German POW from the Soviet Union.¹¹⁰ The traumas and hardships of being housed in a cow stall and chicken coop increased the psychological damage Frau S. and other Bessarabian Germans had already experienced. These wretched housing options that many Bessarabian Germans lived in are important when analyzing and understanding Resettler integration into GDR society as Meinicke claimed that the lack of suitable housing in the Soviet Zone made Resettler integration even more difficult.¹¹¹

Before blaming SED authorities completely it should be taken into account that they were often trying to do the best with the resources they had available. Soviet and SED documents show the desperate situation in the SBZ with millions arriving needing homes, food and other aid. In

¹⁰⁹ Wille, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 273.

¹¹⁰ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹¹¹ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 53.

November 1949, SED authorities registered 4,347,377 expellees in the Soviet Zone. Figures from April 1949 show their distribution among the five provinces:

Expellees Arriving in the SBZ:

Year	Total	Eastern Provinces	Czech	Prussia	Hungary
1946	1,083,609	405,401	631,911		
1947	671,185	554,447	31	30,268	14,721
1948	164,971	39,164	3,784	69,162	34,577
Total	1,920,455	999,012	635,726	99,430	49,298

Expellees as % of SBZ Population as of 19 April 1949

State	Total Pop.	Expellees	Expellees as %
Brandenburg	2,646,991	655,466	24.8
Meck-Vorpommern	2,126,790	922,088	43.3
Saxony	5,798,990	997,798	17.2
Saxony-Anhalt	4,303,441	1,051,024	24.4
Thuringia	2,988,288	685,913	23.0
SBZ	17,864,500	4,312,289	24.2

¹¹²

From Central Administration for German Resettlers (ZVU) records one can see that by 1949 approximately 24% of the entire population of the Soviet Zone consisted of Resettlers with 13,000 of those being Bessarabian Germans.¹¹³

Another SED action that negatively affected Resettlers' immediate integration into the local cultures of the Soviet Zone was its policy of governmental housing inspections. Frau V. claimed that locals were forced to take her family into their home.¹¹⁴ SED officials searched homes

¹¹² BarchB, DO I, Mdl, 10, ZVU, no 49, Bl. 146, as recorded in Wille, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 265.

¹¹³ <http://www.bessarabien.de/geschichte/neubeginn.htm> (accessed: 03/09/2014)

¹¹⁴ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

throughout the Soviet Zone in order to ascertain which were not filled to capacity. Locals whose homes were deemed as not being fully utilized were then assigned to take in Resettlers and house them. This policy created a great deal of anger and resentment on the part of locals towards the new arrivals and prevented Resettler acceptance in local communities. As with other SMAD and SED mandates this policy of housing inspections was not uniformly or vigorously enforced. Some local officials hoped that the slower they conducted the housing inspections the less likely Resettlers would be assigned to live in their communities.¹¹⁵

Bessarabian Germans were already traumatized and physically ailing from the flight, the expulsions and life in the Resettler camps. Their experiences and opinions of SBZ locals degenerated due to the housing inspections and many locals felt like the Bessarabian Germans were competitors for scarce resources. This situation was confirmed by Herr G. who claimed that locals in Saxony-Anhalt where his family settled had been warned that the coming refugees were Roma and not to be trusted. This resulted in a negative and caustic reception by locals of Resettlers in the area.¹¹⁶ Additionally, the Resettlers' lack of material possessions and subsequent begging from locals created the perception that they were invaders after the little food that locals had after the war.¹¹⁷

Bodenreform

¹¹⁵ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 63.

¹¹⁶ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹¹⁷ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

One of the great attempts at integrating the Resettlers was the SED's policy of Bodenreform or land reform. The Soviets began in the late 1940s to divide aristocratic estates throughout the Soviet Zone. By 1947 millions of hectares had been redistributed to the *Neubauer* or New Farmers,¹¹⁸ a great number of which were Resettlers.¹¹⁹ The prospect of a land parcel convinced many Bessarabian Germans to stay in the Soviet Zone or to move there.

Herr S. was drafted into the German army while living on his family's Heim-ins-Reich allotment in Poland. He was badly injured in the Battle of the Oder in February 1945. Due to his injuries he had been sent to a recuperation hospital in Bavaria. His mother and family fled from the Soviet Army and settled in Mecklenburg. Herr S.'s mother wrote excitedly about a new program in the Soviet Zone where authorities were giving land to anyone who wanted to claim an allotment. She encouraged him to come to the Soviet Zone as she, her brother and he could all claim separate Bodenreform parcels where they had been assigned to live near Wismar, Mecklenburg. Herr S. moved to Mecklenburg soon thereafter.¹²⁰

Even for financially destitute single mothers the prospect of free land was reason enough to remain in the Soviet Zone rather than go further west. Herr W.'s mother, whose husband had died in Italy as a soldier, claimed her own Bodenreform allotment in Mecklenburg. Herr W. reported that many Bessarabian German families had been assigned to settle in this area and that the Bessarabian Germans all helped each other. Herr W. reported that with this mutual help the lives of Bessarabian New Farmers "war gut, relativ schnell gut" on their new Bodenreform

¹¹⁸ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 175.

¹¹⁹ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 60.

¹²⁰ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

allotments.¹²¹ It is important to note that these Bodenreform experiences were often similar to those experienced four years earlier during the Nazi regime's Heim-ins-Reich program. Once again, the Bessarabian Germans were resettlers claiming farms and land parcels which had been confiscated by the government. When the results of the Bodenreform turned disastrous, just as they had in Poland under the Nazis' program, the interviewees' desire to attempt to integrate into GDR society was negatively affected.

The New Farmer program allowed the Bessarabian Germans to claim the goods, machinery and animals abandoned by the previous owners. The quality of land and resources received depended greatly on the time of arrival – those who arrived first received the best.¹²² The Bodenreform is important in the social and economic integration of the Resettlers because 43.3% of all allotments were assigned to Resettlers. Resettlers only comprised 24.2% of the total SBZ population.¹²³ This meant that the Resettlers received almost double the amount of lots per capita when compared to local SBZ residents.

Another policy of the Bodenreform movement involved the implosion of castles and aristocratic houses. SMAD authorities would use explosives to bring down large aristocratic residences in a desire to destroy Germany's aristocratic past, but also to provide building materials for the New Farmers. Herr S. confirmed this practice when he reported that the bricks and stones he used to build his own house in Mecklenburg came directly from the demolition of a local castle.¹²⁴ Having a permanent home after years of impermanence was one of the first steps towards

¹²¹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹²² Seraphim (1955), p. 16.

¹²³ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 175.

¹²⁴ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Bessarabian Germans and other Resettlers being able to attempt to integrate into local society, albeit several years later.

Castles and aristocratic houses were not only used as housing and building material, but also the goods in them helped alleviate the suffering of the Resettlers. Alleviating Bessarabian German suffering was the next step in the SED's plans to integrate the Resettlers. Frau A. born in Bessarabia and living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt reported how after the owner of the local aristocratic manor fled to West Germany, the gardener of the estate was assigned to divide the building's furniture, cookware and other items among the Resettlers and locals in Harkerode. Frau A. had a large mirror given to her from the manor house and it hangs in her house to this day.¹²⁵ Meinicke claimed that policies during this era were significant in the lives of Resettlers since it bound them even closer to the SED and created a dependence on government programs.¹²⁶ Bessarabian German participation in these programs brought about a level of personal and group integration regarding the public transcript in the GDR in that they were willing to follow SED policies such as publicly remain silent about their pasts.

The lack of agricultural training of many New Farmers affected Bodenreform results in that not all potential participants felt prepared to take control of a land parcel. This was the case reported by several interviewees. These people instead often worked as hired help on parcels controlled by the New Farmers.¹²⁷ This was a return in some cases to the aristocratic patterns of labor and land ownership¹²⁸ and for some Resettlers these employment relationships with local employers

¹²⁵ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau A., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹²⁶ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 57.

¹²⁷ Seraphim (1955), p. 18.

¹²⁸ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 64.

were fraught with harsh feelings. Frau K. reported that authorities had confiscated an aristocratic landholding near her village in Mecklenburg and turned it into a VEG (Volks-Eigene-Gut). This property, officially owned by the people of the GDR, had a local official assigned as its new manager. This official lived in the property's castle by himself all the while using Frau K.'s father and other Resettlers as mere laborers.¹²⁹ This taking advantage of some Bessarabian German Resettlers intensified their feelings of mistrust regarding locals and the SED regime. These negative experiences impeded several Bessarabian Germans' integration for several years into local SBZ cultures and societies.

The realities of working a Bodenreform parcel and the immediate results were truly dismal. Many problems existed that made the situation intolerable for many of the New Farmers, particularly for Resettlers. Local authorities were often charged with the division of Bodenreform land and the distribution of New Farmer parcels. Local officials grossly discriminated against the Resettlers in the quality of land allotments as they had done in employment opportunities.¹³⁰ Resettlers were often underrepresented on local councils¹³¹ thereby giving locals the power to make discriminatory practices into official policies of the local government. Discrimination and other perceived injustices convinced many Bessarabian Germans that locals saw them as foreigners and would never accept the Resettlers as part of their communities. This perception affected Bessarabian Germans willingness to attempt to integrate into GDR society for many years.

¹²⁹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich camp in Saxony, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹³⁰ Arnd Bauerkämper, "Social Conflict and Social Transformation in the Integration of Expellees in Rural Brandenburg, 1945-1952", in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 288.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 290.

Local discrimination was not the only problem facing the Bessarabian New Farmers. Machinery and animal labor shortages were so chronic that 75% of all New Farmers had to work their parcels without the aid of horses.¹³² This deplorable situation, combined with a lack of governmental planning, supplies and equality created hostile feelings between the Resettlers and the SED regime. These feelings and intolerable conditions resulted in many Bessarabian German Resettlers viewing the SED as a government that was not working for their benefit. This perception translated into most Bessarabian German Resettlers turning inward, just as they had done with Russian and Romanian authorities, to find solutions to their problems. This turning inward only intensified Bessarabian German feelings of isolation and prevented their immediate integration after arriving in the Soviet Zone.

These feelings of disappointment and mistrust led to a mass exodus from the Bodenreform program by New Farmers. Herr W. reported that after three years of trying to work their family Bodenreform parcel by herself that his mother surrendered it to the government. The horrible conditions in which she had to work, combined with the stress of being a single mother of four young children was too much for Herr W.'s mother and she decided she wanted nothing more to do with the Bodenreform program.¹³³

This situation was confirmed by another Bessarabian German in Mecklenburg. Frau S. claimed that her family received a Bodenreform land parcel due to its being abandoned by the previous

¹³² Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 64-65.

¹³³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

owners.¹³⁴ SED documents show that in Brandenburg alone there were 906 families who gave up their parcels during 1945-46 and then an additional 2,038 families gave up their parcels in 1947.¹³⁵ Many New Farmers left their parcels due to a lack of farming implements, machinery and money to keep the farm plots going. What is of great interest are the huge numbers of New Farmers who turned their parcels back to the government due to “old age” related illness and husbands still being held as POWs. This information confirmed the reality that many of the New Farmers who returned their parcels were women and older people who simply could not fill the high government quotas.¹³⁶ Difficulty in fulfilling officials’ demands and the disastrous conditions of the Bodenreform program created greater animosity between the Resettlers and the SED government. This situation only intensified the isolationist tendencies and resistance skills Bessarabian Germans had brought with them to the Soviet Zone.

Housing continued to be the bane of Resettler existence and many still lived in barns, one-room dwellings and stables. A full two years after the end of the war only 63,000 of the 210,000 New Farmers lived in housing of their own.¹³⁷ Soviet authorities decided to act and ordered in September 1947 that 37,000 new homes be built for the New Farmers. Ther points out that this was a monumental effort, especially with respect to what West Germany did during this time regarding housing for refugees and expellees, as this meant that almost all building resources in the Soviet Zone were going toward New Farmer housing construction.¹³⁸ Frau S. reported that

¹³⁴ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹³⁵ BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 203 MdI (Ministerium des Innern), Nr. 1166, „Historisches Bericht über die Arbeit in der Umsiedlerbewegung von 1945 – Mai 1948 im Land Brandenburg, 1948“, Bl. 15-16.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 176.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 179.

her father received at this time a 10,000 Mark loan for New Farmers to build a family home¹³⁹ and Herr S. reported the same amount of money was given as a loan so that his family could build their new home in Wismar, Mecklenburg.¹⁴⁰

Stalinization and Industrialization in Resettlers' lives

The SED continued with the next step in their revolution which would have lasting effects on the personal and group integration of the Resettlers into GDR society. At Stalin's behest the GDR set out on an industrialization process that changed its society and economy. It was the SED's focus on industrialization and directing its economic resources in this direction that made shortages in the Bodenreform program even more poignant.¹⁴¹ Given their frustration with material shortages in farming communities, many Resettlers gladly left their parcels¹⁴² beginning in 1952 and went to the cities¹⁴³ to work in the GDR's new industrial complexes.

A significant difference between Bessarabian German interviewees and other Resettlers is that while many GDR refugees and expellees moved to these new industrial centers, most Bessarabian German interviewees remained and worked their Bodenreform parcels. The fatigue and traumas of the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, war years in Poland, flight, expulsions and difficulties after arriving in the Soviet Zone had created in the interviewees' families a desire to

¹³⁹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁴⁰ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁴¹ Donth, p. 348.

¹⁴² Bauerkämper, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 292.

¹⁴³ Seraphim (1955), p. 11-12.

remain where they were. This decision affected German Bessarabian integration into GDR society in several ways. It was much easier for newly arrived Resettlers to integrate in the communities of the industrial centers when compared to small agricultural villages. The decision to retain and work their Bodenreform parcels, all the while being surrounded by angry and resentful locals, activated Bessarabian German resistance skills and separatist tendencies. This situation drove many Bessarabian Germans inwards toward each other and allowed them to create wholly Bessarabian German environments within the hidden transcript of the GDR. Living in these Bessarabian German environments only intensified their isolation from local society and consequently prevented their personal and group integration for several years.

Stalinization affected Bessarabian German Resettlers most poignantly in the area of the collectivization of farms in 1952. New Farmers were forced by the SED regime into collectivized farms or LPGs (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft*).¹⁴⁴ Frau S. confirmed that she and her husband's Bodenreform parcel was confiscated by the SED government in 1959 and that they were forced to enter the LPG as laborers.¹⁴⁵ Herr S. and his relatives lost their Bodenreform allotments in 1960 as they also were forced onto a collectivized farm.¹⁴⁶ Many GDR citizens did not like their changed status from farmers to mere laborers on a large collectivized farm. This created a large exodus of New Farmers to flee to West Germany. Herr G. insightfully commented that he believed that the Bodenreform movement had been created to destroy the large, aristocratic landholders, so that later the SED could force the small

¹⁴⁴ Peter-Heinz Seraphim, *Die Heimatvertriebenen in der Sowjetzone*, (Berlin: Steinmetz & Langen, 1954), p. 240.

¹⁴⁵ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁴⁶ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Bodenreform farmers into the collectivized farms. He saw it all as calculated and thought out ahead of time by Soviet and SED officials.¹⁴⁷

Interactions with Locals

After experiencing the horrors of the flight, expulsions, Resettler camps and failed SED policies, abusive treatment by locals made the beginning of the Bessarabian Germans' stay in the Soviet Zone all the more bitter. It was this negative reception by locals that affected the integration of the Bessarabian Germans the most as it only intensified their resistance set skills they brought with them from Bessarabia.

Frau W. reported that after she and her family arrived in Mansfeld in the Harz region that it was not uncommon for locals to yell "Ihr seid Polacken!" and other statements that Frau W. and her family found insulting.¹⁴⁸ One possible reason for this was a lack of High German speaking skills among the Bessarabian Germans. Frau V. reported that since her mother only spoke *Schwäbisch* (Swabian dialect) that many of the locals thought that she and her family were Russians. This could be responsible for some of the negative interactions with the people of Mecklenburg, as they had also suffered a great deal at the hands of Soviet troops and potentially saw Frau V. and her family as being allied with their Soviet enemies.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁴⁸ Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1931 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹⁴⁹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Frau K. claimed that while later in the GDR she was not discriminated against for being a Resettler, that she and her family were discriminated against when they first arrived in the Soviet Zone. With years of consideration Frau K. insightfully said that she understood why locals treated the Bessarabian Germans the way they did. “Wir waren so anders als die Mecklenburger – unsere Sprache, Dialekt...unsere Eltern haben bessarabische Trachten überall getragen!”¹⁵⁰

Soviet and SED authorities continued the forced housing inspections under “Kontrollratgesetzes Nr. 18” in order to find more housing opportunities for the Resettlers. The ZVU in Brandenburg published a monthly newsletter and distributed them to ZVU offices and public officials as a tool to encourage enforcement of this policy. The ZVU in Brandenburg reported in September 1947 the following situation involving Countess S. and her refusal to house Resettlers in her home:

Die Gräfin S...aus Teltow zeigt bei einer Besichtigung ihres umfangreichen Wohnraumes wenig Interesse, Umsiedler aufzunehmen. Nachdem ihr der Vorsitzende des Kreisumsiedlerausschusses sagte, welcher Wohnraum ihr auf Grund des Kontrollratgesetzes Nr. 18 zur Verfügung steht, führte sie im Beisein anderer Personen einen großen Skandal herbei. Die Einweisung der Umsiedler mußte mit Polizeizwang erfolgen.

Wir fragen: Wann werden diese Herrschaften, die anscheinend noch nicht die Schwere unserer Zeit begriffen haben, endlich mit der vollen Härte des Kontrollratgesetzes Nr. 18 bestraft? Warum begnügt man sich nur mit einer Mitteilung im Kreisblatt? Wir erwarten von allen Kreisumsiedlerausschüssen, daß sie mit der ganzen Strenge des

¹⁵⁰ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich camp in Saxony, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Kontrollratgesetzes gegen die Personen vorgehen, die ihre reaktionäre Gesinnung in unsere heutige Zeit hinüberretten wollen.¹⁵¹

Refusals by home owners to accommodate Resettlers only added to the bitterness and embarrassment of their indigent circumstances. This negative situation under which many continued to be housed deepened the divide between Bessarabian Germans and SBZ residents.

Other examples included in the ZVU newsletters involved locals misusing Resettlers as replacement labor for the *Fremdarbeiter* (slave laborers and Allied POWs) who had returned to their homelands.¹⁵² Resettlers were often involved in work such as helping bring in the harvest and other former slave laborer tasks on agricultural estates. The court in Stavenhagen, Brandenburg ruled that Frau M. had to serve four months in jail and pay an 1800 Mark fine for abuse and misuse of Resettlers living on her farm.¹⁵³

The ZVU also used its newsletter as an opportunity to warn public officials that they would be held accountable for their treatment of the Resettlers and lack of enforcement of SMAD directives:

Ein Bürgermeister wie er nicht sein soll:

Ist der Landwirt und Bürgermeister K... aus Sernow. Er wurde wegen Vergehens gegen das Kontrollratgesetz Nr. 18 mit 600.—RM Geldstrafe oder 60 Tagen Haft verurteilt. In

¹⁵¹ BLHA, Rep. 250 Landratsamt Guben-Frankfurt/Oder Nr. 282, „Mitteilungsblätter der Landesregierung Brandenburg Abteilung Umsiedler und Heimkehrer, 1947-1948“, Bl. 16.

¹⁵² MLHA, Rat des Kreises Güstrow, Nr. 129, as recorded in Manfred Wille (ed.), *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, p. 92.

¹⁵³ BLHA, Rep. 250 Landratsamt Guben-Frankfurt/Oder Nr. 282, „Mitteilungsblätter der Landesregierung Brandenburg Abteilung Umsiedler und Heimkehrer, 1947-1948“, Bl. 17.

der Verhandlung ergab sich, daß K... ein äußerst unsoziales Verhalten bei der Unterbringung von Umsiedlern an den Tag legt. Solche Bürgermeister sind untragbar. Der Gemeindeverwaltung erwächst die Pflicht, einen sozial denkenden Menschen durch Neuwahl an diese Stelle zu setzen.¹⁵⁴

Public officials who would not enforce regulations regarding the proper care of Resettlers due to connections within their local communities put their livelihoods and financial futures at risk.

These interactions and treatment mirror situations reported by Bessarabian German interviewees. After suffering all that they did throughout their war-time experiences, the negative reception by locals extinguished any hopes and desires that the Bessarabian German Resettlers had of finding a new home in the Soviet Zone. The realities of being viewed and used as slave labor replacements, in addition to abuse at the hands of local officials activated the resistance skill sets the interviewees brought with them from Bessarabia. These situations consequently impeded Bessarabian German personal and group integration into GDR society for several years.

It should be pointed out that not all news in the ZVU's publications was negative and not all experiences with locals were reported in a negative way by Bessarabian German interviewees. The ZVU also used the newsletter as a form of control by flattering or emphasizing positive examples of what officials or locals could do to help the Resettlers. In December 1947 ZVU officials in Potsdam happily reported:

Handwerker aus Fürstenberg/O. helfen den Umsiedlern:

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Bl. 22.

Der Ortsvorstand der SED hatte alle Handwerksmeister der Stadt zu einer Besprechung zusammengerufen um den Umsiedlern zu helfen. Folgende Handwerker beschlossen daraufhin, bis Mitte Dezember über ihr Soll hinaus Einrichtungsgegenstände anzufertigen und diese den Umsiedlern auszuliefern:

Tischler Theile	50 Betten	
Tischler Kripper	5 Tische und 20 Hocker	
Tischler Karge	10 Betten	
Korbmacher Voigt	20 Hocker	
Korbmacher Löwenberg	9 Tische und 36 Hocker	155

In addition to the 230 Resettlers interviewed for this project, there were a number of native GDR residents who were interviewed as well. Almost all locals interviewed were friends of Resettlers or had helped them in some way.

Frau W., a native of Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt reported how Resettlers were *einquartiert* (forcibly lodged) with her family. Her mother felt “boxed in” and did not like the living arrangements, but because of Soviet and SED policies so it had to be obeyed. While Frau W. and her family did not like having to share their home with Resettlers and contribute to their care, when they had so little themselves, over a few years friendships developed and Frau W. remained close and involved with those Resettlers throughout her life.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Bl. 24.

¹⁵⁶ Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1941, grew up in Harkerode, Sachsen-Anhalt.

Frau D. a native from a small village outside of Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern spoke about how her mother saw the “Eastern refugees” and had compassion on two Resettler families and allowed them to live in their house. The D. family then left for Güstrow to live in the city itself and allowed one of the Resettler families, an interviewee for this project, to live in their home for 14 years. (Frau D. believed that her mother being raped by Soviet soldiers in their home also had something to do with this decision.) Frau D. and her family continued to aid this Resettler family from East Prussia and became close friends with them to this day.¹⁵⁷

Frau P. a local of Sandersdorf, Sachsen-Anhalt (near Bitterfeld) spoke about her father was put in charge of helping with the reception and care of Resettlers in the area. He often brought Resettlers home much to his wife’s disappointment – there was already so little for their own family. Frau P. remembered visiting a Resettler family of five who had been living in a laundry hut. They lived in miserable conditions and were covered in lice and Frau P.’s father committed much of his own material resources to help this Resettler family and others.¹⁵⁸

Help from locals was confirmed by Herr G. After his family’s arrival in Saxony-Anhalt and a very negative reception by locals, Herr G. reported that everything his family eventually possessed in the form of furniture, utensils and other items were given to them by locals.¹⁵⁹ It should be emphasized that Herr G. was the minority among Bessarabian German interviewees, as most reported feeling abandoned and on their own to support themselves in the Soviet Zone.

¹⁵⁷ Interview on 13/11/2008 with Frau D., born in 1942 and native to village near Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁵⁸ Interview on 16/02/2009 with Frau P, born in 1939 and native to village near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹⁵⁹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

When asked how locals in Saxony-Anhalt had treated her family, the GDR-born daughter of Bessarabian German Resettlers said, “Die Einheimischen waren zu uns distanziert...aber das hatte keine grosse Bedeutung für uns, weil die Bessaraber so eine isolierte Gruppe sind.” Even among themselves the Bessarabian Germans recognized their inherent isolationist tendencies and nature.¹⁶⁰

Government Aid

After trying to provide for Resettler material needs through what Philipp Ther described as the SED’s three-pronged plan involving “social - charitable, redistributive and social-revolutionary policies,”¹⁶¹ officials attempted to integrate Bessarabian Germans and other Resettlers by proclaiming all refugees and expellees living within the Soviet Zone as citizens. This provided the Resettlers with a legal status having equal rights with locals, as well as the ability to receive state government welfare payments. Monetary help was offered to the Resettlers in the form of a payment of 300 Reichsmarks per household.¹⁶²

The problem with this payment, as with so many Soviet and SED integrative policies regarding the Resettlers, was that it was too little to alter interviewees’ material suffering. This 300-Mark payment was equal to one month’s wages at the time.¹⁶³ This money could not cover the costs of resupplying a family who had lost all their possessions. This insufficient government aid did

¹⁶⁰ Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau M., born in 1946 in Mansfeld, Saxony-Anhalt, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹⁶¹ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 56-57.

¹⁶² BLHA, Rep. 333 SED-Landesvorstand Brandenburg Nr. 574, Bl. 64.

¹⁶³ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 72-73.

little to change Bessarabian Germans living conditions and only confirmed to them that they could not rely on the SED regime for help out of their circumstances.

Other material assistance programs attempting to alleviate Resettler material needs included making *Bezugscheine* (ration coupons) for items such as clothing, shoes, pots, pans and other material necessities available to interviewees. As in the case with other attempts to help Bessarabian Germans and other Resettlers, this program was not successful. A local official responsible for the care of Resettlers in Lauschwitz, Brandenburg pointed out to ZVU officials in Potsdam, that there were too many ration coupons and not enough material items to be redeemed.¹⁶⁴ Despite SMAD and SED efforts to provide programs and legislation to alleviate Resettlers' suffering there was not enough money or materials on hand to fund reprovisioning over four million newcomers.¹⁶⁵

SMAD and SED authorities tried to initiate other financial programs to help Resettlers and specifically Bessarabian Germans as New Farmers. *Umsiedlerkredite* or interest-free loans were given specifically to Resettlers so that they could buy what they needed or build new homes. Several interviewees reported having received these interest-free loans.¹⁶⁶ However, the constant shortage of material goods in the SBZ often made the interest-free loans of little use to the Resettlers.

¹⁶⁴ BLHA, Rep. 250 Landratsamt Guben-Frankfurt/Oder Nr. 283 „Tätigkeit der Umsiedlerausschüsse in den Gemeinden, 1947-1948“, Bl. 2.

¹⁶⁵ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 56.

¹⁶⁶ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

Since the interest-free Resettler loans and other SED programs were not successful in bringing an end to Resettler suffering the ZVU began in 1946 to hold special collection drives to benefit Resettlers all over the Soviet Zone. These collections culminated in the “Umsiedlerwoche”¹⁶⁷ where locals donated daily wares and money. The state of Brandenburg declared in 1947 that their Umsiedlerwoche would occur between 26 October and 2 November. The director of the *Amt für Arbeit und Sozialwesen* told local mayors in Fürstenberg/Oder and Neuzelle the purposes of the Umsiedlerwoche and gave a warning to those who did not participate:

Damit einer weiteren Zuweisung von Flüchtlingen nicht mehr zu rechnen ist gilt es jetzt die Lebensbedingungen der Umsiedler zu verbessern. Die Umsiedler müssen sich mit dem Gedanken vertraut machen, dass eine Grenzregulierung nicht mehr in Frage kommt und sich nun für einen Beruf oder für eine Siedlung entscheiden. In erster Linie gilt es zunächst die Wohnverhältnisse zu verbessern. Es darf nicht mehr vorkommen, dass 5 und mehr Personen in einem Zimmer wohnen müssen, während den Bauern noch mehr als genügend Räume zur Verfügung stehen. Die nächste Aufgabe ist, die Umsiedler mit dem notwendigsten Inventar und Hausrat zu versehen. Die Umsiedlerwoche ist der letzte Versuch, den Flüchtlingen auf gütlichem Wege in jeder Weise helfen zu können, andernfalls muss eine gesetzliche Regelung vorgenommen werden.¹⁶⁸

One can see from this threat that local enthusiasm to help the Resettlers had waned. The collection drives brought in pots, pans, suits, tooth brushes, socks, shoes and even money, but the results of these Umsiedlerwoche were extremely disappointing to ZVU officials. It is significant

¹⁶⁷ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 62.

¹⁶⁸ BLHA, Rep. 250 Landratsamt Guben-Frankfurt/Oder Nr. 278 „Betreuung der Umsiedler, 1946-1947“, Bl. 5.

to note that despite all these efforts by the SED regime only one of the Bessarabian German interviewees had heard of the Umsiedlerwoche and other collection drives.

When asked during the interviews whether or not they knew of the existence of the Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler or ZVU, all Bessarabian German interviewees claimed they had never heard of it or that they had not received help from the government. The overwhelming majority reported that during their early years in the Soviet Zone they felt like they had been abandoned and left to survive on their own. This result is significant as it shows a break between perception and reported reality due to their having received interest-free loans, material from the demolition of aristocratic houses to build their own homes, Bodenreform parcels and being the beneficiaries of other SED programs. While a partial explanation for this could be that several interviewees were children or teenagers at the time and therefore not aware of all aid their families received, it is also possible that government aid was so ineffective that SED efforts were simply forgotten.

This Bessarabian German perception that they had not received aid from the government is also revealing about the levels of personal and group integration that these interviewees achieved during the GDR period. Their belief that they were abandoned to suffer on their own caused several Bessarabian German Resettlers to psychologically and socially turn inward towards each other just as they had done under Russian and Romanian administrations in Bessarabia. These choices limited their interactions with SBZ residents and SED officials and consequently impeded their integration into the society and cultures of the Soviet Zone for several years.

LIFE CYCLES

With the average Bessarabian German interviewee being 12-years old in 1945 the interviewees still had many life events to experience. Taking these factors as potential indicators of personal and group integration into GDR society this sub-chapter will explore issues such as the educational, employment, marriage, divorce and familial life cycles of Bessarabian German Resettlers in the GDR. Were there distinctly Bessarabian German patterns in marriage and divorce or did they conform to the GDR norm? How many children did the interviewees have compared to the GDR populace in general? These and other questions of Resettlers' everyday life that affected integration are rarely discussed in the secondary literature.

Education

The educational experiences of some interviewees began in Bessarabia. For those Bessarabian Germans old enough to be involved with their primary or secondary schooling at the time, many reported obstacles to finishing their education due to the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, life in Resettler camps, war-time shortages in Poland and due to the horrors of the flight and expulsions. The disruption of young Bessarabian Germans' education was an important factor in their integration into GDR society as it affected their employment opportunities and feelings of self-worth, and consequently the quality of life many interviewees had during their early years in the Soviet Zone.

Bessarabian German Resettlers reported having missed one or two years of schooling in general. This is revealing as many interviewees felt that the closing of their schools and their consequently limited education negatively impacted their early integrative years in the Soviet Zone. Frau W. began attending primary school while in a Nazi Heim-ins-Reich resettler camp in Czechoslovakia. She was there for one year and then attended school for three years in Poland. Her primary education in Poland was severely limited and adversely affected due to the constant lack of teachers. Many teachers in the area were drafted into the German military as the war continued. Due to these difficulties and the flight she experienced, Frau W. reported that she lost two years of primary education. She claimed that this affected her life in that she had great difficulties due to her lack of academic skills, especially in the area of writing. This lack of ability in writing then affected her future in the GDR as her employment option was to go work in a factory as a laborer. Frau W. considered this a negative limitation during her early years in the SBZ.¹⁶⁹

Frau L. reported a similar limitation in her GDR employment options. Frau L. claimed that due to disruptions in her education, life in several camps and the flight from Posen, that she lost several years of educational training. Due to her lack of education she was forced to accept a job working in a jam factory. It was only after she was 24-years old that she was able to complete an apprenticeship as a tractor driver and then later move on to other employment fields. Considering that most people under normal circumstances complete apprenticeships in their late teenage years, Frau L. was completing hers a full five years later than normal. These negative effects regarding her education were considered by Frau L. as an embarrassment.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹⁷⁰ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau L., born in 1928 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

Herr N. is the Bessarabian German interviewee whose educational training suffered the most due to several life disruptions growing up. Herr N. completed 4th class in his primary school in Bessarabia, the last two years being taught in Romanian as directed by Romanian authorities. That alone would have adversely affected Herr N.'s education, having to switch learning history, science or mathematics from one's native language to another. This negative situation's effects on Herr N.'s education compounded due to the temporary nature of the Heim-ins-Reich resettler camp schools. His education suffered further problems as during his two years of schooling in Poland he was taught by an unqualified young woman due to all the other teachers being drafted into the military. Herr N. estimated that he lost four years of primary education and this situation greatly affected his life in the GDR as he was forced to hold a number of odd jobs rather than having steady employment. It was only several years later, after he took advantage of further educational opportunities in the GDR, that this educational handicap was overcome.¹⁷¹

An interesting characteristic that Bessarabian Germans demonstrated during their interviews was a life philosophy of striving to be better than their counterparts. This desire to surpass others potentially came from their being surrounded by other religious and ethnic groups in Bessarabia and feeling the need to outperform their neighbors coupled with a Protestant work ethos. The disruptions that occurred in several interviewees' educations, and consequently their limited employment opportunities in the Soviet Zone, negatively affected some Bessarabian Germans' feelings of self-worth. These negative self-images created feelings of depression and adversely affected their integration into local cultures after their arrival in the Soviet Zone.

¹⁷¹ Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thüringen.

This need and desire to excel among Bessarabian Germans was intensified and reached the point of obsession after their negative reception by SBZ residents. Interviewees and their families began with vigor to surpass SBZ locals in educational, employment and other fields.

Frau K. reported that her father was excessively focused on the concept that his children would achieve more than Mecklenburg locals, especially based on their treatment of the Resettlers after their arrival. Frau K.'s father forced his children to excel in their schoolwork with the goal of outperforming local children and hopefully gaining the respect he desired.¹⁷² Frau V. claimed something similar in that she, her family and fellow Bessarabian Germans were always striving to achieve and become more than the locals in Mecklenburg in the areas where they settled.¹⁷³

This situation affected Bessarabian German integration on a personal and group level in that locals, rather than being jealous, began to respect the new arrivals and the intense discrimination they experienced after their arrival in the Soviet Zone began to subside.

The younger Resettlers continued their schooling until 8th class when several decided to complete an apprenticeship in the GDR. A great variety of apprenticeships were reported by interviewees and the choice of which type of apprenticeship to complete affected individual integration into GDR society due to potential interactions with local populations. Herr W. completed an apprenticeship as a wheelwright, but then worked in the *Grenzpolizei* (Western Border police) for ten years. He then completed further training and got his *Meister* (Master in a

¹⁷² Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich camp in Saxony, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁷³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

trade) and worked in a door factory.¹⁷⁴ Herr G. followed a similar path by completing an apprenticeship as a carpenter, but then later completed a study program to become a Protestant minister.¹⁷⁵

Secondary Education and Abitur

The educational system in the GDR began with most children attending a primary school together. This was then followed by attendance at a POS (Polytechnische Oberschule). After their time in the POS, students who did well academically attended the EOS (Erweiterte Oberschule) where they prepared for their *Abitur* or secondary leaving certificate. This gave the individual student the qualification to apply for university studies.¹⁷⁶

Due to the disruptions in many Bessarabian German interviewees' education attending secondary school and receiving their Abitur was not an option. Frau K. was the only Bessarabian German interviewee who reported having completed her Abitur. This is possibly a testament to her father's drive that his children surpass locals academically, but also that Frau K. was one of the youngest of the Bessarabian German interviewees and began and completed her schooling in the GDR. The completion of one's primary and secondary education wholly in the GDR is significant to the personal integration of the interviewees as doing so greatly increased their

¹⁷⁴ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁷⁵ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁷⁶ Fulbrook, *People's State*, p.121: "...the Abitur, which was the academic prerequisite for university study. It was also possible to arrive at this point by other routes, such that further educational development was never closed off for those with the appropriate motivation and intelligence. But academic success alone was not enough. Political conformity, the appropriate family background, lack of religious commitment, willingness to play a full role in the life of the FDJ, and similar considerations were equally important to ensure the opportunity for future study."

willingness to accept the GDR as their new Heimat and to speak of it in an overwhelmingly positive manner.

Further Studies and University Education

These handicaps in so many Bessarabian Germans' primary and secondary education due to war-time disruptions had affected their employment options in the GDR. Their futures of holding menial and odd jobs affected interviewees' feelings of self-worth and confirmed to several Bessarabian Germans that the SED regime was of no help to them. This situation only intensified the resistance skills and isolationist tendencies Bessarabian Germans brought with them to the GDR.

In order to combat what the SED saw as a privilege denied to the workers and peasants in Germany's past, the SED increased the number of further study opportunities available to GDR citizens.¹⁷⁷ People living in the GDR used these study opportunities with greater frequency as a method of completing their various educational qualifications and degrees. In 1951 there were approximately 3,600 students taking part in distance-learning programs and by 1963 the numbers had risen to approximately 30,000.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p.216: "Initiatives such as the 'Workers' and Peasants' Faculties' (Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultäten) and evening classes provided additional opportunities for acquiring qualifications later in life for those who had come from backgrounds where further and higher education were almost undreamt of. Even in the 1960s, and as late as the 1970s, reorganization of the economic structure combined with the effects of earlier migration to allow continued upward mobility for people of humble backgrounds."

¹⁷⁸ *Statistisches Taschenbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1964*, Hrsg. Staatlichen Zentralverwaltung für Statistik, (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1964), p. 156.

The majority of Bessarabian German interviewees chose to take part in these new educational training opportunities through night schools, distance learning programs and attending university. One of the great advantages to living in the GDR and one that was constantly lauded by all interviewees regardless of Heimat origin, was that of affordable educational advancement schemes in the GDR.¹⁷⁹

Participation in these further educational opportunities had a great impact in the lives of the Bessarabian German interviewees. Frau W. was able to leave the job she perceived as unfulfilling in a steel mill by taking advantage of a distance learning program through a technical university in Aschersleben, Harz region. Frau W. became a daycare teacher and worked in that capacity very happily until 1990.¹⁸⁰ Frau W. whose education had suffered several disruptions due to the war attended an agricultural university in Mansfeld, Saxony-Anhalt and received her degree in agriculture.¹⁸¹ Frau V. who finished her secondary school with the 10th class went on to complete a distance learning program in business and commerce.¹⁸² Frau K. who was the only interviewee to report having received her Abitur went on to study to become a biology and chemistry teacher at the University of Rostock.¹⁸³

Revisiting an example discussed above, Herr N. benefited greatly from the educational opportunities in the GDR. Herr N.'s educational background included two years of primary school given in the German language; two years of primary school in the Romanian language;

¹⁷⁹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich camp in Saxony, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁸⁰ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹⁸¹ Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1931 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹⁸² Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

¹⁸³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich camp in Saxony, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

two years of primary school in Poland with an unqualified young woman as a teacher; and four years of education lost. This educational handicap required his working various menial jobs in his early life in the Soviet Zone. This situation changed after Herr N. attended night school, gained the secondary educational knowledge he lacked and then completed a university degree in mining. Due to his university degree and other education he eventually became the director of a technical mining university near Bitterfeld.¹⁸⁴

When one takes into account information recorded by the GDR's *Staatlichen Zentralverwaltung für Statistik* regarding the number of students in university studies, distance-learning opportunities and night school programs at university and technical schools throughout the GDR, the Bessarabian German Resettlers took greater advantage of further educational opportunities when compared to the GDR populace in general.¹⁸⁵ This result and previous examples of further educational opportunities that interviewees took advantage of confirm Dagmar Semmelmann's conclusion from her Resettler oral history project that the Resettlers were more focused on and achieved a greater level of educational accomplishment and advancement in the work place when compared with the native GDR population.¹⁸⁶ Bessarabian Germans went above and beyond to excel and surpass their native neighbors, just as they had tried to do in their native Bessarabia.

The previous examples regarding further educational opportunities are significant regarding interviewees' personal integration into GDR society. Through their participation in these educational programs interviewees' feelings of self-worth improved, their positive interactions

¹⁸⁴ Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thüringen.

¹⁸⁵ *Statistisches Taschenbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1964*, p. 156.

¹⁸⁶ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann and Schwartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

with locals increased and their negative feelings towards the GDR decreased. This began a process for some interviewees that brought an end to their turning inward away from GDR society and made them more willing to attempt to socially integrate into local cultures.

Employment and Denazification

While Stalinization of the GDR affected the economic direction and lives of the Bessarabian Germans mostly in the area of agricultural collectivization, Denazification also had a great impact on Resettlers in the GDR. With approximately eight million members of the Nazi party at the end of the war¹⁸⁷ Denazification was a policy that affected hundreds of thousands in post-war Germany. Hermann Weber noted:

In der SBZ verknüpfte die SMAD den Aufbau der Verwaltungen auf allen Ebenen mit einer personellen Neubesetzung, die – wie alle Maßnahmen in der ersten Zeit nach der NS-Diktatur- mit der Beseitigung der Überreste des Hitler-Regimes begründet wurde. Durch die Ausschaltung der Nationalsozialisten aus dem öffentlich-politischen und beruflichen Leben gelang der SMAD eine umfassende Entnazifizierung, bis August 1947 verloren 520.000 Personen ihren Arbeitsplatz, vorwiegend im öffentlichen Dienst. Über 10.000 Angehörige der SS, 2.000 der Gestapo und 4.300 „politische Führer“ der NSDAP wurden nach offiziellen Angaben angeklagt, insgesamt 12.807 verurteilt (darunter 118 zum Tode).¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 72.

¹⁸⁸ Hermann Weber, *Die DDR: 1945-1990*, (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000), p. 10.

The ramifications of this process for the Resettlers were tremendous in that the removal of hundreds of thousands of government employees left huge gaps in the SBZ workforce and to a large degree the Resettlers were the beneficiaries.¹⁸⁹ The effects of this policy in the Soviet Zone were substantial in that an overwhelming majority of state office workers in 1950 had been assigned to their positions after the war; 72,000 of whom were Resettlers.¹⁹⁰

One of the gaps in the GDR workforce caused by Denazification that was generously filled by Bessarabian German interviewees was that of school teaching. By 1950 more than one-third of teachers in the GDR had originated from “expulsion areas”.¹⁹¹ This is of particular interest given that teaching was one of the most common professions among this study’s interviewees irrespective of their Heimat origin and also that it was the most common area of employment reported by Bessarabian German interviewees. While a large percentage of the GDR was involved in industrial or factory work,¹⁹² and some interviewees like Herr W. and Frau L.¹⁹³ worked in factories, Frau W., Frau K. and Herr N. all worked as teachers or in education.¹⁹⁴ This differed greatly from the overall educational and employment backgrounds of their parents which often included agriculture.¹⁹⁵ It is noteworthy that the educational policies of the GDR made approximately 36% of the total interviewees in this study into a group of teachers, office workers and scientific experts who filled positions left vacant by Denazification and the war. The Bessarabian German interviewees followed these general Resettler employment trends.

¹⁸⁹ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 78.

¹⁹⁰ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 268.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1970*, Hrsg. Staatlichen Zentralverwaltung für Statistik, (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1964), p. 1 and 19.

¹⁹³ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau L., born in 1928 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹⁹⁴ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

¹⁹⁵ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau A., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

Marriage and Divorce

Other areas of the Resettlers' life cycles in the GDR are those that involve family, specifically marriage, divorce rates and the number of children the interviewees had in the GDR. Taking these factors as potential indicators of Bessarabian German social and economic integration into GDR society the following was reported.

All Bessarabian Resettlers married or found "life partners" during the period in which they lived in the GDR. This result is revealing in that it potentially shows that the traumas of the flight, expulsion, arrival in the Soviet Zone and other negative experiences had not adversely affected the interviewees to the point that they wanted to live alone which could have been an option taken by people who lived through similar events. Marriage affected Bessarabian German integration as it created many new opportunities for interacting with locals compared to Resettlers who remained single.

The interviewees also showed a great tendency to remain married rather than divorcing. This result is significant due to the huge number of divorces in West Germany and the GDR after WWII. This result also goes against the GDR norm where divorce was so common.¹⁹⁶ The Bessarabian German interviewees remained married when they were surrounded by divorcing couples which would have created several new and unique opportunities for either integrative interactions with locals or opportunities to remain separate according to the individual interviewee's desires within the hidden transcript of the GDR.

¹⁹⁶ Lothar Mertens, *Wider die sozialistische Familiennorm: Ehescheidungen in der DDR 1950-1989*, (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), p. 14.

The next issue was whether or not the Resettlers tended to marry fellow refugees. Throughout the years when most interviewees married, Resettlers comprised approximately 24% of the total GDR population of 17.5 million.¹⁹⁷ One would expect the probability of a Resettler-Resettler marriage (a Resettler marrying another Resettler) to be approximately 12%. While it is difficult to say with only 11 interviewees, the Bessarabian Germans had an approximate 40% marriage rate to fellow Resettlers. This is significant as the Bessarabian German Resettler-Resettler marriage rate is more than triple the statistically expected Resettler-Resettler marriage rate and potentially demonstrates the friction and lack of integration that occurred between GDR locals and Bessarabian Germans during their early years in the Soviet Zone. This reality, whether chosen or forced due to Bessarabian Germans and locals avoiding each other, would have affected personal and group integration into GDR society by limiting interactions in local society that otherwise could have existed with a native spouse.

None of the Bessarabian German interviewees who reported having married another Resettler married a fellow Bessarabian German after arriving in the GDR. Bessarabian Germans who married fellow Resettlers reported most often that their spouses originated from Pomerania. This seems logical as most Bessarabian German interviewees who participated in this project lived in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and hundreds of thousands of Pomeranian Resettlers settled in this region after the war. Marrying a fellow Resettler affected some interviewees' social and psychological integration as marriage partners who had experienced similar traumas from the flight, expulsions and negative reception by SBZ locals were equally traumatized to the point that both partners desired to remain aloof and apart from GDR society. Marriage to a native

¹⁹⁷ BarchB, DO I, Mdl, 10, ZVU, no 49, Bl. 146, as recorded in Wille, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 265.

GDR resident increased integrative interactions and hastened, or at least encouraged, interviewees' integration into local communities.

Children

The average birth rate in the GDR was 2.5 children per woman in 1952. This fluctuated throughout the rest of the 1950s and 1960s, falling to two children per woman in 1970.¹⁹⁸ Bessarabian interviewees who reported the number of children they and their partners had fell directly within the GDR average. The number of children people had in the GDR often coincided with resources available to care for and raise these children.¹⁹⁹ The result that Bessarabian Germans fell within the GDR average serves as potential evidence that they as individuals and as a group had attained a level of financial and material integration approximating that of the average GDR citizen.

HEIMAT PRACTICES and CULTURAL PECULIARITIES

The SED used the concept of a “socialist Heimat” in an attempt to create a sense of GDR nationhood separate from that of West Germany.²⁰⁰ This effort at creating a GDR Heimat identity was attempted through activities on a national and local level including the formation of

¹⁹⁸ <http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms> (accessed: 30/07/2014)

¹⁹⁹ Mertens, p. 14.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 63

hobby groups, creation of amateur choirs, the singing of GDR Heimat songs and the creation of television programs showing the beauty of the regions of the GDR.²⁰¹

After WWII Soviet and SED authorities made it clear to the interviewees and GDR society alike that the Resettlers were to be blamed as one of the main causes of the war. In order to atone for this guilt the Resettlers had “justly” been cast out of their homelands.²⁰² The Soviets and SED additionally threatened Resettlers with imprisonment if they publicly spoke about their native identities and cultures, war traumas and other politically sensitive issues such as the GDR-Poland border recognition.²⁰³

In exchange for their silence the Soviets and SED offered the Resettlers help in rebuilding a new life in the Soviet Zone. The SED tried for several years to erase the Resettlers as a separate group in the GDR population, but the Resettlers using informal sub-structures in the public and hidden transcripts did not cooperate. As Heike Amos showed through her research in the Stasi archives, the Resettlers continued to exist as non-assimilated groups within GDR society throughout the existence of the SED regime.²⁰⁴

While the Resettlers were publicly banned from discussing their pasts, their old Heimat regions and other experiences, the question remained – did the Resettlers obey this ban regarding their identities, memories and cultures? This sub-chapter will explore Bessarabian German attempts to circumvent public bans through their use of sub-structures within the hidden transcript. These

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁰² Kossert, p. 194.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 193.

²⁰⁴ Heike Amos, *Die Vertriebenenpolitik der SED 1949 bis 1990*, (Munchen: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009).

informal sub-structures include social and cultural activities and using food as a tool for the transmission of the feeling of Bessarabian Heimat. When analyzing the possibility of amalgamation between Resettler and local cultures it is revelatory when considering Bessarabian German answers to the question of how they think they influenced and changed GDR society.

Factors that affected Bessarabian German integration

There were several cultural peculiarities of the Bessarabian Germans that affected their social, economic and religious integration into GDR society. One of the first and most obvious was the Bessarabian German accent, which immediately identified them as not belonging to the local GDR region. The Bessarabian Germans were skilled linguists with abilities in their native *Schwäbisch* (Swabian dialect), Russian, Romanian and other languages, but it was their lack of mastery of *Hochdeutsch* (High German) that often caused integrative difficulties.

There seems to be a cultural peculiarity in Germany where for many Germans one's mastery of High German reflects one's intelligence and refinement. As discussed earlier, Frau V. reported that her mother could not speak High German upon her arrival in Mecklenburg after the flight. This lack of High German speaking ability signaled to locals her "foreignness" and discouraged contact. Frau V. reported that the situation with locals grew worse due to her mother's constant use of Swabian dialect which consequently convinced locals that Frau V.'s mother and her family were in fact Russians. This also adversely affected the integration Frau V.'s family in

that many locals which had experienced horrors at the hands of Soviet troops saw Frau V. and her family as being potential enemies.²⁰⁵

Their accents and inability to expertly speak High German also perpetuated locals' beliefs that Bessarabian German Resettlers were non-German arrivals such as Poles, Roma or Sinti. Bessarabian women's propensity for wearing headscarves and unique Bessarabian black dresses emphasized their foreign origin to locals. These perceptions affected Bessarabian German interactions and integration with GDR locals.²⁰⁶

To further complicate the integration process of Bessarabian Germans into GDR society, Herr W., Herr G.²⁰⁷ and other interviewees reported that they taught their GDR-born children Swabian dialect.²⁰⁸ This informal sub-structure allowed Bessarabian German Resettlers who chose to do so to remain aloof and separate from local society. The social and cultural integration of these interviewees was further compromised.

When discussing ways in which they kept Heimat traditions alive almost all interviewees spoke about foods from Bessarabia that they continued to make for their families in the GDR. Frau L. commented that she made Bessarabian foods such as Kürbistaschen, Streudeln and Dampfnudeln for her family in the Harz region. Her dishes became part of the local cuisine after she taught her

²⁰⁵ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²⁰⁶ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Herr G. said that locals in Saxony-Anhalt had been informed that the coming refugees were Roma and not to be trusted, hence the chilly reception in the beginning.

²⁰⁷ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²⁰⁸ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

daughter-in-law Bessarabian recipes.²⁰⁹ This transfer of Heimat cooking knowledge also occurred in Thuringia when Herr N.'s wife learned Bessarabian cuisine from his mother.²¹⁰ Frau A. made Streudeln and Dampfnudeln part of her family's normal diet in the GDR along with special treats like Plätzchen for Christmas.²¹¹ Herr W. also taught his GDR-born children how to cook Bessarabian dishes.²¹²

This information is included as it shows how using informal sub-structures, such as cooking Heimat foods, Bessarabian German Resettlers were able to circumvent official bans on the propagation of Resettler culture and continue to transmit their heritage to their GDR-born children. Food, serving as a piece of "mobile Heimat", became a method of continuing Bessarabian Germans' ability to remain separate from GDR society or to integrate with GDR society by sharing this knowledge. The result was based on the interviewee's personal use of agency within the hidden transcript of the GDR.

Bessarabian German grandparents also played roles in the integration of their children's families into GDR society. Frau V. reported that since she worked full-time, her mother took care of her children. Frau V. claimed that her GDR-born children lived, learned, ate and were raised in a Bessarabian German environment filled with Bessarabian folk dances, Bessarabian cuisine and folk songs.²¹³ This use of informal sub-structures within the hidden transcript of the GDR affected the integration of these grandparents as there was no need or impetus to change or

²⁰⁹ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau L., born in 1928 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²¹⁰ Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thüringen.

²¹¹ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau A., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²¹² Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²¹³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

integrate with locals. These choices and actions within the hidden transcript also affected the integration of their children and grandchildren by keeping a private Bessarabian German identity alive and intact. This situation consequently slowed or impeded their children's and grandchildren's integration into GDR society.

Within the public transcript of the GDR all Heimat meetings were banned. Bessarabian Germans circumvented these rules through their use of informal sub-structures within the hidden transcript by having private, unofficial Heimat meetings. This ban on Heimat meetings was also circumvented by co-opting gatherings allowed in the public transcript such as weddings, funerals and even socialist holidays. Frau W. reported that as there were many Bessarabian German Resettlers near Mansfeld, Saxony-Anhalt her father was able often to have private Heimat meetings with friends where they would reminisce about Bessarabia.²¹⁴ This type of situation where several Resettlers from the same Heimat region settled in the same region was confirmed by Ute Schmidt in her study of Bessarabian Resettler villages in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Festivals, birthdays and other private events were celebrated as they would have been celebrated in Bessarabia. Additionally, Bessarabian GDR Resettlers co-opted official GDR Heimat celebrations such as International Women's Day, 1st of May celebrations, harvest festivals and other socialist GDR holidays by celebrating these as required by the regime, but with foods and customs from the old Heimat.²¹⁵

Bessarabian German Resettlers also circumvented public transcript bans on Heimat meetings by attending religious services and other church gatherings. Herr G., a Protestant minister, claimed

²¹⁴ Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1931 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²¹⁵ Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, p. 521.

that church services and religious gatherings called *Glaubenstage* functioned as Heimat meetings in that everyone from Bessarabia was there. They could speak about Bessarabia, share memories, participate in Heimat cultural experiences and discuss their lives in the GDR. He added that he believed the Protestant Church was a crucial part in integrating Bessarabian Germans into local society.²¹⁶

These numerous opportunities Bessarabian Germans had to meet with each other worked as a way to encourage integration, but also to impede and stop it. Being surrounded constantly by fellow Resettlers provided a balm to the traumas the Bessarabian Germans had experienced. This aid softened the shock of war-time hardships and made it psychologically possible for those Bessarabian Germans who chose to do so, to venture out among locals. These interactions consequently began the processes of integration. This same help and aid from fellow Resettlers also had the opposite effect in that some interviewees' needs for friendship and human interaction were fulfilled through their relationships with other Bessarabian Germans. This consequently made forming relationships with locals less of a priority and impeded and postponed several interviewees' individual integration into GDR society.

Further ways that interviewees were able to maintain their Bessarabian culture and identities was by sharing Heimat memories with their GDR-born children and to visit Bessarabia. One of the advantages to being a Resettler in the GDR was that because many of the expulsion areas were located in socialist countries allied with the GDR, visiting the former Heimat was not as difficult for them when compared to those refugees and expellees who lived in West Germany. Frau K.

²¹⁶ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

visited Bessarabia with her children who were born in the GDR. Frau K. claimed that her children said that they had never had a feeling of Heimat until they saw Bessarabia.²¹⁷ Herr W. reported that he visited Bessarabia five times and planned to do so again in the future. Through these visits Bessarabian German identities were maintained and consequently affected some interviewees' desire and need to accept a GDR identity.

Through the interviews with Bessarabian Germans it was observed that as the SED attempted to create a new "GDR socialist Heimat" and identity for its citizens through activities such as plays, classical concerts, public informative speeches, DEFA films and local cultural houses,²¹⁸ the Bessarabian German Resettlers used their own informal sub-structures and activities in the hidden transcript to maintain Heimat memories, Bessarabian identities and relationships.

POLITICS

Everything in the GDR had political overtones and political meaning. Mundane aspects of everyday life in the GDR including eating habits, exercise and leisure activities were studied, discussed and planned for by the appropriate governmental entity. As Thomas Lindenberger claimed:

Bis in die obersten Etagen von Partei und Staat hinein gestaltete sich Herrschaftsausübung weniger als Durchsetzung ihrer Regeln und Prinzipien als vielmehr als direkter Zugriff auf konkrete Zustände und Angelegenheiten. Die Tagesordnung des Politbüros liest sich daher teilweise wie der Themenkatalog einer alltagsgeschichtlichen

²¹⁷ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich camp in Saxony, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²¹⁸ Palmowski, p. 26-27.

Ausstellung, so gründlich kümmerten sich die da oben um alles und jedes, was unten vor sich ging.²¹⁹

It was made apparent through the interviews that since all things in the GDR had a political aspect, that few things were perceived by the Resettlers as being truly political in nature. This sub-chapter will examine Bessarabian Germans' political integration into GDR society and their involvement in mass organizations such as a nation-wide, obligatory union and a Soviet-focused cultural society. The reasons why or why not interviewees joined political parties as indicators of personal and group integration will also be analyzed.

State-Run organizations

Hartmut Zimmermann claimed in the *DDR Handbuch* that:

“Die Massenorganisationen der GDR hatten die Aufgabe, alle Bürger, insbesondere jene, die nicht der SED angehörten, entsprechend ihrer gesellschaftlichen Lage und ihren speziellen Bedürfnissen zu erfassen. Dies sollte die Lenkung und Kontrolle der Gesellschaft im Sinne der SED garantieren {Kontrollfunktion} und die Bürger für die von der Partei gesetzten Ziele mobilisieren und aktivieren {Transmissionsfunktion}...ihre spezifischen Interessen organisiert und kontrolliert gegenüber der Partei und dem Staat zu artikulieren {Interessenvertretung bzw. Informationsfunktion}. Daneben hatten sie die Bürger zur Konformität mit der politischen Linie der Parteiführung zu erziehen {Identifikationsfunktion} und schließlich – dies war in den Nachkriegsjahren von

²¹⁹ Thomas Lindenberger, “Alltagsgeschichte und ihr möglicher Beitrag zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR”, in Bessel and Jessen (Hrsg.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur*, p.318.

eminenter Bedeutung – zur Kaderbildung für Partei, Staat und Wirtschaft beizutragen. Gemeinsame Elemente aller Massenorganisationen der GDR waren die Anerkennung der führenden Rolle der SED die Anleitung durch SED Mitglieder in allen wichtigen Positionen des Verbandes und der Aufbau nach den Prinzipien des „demokratischen Zentralismus“.²²⁰

Given this background knowledge of the purpose and roll that the mass organizations had in the GDR, one can understand my surprise at the interviewees' confusion as to why they were being asked about their participation in these groups during the political part of the interview. The interviewees did not consider their involvement in the *Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaft Bund* (FDGB), *Deutsche-Sowjetische Freundschaft* (DSF), *Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands* (DFD) and other mass organizations as an action of their political wills.

The FDGB or Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaft Bund was the first mass organization given permission by Soviet authorities to be created in the SBZ. This first of the mass organizations was formed in June 1945. The directive was given to union leaders from all political parties to create an *Einheitsgewerkschaft* or one union for all workers in the Soviet Zone. This effort was successful, but Communists were soon given complete control over the organization.²²¹ The FDGB became the sole union in the GDR and in 1950 had an approximate membership of 4.7 million.²²² As Hermann Weber explained, the FDGB's main purpose was:

²²⁰ Ulrich Mählert, *Die Freie Deutsche Jugend 1945-1949: Von den 'Antifaschistischen Jugendausschüssen' zur SED-Massenorganisation: Die Erfassung der Jugend in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone*, (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), p. 13.

²²¹ Weber, p. 8.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

“FDGB sollten die Gewerkschaften Schulen der sozialistischen Erziehung zur Erfüllung der Wirtschaftspläne werden....Wie alle Massenorganisationen der DDR erfüllte der FDGB damit seine spezielle Aufgabe, die Politik der SED in seine Zielgruppe, das heißt die Arbeitnehmerschaft, zu tragen.“²²³

The FDGB's influence and growth continued throughout the existence of the GDR until in 1987 the FDGB had a total membership of 9.5 million or approximately half of the GDR population.²²⁴

Another mass organization, Gesellschaft für Deutsche-Sowjetische Freundschaft, was created in July 1949 and had as its focus to develop exchanges and friendships between the people of the GDR and the Soviet Union.²²⁵ Bessarabian German interviewees portrayed their involvement with the FDGB and the DSF as being part of the average GDR citizen's life rather than an exercise of a political nature.

Bessarabian German interviewees' involvement in these mass organization indicates a political integration near or equal to that of the average GDR citizen due to similar findings from Palmowski's interviews with native GDR citizens. Results from this project and Palmowski's study showed a tendency of the majority of GDR citizens to be integrated politically on a

²²³ Ibid., p. 53.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 97.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 53. “Zur Förderung der engen Bindungen an die Sowjetunion hatte die SED bereits 1947 eine eigene Organisation gegründet; die „Gesellschaft für deutsch-sowjetische Freundschaft“ (DSF) zählte 1958 3,3 Millionen Mitglieder, ihr damaliger 6. Kongreß verlangte vor allem die Durchsetzung der „sowjetischen Neuerermethoden“ in der DDR und den weiteren Ausbau der Freundschaft zur UdSSR. Nun war nach den Nun war nach den schrecklichen Erfahrungen des Zweiten Weltkrieges in der Bevölkerung die Bereitschaft vorhanden, auch mit der Sowjetunion gute Beziehungen zu pflegen.“

superficial level involving membership in the SED's mass organizations, but that privately there was little if any acceptance of the SED regime as a legitimate entity.²²⁶

Resettler Activity in Political Parties – or lack thereof

The interview arrived at the point that the Resettlers had been waiting for, what they considered to be their true political life - political parties and their activity in them. Two Bessarabian German interviewees had been members of the SED; one had joined the Bauernpartei; and the rest were not members of a political party. With only eleven interviewees it is difficult to say anything definitive about Bessarabian German political integration as a group, but with three out of eleven belonging to a political party this result showed the possibility that the interviewees were more likely to belong to a political party than the GDR population at large.²²⁷

The leaders of *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* arrived in the Soviet Zone after spending the war years in several places of exile. The KPD was the first political party granted permission by Soviet authorities to organize and members of the *Zentralkomitee* did so on 11 June 1945.²²⁸ The *Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands* was the second party to receive permission to organize and was formed on 15 June 1945. The SPD called for Marxist-oriented politics and a socialist economic system.²²⁹ The SPD was pressured by KPD and Soviet officials from the beginning to form a unified workers' political party. KPD leaders were particularly keen on the idea of unification with the SPD as the KPD could not rally enough support to win elections on its own.

²²⁶ Palmowski, p. 20.

²²⁷ <http://www.ddr-wissen.de> (accessed: 27/08/2014)

²²⁸ Weber, p. 6.

²²⁹ Ulf Sommer, *Die Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands Eine Blockpartei unter der Führung der SED*, (Münster: Agenda Verlag, 1996), p.30.

Although reluctant, SPD leaders acquiesced and the two parties were joined in April 1946 as the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands. Through this union the SED became the largest of political parties in the Soviet Zone with approximately 1.3 million members²³⁰ and was consequently very successful in the elections of 1946.

Why interviewees joined the SED

The main reason reported by the two Bessarabian German interviewees for joining the SED was related to their careers. Herr W. joined the SED as a job requirement for his work with the Border Police.²³¹ Herr N. claimed that a representative from his office visited him in his home and pressured him to join. The representative pointed out the opportunities afforded to Herr N. in the areas of further studies and employment and was then told he needed to join the SED in order to help give back to the system.²³²

Why interviewees joined other political parties

The alternatives to the SED in the GDR were the *Blockparteien*, i.e. Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (LDPD), National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (NDPD), Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Ost-CDU) and the Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands (Bauernpartei).

²³⁰ Weber p. 17.

²³¹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²³² Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thüringen.

Herr S. was actually a KPD member, but joined the Bauernpartei because he believed he could do more good there. He said it was only later that he realized the SED controlled everything.²³³

Why the majority of interviewees did not join a political party

Eight of the Bessarabian Germans did not belong to a political party and this followed the general malaise among GDR citizens regarding political party membership. When asked why they had not joined a political party the majority expressed that they had not been asked to join or that they had no interest in politics. Frau W. claimed that she had not joined a political party “weil wir es sinnlos fanden. Die SED hat alles beherrscht!”²³⁴

The second most given reason for not joining a political party was due to religious reasons. Given the SED’s anti-religious nature it seems natural that those active in their religious communities would find an aversion to joining the SED. Frau V. claimed that due to her religious beliefs she could not reconcile herself to joining the SED.²³⁵ These claims mirror Dagmar Semmelmann’s research results in Eisenhüttenstadt that there was an overall ideological and political distance between the Resettlers and the SED regime.²³⁶

Summary

²³³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²³⁴ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²³⁵ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²³⁶ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schawartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

It is significant to note that from the viewpoint of the interviewees, belonging to a nation-wide, state-controlled union was not part of their *politisches Leben* nor was their membership in a state-run mass organization aimed at bettering relations between GDR citizens and the Soviet Union. How could membership in these organizations not be seen as something political or part of the interviewees' political lives? It does seem that those Bessarabian Germans who experienced the flight and expulsions at 10-years old or younger (in other words, those who spent the majority of their lives in the GDR) demonstrated evidence of a GDR mentality - growing up in a regime where *everything* was political had created a perception where few things in the GDR were *actually* political. The majority of the Bessarabian German interviewees followed the general GDR trend of not being involved in a political party due to personal qualms with the SED regime or seeing it as futile due to the SED's control of all political activity in the GDR.

RELIGION

This sub-chapter will analyze Bessarabian German religious integration into the local cultures of the GDR and discuss the evolving importance that religion played in the lives of the interviewees during their years in the GDR. The attrition rate and why interviewees chose to leave their religions during this period will also be discussed.

Post-war Religious Landscape

At the end of WWII old Nazi governmental structures were obliterated and the churches stepped into this political vacuum²³⁷ as they were the only institutions in post-war Germany that had retained their personnel, properties and organizational structures.²³⁸ The churches served as a refuge and an anchor for the newly arrived Bessarabian Germans because they were the only organizations the Resettlers recognized, and consequently gravitated towards. The churches provided material aid in the form of clothing, food and other immediate physical necessities. The churches also provided emotional equilibrium and solace. As there was an official ban in the public transcript of the Soviet Zone regarding Resettlers discussing the horrors of the flight and expulsions, the churches provided a needed psychological outlet where Bessarabian Germans could safely speak with others about what they had experienced.²³⁹

Bessarabian Germans were overwhelmingly Protestant. The traditional Protestant lands of the Reformation and Martin Luther lent themselves, especially before the atheistic stances of the SED took hold, to function as a balm to the Bessarabian Germans. Due to their Protestantism, Bessarabian Germans had more in common with religiously-minded GDR locals than Catholic refugees and expellees. This situation created greater bonding opportunities with people living in the Soviet Zone²⁴⁰ and potential supplementary sources of aid. These conditions affected Bessarabian German integration as a group and individually.

²³⁷ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 151.

²³⁸ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 91.

²³⁹ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 70.

²⁴⁰ Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1931 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

The churches were not only a means of physical, mental and emotional help, but they also served as a sub-structure in the permitted public transcript of the GDR that allowed Bessarabian Germans to stay in touch and facilitate relationships with locals and people from Bessarabia. Herr G. who served in the GDR as a Protestant minister claimed that the churches were excellent ways of integrating Bessarabian Germans into local society. Herr G. reported that during religious festivals Bessarabian Germans had the chance to meet each other and share old Heimat customs such as music and stories.²⁴¹ Because the Resettlers could make new friendships with people with the same pre-war origins, the churches often became a piece of the old homeland in the GDR.

This reality affected Bessarabian German integration negatively and positively with locals depending on the individual Resettler. To some Bessarabian Germans the churches aided their psychological and material recovery from the traumas they had endured. This consequently allowed some interviewees the psychological option to move past these traumas and attempt to integrate into local societies. The opposite was also true. The aid and solace of the churches allowed other Bessarabian Germans to remain in their reconstructed, thoroughly Bessarabian German religious and social environments and impeded their integration into GDR society. Which result occurred depended largely upon the individual Resettler and their desires and actions in the hidden transcript of the GDR.

SED policies towards religiously-minded youth

²⁴¹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

For GDR citizens active in their particular religions it was better to avoid the SED as some policies in the Soviet Zone towards the churches between 1949 and 1961 were overtly contentious.²⁴² Officially the 1949 constitution of the German Democratic Republic guaranteed “volle Glaubens- und Gewissensfreiheit”,²⁴³ however in practice the SED launched massive persecutions against the churches before and after the ratification of the constitution. This persecution included taking religious instruction out of the schools and quasi-criminalizing religious activity. These efforts by the SED took their toll on people’s desire to participate in their respective religions.²⁴⁴ Those who hoped for a rechristianizing of post-war Germany were quickly disappointed²⁴⁵ as by the time the 1964 census occurred the number of non-religious GDR citizens had increased to 31.5% from only 6% in 1950.²⁴⁶ This trend continued and it would seem that the SED’s policies of atheistic secularization had brought about its desired results in that by the end of the GDR in 1990 approximately 12 million out of 16 million GDR citizens had not been baptized or considered themselves atheists.²⁴⁷

Religious Activity or lack thereof

Despite these concentrated efforts by the SED to attack GDR citizens’ religious beliefs, and the statistics show that these efforts were successful from an SED point of view, the majority of Bessarabian German interviewees reported that being active in their respective religions was not a matter for which they were persecuted at work or in local society. To the contrary, the

²⁴² Thomas Raabe, *SED-Staat und Katholische Kirche: Politische Beziehungen 1949-1961*, (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), p. 255.

²⁴³ <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/verfddr1949.html#41> (accessed: 07/09/2014)

²⁴⁴ Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 109.

²⁴⁵ Schwartz, *Vertriebene und Umsiedlerpolitik*, p. 545.

²⁴⁶ Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 103.

²⁴⁷ Raabe, p.157.

overwhelming majority of the interviewees reported that being active or not in their respective religion was a personal choice and not a situation where they felt forced to choose one way or another by the SED or locals.

This is especially revealing given the great pressure brought to bear on GDR citizens regarding religious activity in certain employment fields and regarding opportunities to study, as was the case for one Bessarabian German interviewee. Herr N. claimed that just as he felt forced to join the SED, he felt pressured into leaving his religion due to coercive efforts by local political officials. It is possible that his high-profile position as director of a mining technical university in Bitterfeld brought about the pressure.²⁴⁸ Herr N. was clearly the minority and the exception among the Bessarabian German interviewees.

Out of eleven interviewees one Bessarabian German reported having a Catholic background, while the others were Protestant. Six of the interviewees reported that either they had left their respective religion or they were not active in it. This result shows that the Bessarabian German interviewees had a significantly higher religious activity rate than the GDR norm.²⁴⁹ This serves as potential evidence for Bessarabian German resistance skills at work against the SED integrative actions towards atheism in the GDR.

Frau K. while not active in her church, and giving the impression that she did not believe personally, claimed that she held onto her church membership out of respect for her parents who

²⁴⁸ Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thüringen.

²⁴⁹ Raabe, p.157.

were so believing themselves.²⁵⁰ Frau A. claimed that she was simply not religious and that it was her choice not to be active in her church.²⁵¹ The clear majority of Bessarabian German interviewees who left their church or who were not active in their church claimed that this was their own personal decision rather than being forced on them by SED anti-religious policies.

Pushing Boundaries in the Public Transcript

Palmowski claimed that when one followed the rules of the public transcript in the GDR, one was given a hidden transcript to bring about, at times, very public results.²⁵² Frau V. described how for religious reasons she was not politically active. Frau V. worked within the confines of the public transcript regarding religion on behalf of her children. The GDR created a secular christening ceremony called the “Sozialistische Namensgebung”. This was a ceremony in which the child was given a name and where the child received 100 Marks as a gift. Frau V., claiming freedom of religion and equality as a GDR citizen, went to local authorities and demanded payment of 100 Marks for each of her children even though they had been baptized in a Protestant Church. Frau V. protested that the 100 Marks were an unfair privilege for those not belonging to a religion. The authorities acquiesced.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich camp in Saxony, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²⁵¹ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau A., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²⁵² Palmowski, p. 12-13.

²⁵³ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Frau V. worked within the confines of the public transcript in the GDR once again on behalf of one of her children. One of her sons wanted to study medicine and on religious grounds requested an exemption from the military draft. Studying medicine in the GDR rarely happened without military service. Frau V. pleaded her son's case before local SED authorities who rejected his request. She then went to the next level of authorities and so on until she won approval for her son not only to avoid military service, but to study medicine at the University of Rostock.²⁵⁴ This serves as evidence that those who were willing to fight within the confines of the public transcript in the GDR were able to achieve personal hidden transcript goals even if they seemed to contradict official SED policies.

DISCRIMINATION, ACCEPTANCE and SELF-IDENTIFICATION

In defining identity, Peter Wagner wrote:

In the social sciences the term 'identity' is used predominantly in two forms. As a shorthand for 'self-identity' or 'personal identity' it refers to a human being's consciousness of the continuity of her existence over time and of a certain coherence of her person, to a "subjective sense of continuous existence and a coherent memory." (Erikson, 1968: 61) The terms 'social' or 'collective identity' expand the idea and refer to a sense of selfhood of a collectivity, or the sense of a human being to belong to a collectivity of like people. 'Identity' then means 'identification' of oneself with others. A consciousness of sameness within a group implies the idea to be different from those who do not belong to this group. This phenomenon is currently discussed under terms such as alerity or

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

strangeness and the setting of boundaries between that which is one's own and that which is of others.²⁵⁵

Bessarabian German Resettlers often chose to follow the public transcript dictated by the SED regime. This included not publicly discussing the flight, the expulsions, horrors at the hands of Soviet troops and other negative experiences. But does government-enforced denial of one's identity change one's identity? Or was the situation with the Bessarabian Germans such that rather than a government-imposed change to their identities that modifications occurred by adopting local customs in the areas where they settled? Taking an interviewee's self-identification or claim of feeling part of GDR society as a possible indication of the depth and level of integration Bessarabian German Resettlers achieved, the following results were reported.

The majority of Bessarabian Germans claimed they were grossly discriminated against in the beginning of their sojourn in the Soviet Zone. They were often made to feel like outsiders and not welcome in local society. The interviewees reported that after several years of interactions with GDR locals a level of acceptance occurred. Frau W. claimed that she eventually did not feel like a foreigner in the Harz region as she had a large circle of friends. Frau W.'s acceptance by locals helped bring an end to her feelings of isolation and rejection.²⁵⁶ Frau A. in a neighboring village in the Harz region reported that she felt like an outsider, but that she was never discriminated against because of her status as a Resettler. Frau A. experienced a more superficial acceptance by locals in her community and thus, while the harsh treatment she

²⁵⁵ Peter Wagner, "Identity and Self-Hood as a Problematique", in Heidrun Friese (ed.), *Identities: Time, Difference and Boundaries*, (New York: Bergbahn Books, 2002), p. 35.

²⁵⁶ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

received at first after her arrival had stopped, an in-depth integration into local society had not occurred.²⁵⁷

Frau W. reported that, especially in the beginning, locals made her feel like she was “minderwertig”, but with time things got better. She further reported that she is still seen and considered as an outsider by locals. When referring to her in conversation locals in the Harz region say “sie kam damals”, emphasizing the foreign aspect of Frau W.’s identity among locals in Mansfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.²⁵⁸ This being the case however, the majority of Bessarabian German interviewees reported that after a period of harsh discrimination and prejudice from locals in the beginning, over time and through their interactions with locals, the negative treatment ceased. This change in Bessarabian Germans’ perception of being mistreated and eventually tolerated by locals made it possible, at least on a superficial level, to attempt to integrate into GDR society.

Through his interviews with native GDR residents Palmowski claimed that “the socialist heimat ideal helped the party secure its power, but never achieved the identity between the citizens and the state which the party so desired.”²⁵⁹ He additionally explained that “East Germans never appropriated the GDR as ‘their’ nation....they acknowledged publicly the public transcript, but privately never identified with the GDR, thus when the wall fell the ideal of a socialist heimat disappeared and the older, regional identifications remained.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau A., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²⁵⁸ Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1931 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²⁵⁹ Palmowski, p. 302.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

This tendency was also observed through this study's interviews with Bessarabian Germans. Three Bessarabian German interviewees could be said to have had a positive opinion of the GDR and had self-identified themselves as "GDR citizens", the rest mirrored the results of Dagmar Semmelmann's research involving Resettlers in Eisenhüttenstadt. Semmelmann found that the Resettlers had kept an "inner distance" ideologically and politically from the SED regime.²⁶¹ This inner distance with regards to the SED regime and its policies fostered in the majority of the Bessarabian German interviewees the preservation and continued attachment to their older, regional self-identifications as ethnic Germans in Bessarabia.

In addition to the effects this inner distance had among Bessarabian Germans, Ute Schmidt explained the role of informal sub-structures in the integration or lack thereof among Bessarabian German Resettlers:

Am Beispiel der Bessarabiendeutschen lässt sich zeigen, dass Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der DDR – trotz der Tabuisierung der Flüchtlingsthematik und von der DDR-Öffentlichkeit unbeachtet – informelle Substrukturen gebildet haben, die es ihnen ermöglichten, sich in diesen Asymmetrien nicht nur behaupten, sondern auch ihre kulturelle Identität zu wahren.²⁶²

The informal substructures that existed in the lives of the Bessarabian Germans, such as Heimat traditions and other cultural and social practices, had created "Grenzen der Diktatur". These limits of the dictatorship's influence allowed movement within the hidden transcript of the GDR depending on the active choices made by individual Bessarabian German Resettlers. These

²⁶¹ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schwartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

²⁶² Schmidt, in Hoffmann und Schwartz (Hrsg.), p. 320.

active choices about how to use informal sub-structures in the hidden transcript of the GDR encouraged, limited or stopped Bessarabian German integration on a personal and group level.

WHY DID THEY STAY?

The majority of the Bessarabian German interviewees remained attached to their older regional identities, and were often not pleased regarding SED policies towards Resettlers in general. This lack of enthusiastically adopting a GDR national identity and hostility at times towards the SED regime might cause one to ask: why did they stay in the GDR? Why did these interviewees not leave for West Germany like so many other Bessarabian Germans?

17 June 1953 was a turning point for many Resettlers in the GDR. Chronic material and housing shortages, a political strike being crushed by Soviet forces, little success with the Bodenreform movement and the SED treating Resettlers as Hitler's vengeful "fifth column"²⁶³ plagued GDR Resettlers. These negative circumstances combined with Resettlers' economic hopes with the passage in 1952 of the *Lastenausgleich* in West Germany, a law that "equalized" war burdens and allowed for compensation to be paid to refugees and expellees for war-time losses,²⁶⁴ that life would be better in the FRG. This belief led hundreds of thousands of Resettlers to flee the GDR.

They pointed out that just as the GDR was bringing its Resettler policies to a full stop, West Germany made greater aid available to the refugees and expellees in the form of monetary

²⁶³ von Plato, Meinicke and von Plato, p. 87.

²⁶⁴ Daniel Levy, "Integrating ethnic Germans in West Germany: the early postwar period", in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 27.

compensation, aid and political participation.²⁶⁵ From 1949 to 1961 approximately 2.75 million *Republikflüchtlinge* (former GDR residents who left and settled in West Germany) fled the GDR. Out of these 2.75 million former GDR residents approximately 30.5% or 838,300 were Resettlers.²⁶⁶

Given that approximately 838,000 Resettlers left the GDR between 1949 and 1961²⁶⁷ out of an estimated Resettler population of 4.3 million²⁶⁸ one can conclude that many were not content with life in the GDR. And yet, for all this negativity concerning their lives and circumstances in the GDR, the question still remains: why did the majority stay when so many others left? Despite the SED regime's failed efforts to help the Resettlers and their antagonistic stance towards refugees and expellees it seems that the majority found ways to "normalize" their lives in the GDR.

This normalization can be used as a potential indicator of the level of Bessarabian German interviewees' integration into GDR society. While life was extremely difficult and negative in the beginning, the interviewees reported that as time passed GDR locals began to treat them with greater respect, they had acquired material possessions and these circumstances created a "ganz normales Leben"²⁶⁹ that many interviewees were hesitant to abandon.

²⁶⁵ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 73.

²⁶⁶ Helge Heidemeyer, *Flucht und Zuwanderung aus der SBZ/DDR 1945/1949-1961: Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bis zum Bau der Berliner Mauer*, (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1994), p. 41-44.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41-44.

²⁶⁸ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 56.

²⁶⁹ Interview on 20/10/2008 with Frau T., born in 1925 in East Prussia, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.

When asked why they stayed in the GDR rather than fleeing to the FRG, only two Bessarabian interviewees gave answers that one might expect if one accepted the Totalitarian theory's explanation of the SED regime's interactions with GDR citizens. Herr S. claimed that he could not go West otherwise he would be shot²⁷⁰ and Herr G. countered that he stayed in the GDR because of the Berlin Wall in 1961.²⁷¹ This being the case, the majority of Bessarabian German interviewees gave answers that showed that they had attained a certain level of economic and social integration, at times on only a superficial level, in GDR society that convinced them to remain.

Frau L. claimed that she and her family remained in the GDR because their family and relatives were there. She also claimed that she did not want to leave because she had a job and had acquired property like furniture. She did not want to leave this security and start with nothing in West Germany again.²⁷² After years of experiencing the chaos of Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, war-time traumas and uncertainty after arriving in the Soviet Zone, Frau L. had acquired a level of material integration that made leaving seem ridiculous.

Frau W. and her family stayed in the GDR until 1950 waiting for their POW father to return from Soviet custody. After he returned Frau W. had a job, an income and felt "verheimatet". By the time her father returned from Soviet custody a level of social integration had occurred with locals to the point that leaving the GDR made no sense to her.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²⁷¹ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

²⁷² Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau L., born in 1928 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²⁷³ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

Frau A. stayed because she had married a local and her parents had found a permanent house in the Harz region.²⁷⁴ After the perpetual impermanence endured through the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, war-time experiences in Poland, the flight and difficulties after arriving in the Soviet Zone, a level of personal and financial integration with locals had occurred and Frau A. had no desire to give that up.

Frau W. stayed because she was married and then added that she and her Sudeten German husband had never thought about leaving for the West.²⁷⁵ Is it possible to live in the Harz region, so close to the FRG border, to never think about leaving the GDR? This situation was confirmed and quickly summarized by Herr N. when he said, “alles lief gut. Wir waren glücklich. Wir hatten keinen Grund abzuhausen.”²⁷⁶

Even religious Bessarabian German interviewees who were not always pleased with SED policies claimed, as Frau S. did, “wir haben gut gelebt und hatten alles was nötig war.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau A., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²⁷⁵ Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1931 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

²⁷⁶ Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thüringen.

²⁷⁷ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living near Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

CHAPTER TWO

BUCHENLAND or BUKOVINA GERMANS

The next Heimat group shares a similar background and history with the Bessarabian Germans. Bukovina is a region which is divided today between Romania and Ukraine.²⁷⁸ The area was part of the principality of Moldavia, but was later annexed by the Austrian Empire in 1775.²⁷⁹ Bukovina was sparsely populated like Bessarabia after the Turkish Wars. The Austrians encouraged the settlement of Bukovina by German immigrants from Baden, Hesse and today's Hungary and many spoke Swabian dialect.²⁸⁰ Herr K. reported that his ancestors from Württemberg settled in Bukovina in 1780.²⁸¹ These German immigrants along with Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Romanians and other ethnic groups helped rebuild Bukovina and made the capital city, Czernowitz into the multi-ethnic, tolerant "little Vienna" it was called.²⁸²

Bukovina's peace and prosperity of over 100 years was brusquely interrupted by WWI. Due to its strategic location, the Russians invaded Bukovina and conquered the area in 1914. The Russians were then repulsed in 1915, only to reconquer Bukovina in 1916. This situation ended

²⁷⁸ Hofbauer, in Hofbauer und Roman, p. 50.

²⁷⁹ Rudolf Wagner, *Die Bukowina und Ihre Deutschen*, (Wien: Österreichische Landsmannschaft, 1979), p. 5.

²⁸⁰ <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=56#buchenland> (accessed: 04/09/2014)

²⁸¹ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

²⁸² Hofbauer, in Hofbauer und Roman, p. 117-119.

with Russian withdrawal after the Russian Revolution of 1917.²⁸³ Due to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after WWI and its overwhelming ethnic Romanian population Bukovina was given to Romania by the Allies. The ethnic groups of Bukovina soon were victims of the Romanian government's "Romanization" policies in the 1920s just as the Bessarabian Germans.²⁸⁴ Romanization of the varied ethnic groups in Bukovina included the closing of all Ukrainian schools and changing the language of instruction in German public schools and the University of Czernowitz (which had been a German-language university) to Romanian.²⁸⁵

While there are many similarities between the Bukovina Germans and ethnic Germans of Bessarabia, one of the main differences between the two groups is that the Bukovina Germans had always been part of the dominant governance culture in Bukovina. While Bessarabian Germans had always been ruled by different ethnic groups, with different languages, cultures and religions from their own, the Bukovina Germans had lived in an Austrian imperial crown territory. Bukovina was directly governed by the Austrian emperor and his representatives and the language of governance was German. Being part of Bukovina's elite governing culture for almost two centuries had not necessitated the creation of resistance skill sets in Bukovina's ethnic Germans such as those developed by Bessarabian Germans. The Bukovina Germans had not been forced to look inward for solutions as they had always been able to look to Austrian imperial authorities for support and aid.

²⁸³ Wagner, p. 64.

²⁸⁴ <http://bukowinafreunde.de/geschichte.html> (accessed: 14/08/2014)

²⁸⁵ Wagner, p. 70-72.

This lack of resistance skills, combined with a general willingness to tolerate or live with other ethnic groups and religious groups, and the fact that Bukovina Germans supported Romanian annexation,²⁸⁶ resulted in a rather docile and conformist reaction to the Romanian government's "Romanization" policies. While ethnic Germans in Bukovina were not pleased with these policies, they did not vociferously protest either. This lack of resolve and ability to resist assimilative pressures affected Bukovina German integration into GDR society in that they were much more willing to conform to SED and local societal pressures in the public and hidden transcripts compared to Bessarabian Germans.²⁸⁷

Heim-ins-Reich Evacuations

In 1940 the Nazi regime's Heim-ins-Reich program came into full force in Bukovina just as it had in Bessarabia. The Bukovina Germans who numbered approximately 98,000 in 1940 were also evacuated through the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact to resettler camps in Germany and Austria.²⁸⁸ These evacuations were part of Hitler's *Generalplan Ost* to settle ethnic German warrior farmers throughout lands claimed and conquered throughout Central and Eastern Europe. These events and experiences are equally significant to Bukovina German integration in the GDR just as they had been for ethnic Germans from Bessarabia due to the similarities between these evacuations and the flight and expulsions. The abandonment of homes and belongings, the majority of Bukovina Germans were only allowed to take 50 kilos of luggage with them,²⁸⁹ was

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁸⁷ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

²⁸⁸ Koehl, p. 254

²⁸⁹ Wagner, p. 72-73.

also experienced a few years later by these same people during the flight and expulsions. The Heim-ins-Reich evacuations and related incidences are the beginning of the feelings of perpetual impermanence that many Bukovina Germans experienced throughout the war and their early years in the Soviet Zone. These feelings of fatigue and perpetual impermanence created in several Bukovina Germans a lack of desire to fight assimilative pressures in the GDR.

The Nazi regime had created its own liaison office for ethnic Germans, just as the SED would do years later, called the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*. This agency created a huge system of over 1500 camps out of Jewish sanatoria and other appropriated properties to house and care for the newly arrived Heim-ins-Reich Umsiedler or resettlers. Bukovina Germans would repeat this resettler camp experience five years later after their arrival in the Soviet Zone in ZVU Resettler camps. After the shock of having to leave their homeland, abandoning their belongings and the rigors of the evacuations, the Bukovina Germans arrived in the Nazi regime's resettler camps only to experience an intimidating and sometimes humiliating interview process.²⁹⁰

Ethnic Germans from the Baltic region, Bessarabia, Bukovina and other areas had to first prove their German identity to SS officers and other Nazi racial experts. It was unpleasant and disconcerting to have to prove one's identity to black uniformed officials who doubted your identity and ethnicity.²⁹¹ Bukovina Germans had to prove through documents and genealogical charts that they were indeed "Germans" according to the Nazi definition of the term and then subjected to a humiliating exam which one might perform on cattle or horses. Body proportions were measured; hair and eye color were noted; and general health through exams and X-rays was

²⁹⁰ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

determined. Bukovina Germans were then given qualifications in various degrees from IaM/I (very racially valuable) to IVC/3 (racial reject).²⁹²

Those Bukovina Germans who were declared racially valuable were then subjected to a political interview. They were asked several probing questions in order to ascertain their enthusiasm for the Nazi party and its policies, all the while local Nazi party leaders from Bukovina sat by to confirm if resettlers' answers were true. Those resettlers who did not pass the political interview were given a grade of "A" meaning *Altreich*. This meant that they were not politically reliable and had to be settled in Germany or Austria. Those who were considered trustworthy were given a grade of "O" or *Ost* and were to be settled in Eastern Europe. These people were to receive a total compensation for their losses in Bukovina, including land, tools, houses and other properties.²⁹³ These resettlers did not always know that their compensation would come at the expense of Jews or Polish people.²⁹⁴

After experiencing the rigors of the evacuations and the humiliation and intimidation of their arrival, Bukovina Germans then settled into resettler camp life in tents, barracks and other impermanent shelters throughout Germany and Austria. This sojourn was often negative and interminable in that Bukovina Germans were often in these camps for several years²⁹⁵ due to the chaos of the war years. These negative experiences and the length of time they lasted had great impacts on the energy, desire and drive of Bukovina Germans to resist SED assimilative policies in the GDR.

²⁹² Koehl, p. 105-106.

²⁹³ Koehl, p. 105-106.

²⁹⁴ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

²⁹⁵ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

Once a Bukovina German was considered sufficiently Aryan and a farm was found for them to own and work, they were transported to claim and work these confiscated farms in Poland. Frau S. reported that she and her family were shocked, as they had not known that the Bukovina Germans would be compensated with stolen properties, when they found out that the home they were given to live in had been confiscated from a Jewish family.²⁹⁶

Humiliation at the hands of Nazi representatives continued. Frau S. reported that when she first arrived at school her teacher walked up to her, took out Frau S.'s earrings and said "eine deutsche Frau trägt keine Ohrringe." This example is included to show that while in Poland Bukovina Germans' "otherness" and cultural peculiarities came under attack, just as they would later in the GDR. The Nazi regime attempted to change Bukovina Germans' identities and cultural customs in order to make them more "German". These experiences of humiliation and embarrassment regarding their cultural peculiarities were later repeated after their arrival in the Soviet Zone. While Bukovina Germans may have had the energy and drive to resist these attempts to change their identities and culture in Poland, after the horrors of the war, flight and expulsion, this energy to resist was exhausted by the time they arrived in the Soviet Zone. This emotional and mental fatigue to fight assimilative pressure later had huge impacts on Bukovina Germans' integration into GDR society.

After being on the move due to the evacuations from Bukovina and then life in temporary barracks in resettler camps, Bukovina Germans' lives became further complicated and difficult after arriving in Poland. Because Heim-ins-Reich resettlers had been given confiscated farms

²⁹⁶ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

and houses by Nazi authorities, Bukovina Germans were often the targets of Polish partisan attacks. As the situation became more tenuous due to Polish partisan attacks and the chaos of the war years, several Bukovina Germans were consequently evacuated by Nazi officials to the Sudetenland and other areas for their safety.²⁹⁷ This is of particular importance when considering the integration of Bukovina Germans into GDR society, as these evacuations were one more upheaval and source of despair in the lives of Bukovina German interviewees.

A more personal and individual example of what many Bukovina Germans endured was what Herr W. reported about his family's experiences. Herr W. was born in 1930 in Czernowitz, Bukovina. His family lived by the airport in Czernowitz and witnessed the landing of Soviet planes in summer 1940. He and his family were sent by train to a Heim-ins-Reich resettler camp in Silesia where they lived for one year. After their stay in the camp they were given a farm appropriated from its Polish owners near Posen. He attended secondary school in Leczno, but in January 1945 they received orders to evacuate. They left with their horse-drawn wagons in -20 Celsius and joined, in Herr K.'s words, the "100-Kilometer lange Schlange" of the refugee Treks from Poland and Pomerania heading in the direction of Berlin. Herr W. and other refugees arrived on the outskirts of Berlin to realize that the city was being bombarded on a daily basis. Nazi authorities organized the housing of the refugees in the surrounding communities. Herr W. and his family remained in the community where he finished his schooling and found work after the war.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

Just as with many of the Bessarabian Germans, Herr W. and other Bukovina Germans had experienced one psychological trauma after another. By the time the Bukovina Germans arrived in the Soviet Zone in 1945 they had essentially been transient, unsure and insecure for the majority of the previous five years. The emotional and mental upheaval of the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, being treated like cattle in Nazi resettler camps, living in tents, living on farms that they knew did not belong to them, having father or brothers drafted into the German military, being attacked by Polish partisans, being evacuated to safety zones and the chaos of the flight and expulsions all took their toll. All of these events Bukovina Germans had lived through prior to 1945 had huge negative psychological impacts on their mental and emotional state. This reality then translated into a lack of desire to fight SED assimilative pressures and consequently quickened Bukovina German integration into GDR society.²⁹⁹

ARRIVAL and SETTLEMENT

From the original 98,000 Bukovina Germans who left Bukovina in 1940 approximately 15,000 perished due to fighting in the war as soldiers, fleeing the Soviet army as civilians or being killed by Polish partisans.³⁰⁰ Those who survived arrived to the chaos of the post-war Soviet Zone just as the Bessarabian Germans did.

²⁹⁹ Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

³⁰⁰ <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=56#buchenland> (accessed: 04/09/2014)

According to Philipp Ther, the Soviet Zone suffered the greatest out of all Occupation zones³⁰¹ due to its proximity to the expulsion areas. The Soviet Zone was often the first point of contact refugees and expellees had with Occupied Germany. This meant that the Soviet and SED authorities had to provide food, clothing, help finding loved ones and other governmental programs for millions of people despite their final destination. The stress on Soviet Zone resources and supplies soon became overwhelming.

As reported previously regarding the Bessarabian Germans, Soviet and SED authorities created the ZVU or Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler to care for the newly arrived Resettlers. Bukovina Germans arrived to a similar situation that they had experienced just five years prior – chaos, a government agency charged with the care of Resettlers, life in temporary shelters including barracks and tents and no clear indication about what they were to do or where they should go. Due to its proximity to expulsion areas, Brandenburg was the arrival point for many Bukovina Germans.³⁰² In 1945 the ZVU had created 84 Resettler camps in Brandenburg with a capacity to care for 128,000 people.³⁰³

After their arrival in ZVU camps, Bukovina Germans were identified, deloused and exposed to Soviet and SED propaganda about the positive attributes of life in the Soviet Zone and encouraged to remain. This repetition of their earlier experiences in Nazi resettler camps, the perpetual impermanence of the previous five years and the prospect of potentially having to

³⁰¹ Ther, in Rock and Wolff, p. 56.

³⁰² Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁰³ BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 203 MdI, Nr. 1166, „Historisches Bericht über die Arbeit in der Umsiedlerbewegung von 1945 – Mai 1948 im Land Brandenburg, 1948“, Bl. 1.

suffer through similar circumstances in the Soviet Zone left Bukovina Germans with very little resolve or desire to integrate into local society or to fight SED assimilative policies.

Just as with the Bessarabian Germans, life did not get easier for the Bukovina Germans after they left the ZVU camps. Housing was still a major concern due to the great shortage of suitable housing in the Soviet Zone. Finding immediate employment was also difficult. This was a great concern for Bukovina Germans and other Resettlers as often a requirement for receiving SBZ food ration coupons, if one was healthy, was to have a job. The desperate employment situation and great hunger of the times necessitated Bukovina Germans taking jobs that they normally would not want to have. Herr K. reported how his family was so destitute and hungry after their arrival in the Soviet Zone that simply for the sake of receiving food ration coupons he and his father took a job for one year digging up German and Russian soldiers buried in various mass graves and then reburying them in separate cemeteries in Brandenburg.³⁰⁴ Once this job finished, Herr K. and his father then worked for food ration coupons as part of logging teams in Brandenburg. The cut trees were then sent to the Soviet Union as war reparations.

The majority of Bukovina German interviewees expressed that they were victims of discrimination and negative treatment by locals after their arrival in the Soviet Zone.³⁰⁵ As reported previously with the Bessarabian Germans, scarcity of food, housing and SED-enforced quartering of Resettlers in SBZ locals' homes created negative impressions, perceptions and feelings towards the Bukovina Germans. Another factor that exacerbated the relationship between locals and the Bukovina Germans was the belief that the new arrivals were non-German

³⁰⁴ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³⁰⁵ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

arrivals such as Roma or Poles. Bukovina Germans were easily distinguished by their accent³⁰⁶ and their liberal use of Swabian dialect. This situation increased locals' prejudices against the Bukovina Germans and their possible Soviet origins. After hearing Herr K.'s parents speaking Swabian dialect in public, locals in Brandenburg rudely and publicly exclaimed, "Was für Kosaken sind die!"³⁰⁷

This perception by locals of the Bukovina Germans' strangeness and foreign roots was further cemented when the new arrivals insisted on practicing Heimat customs or dressing in their native Bukovina German outfits. Herr W. reported that locals in his community on the outskirts of Berlin thought it strange when Herr W.'s mother would go to market and do tasks around town wearing a basket on her head rather than using a bag of some kind.³⁰⁸ In Bukovina all women transported food and other items in baskets on their heads. However, in Brandenburg her cultural norms were seen as strange. The public practice of Heimat customs reinforced the idea held by some in the Soviet Zone of the strangeness and non-German identity of these new arrivals and this situation consequently affected Bukovina Germans' acceptance by local communities.

Denazification

Denazification or the removal of former Nazi party members from public employment and at times the confiscation of these people's homes and properties³⁰⁹ also impacted the lives of

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³⁰⁸ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁰⁹ Hermann Weber, *Die DDR: 1945-1990*, (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000), p. 10.

Bukovina German interviewees. Frau S. reported that her father who had not been a member of the Nazi party was assigned to work as a judge in Potsdam, Brandenburg in a position that had been emptied due to the Denazification process.³¹⁰

Due to the wholesale removal of former Nazi party members from government, teaching and other public employment the Resettlers benefited greatly when the SED began to refill these positions.³¹¹ Frau S. reported that because so many teachers during the war had been members of the Nazi party that after their removal through the Denazification process there was a huge shortage of teachers in the Soviet Zone. The SED created an accelerated teacher qualification program for the *Neulehrer* or New Teachers in order to fill the thousands of vacancies. Frau S. completed her New Teacher program in 1949 and by 1950 more than one-third of teachers in the GDR had originated from Resettler Heimat regions.³¹² This program is of particular interest regarding the integration of Frau S. and Resettlers as a whole as teaching was the most commonly reported employment area by interviewees regardless of Heimat origin.

Bodenreform

An additional significant effect of the Denazification process was how previous Nazi party membership or involvement with Nazi party organizations affected one's ability to participate in the SED's Bodenreform program. Herr K. reported that due to his father's membership in the Nazis' *Sturmabteilung* that their family was denied a Bodenreform parcel. This is of particular interest regarding Herr K. and other Resettlers' integration into GDR society who found

³¹⁰ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³¹¹ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 78.

³¹² Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

themselves in the same predicament. Although Resettlers' experiences in the Bodenreform later were often negative, in the chaos of the post-war Soviet Zone the Bodenreform program did create an opportunity and goal for many Resettlers to focus on. The inability of being able to receive a Bodenreform parcel forced some Resettlers to remain in the desperate, insecure situation of the time and limited their employment options. The exclusion of Herr K. and his family from the Bodenreform movement is potentially why after his arrival in the Soviet Zone he was often consigned to difficult menial jobs, such as digging up German and Russian soldiers out of mass graves and cutting down trees as war reparations.³¹³

One of the great differences between the Bessarabian German interviewees and the Bukovina German interviewees is their lack of involvement in the Bodenreform program. While Herr W. did report there were several Resettlers he knew from his stay in Poland who had received Bodenreform parcels, not one of the Bukovina Germans interviewed for this project were involved in the Bodenreform movement. While possible reasons for this situation could be that several Bukovina German interviewees, such as Herr W., were born and raised in urban centers in Bukovina and thus had no experience in agriculture³¹⁴ or that the majority of interviewees for this project lived in East Berlin and hence found employment in non-agricultural fields, it is of tremendous interest that an SED program that had huge effects on Resettler integration played no part in Bukovina German interviewees' lives in the GDR.

Government Aid

³¹³ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³¹⁴ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

One of the most significant results from speaking with Bukovina Germans was that only one interviewee reported that they or their family had received any aid from the government. Frau K. reported that she and her family received items from the local mayor in Aue, Saxony who had organized a collection drive for the Resettlers in his community. She said that everyday items such as dishes, cookery and old clothing were distributed to her family after this effort.³¹⁵ Other than Frau K.'s experience there is absolutely no memory of any help from the SED regime towards the Bukovina German interviewees.

This result is revealing concerning Bukovina Germans' memories and potential opinions at the time towards SED officials. The various government programs and events organized to alleviate Resettler suffering including coupons for clothing and other necessities, interest-free loans specifically created for Resettlers to buy needed items or build their own homes or the ZVU's "Umsiedlerwoche" or region-wide collection drives for the Resettlers, were not remembered or experienced by Bukovina German interviewees. When asked during the interviews whether or not they knew of the existence of the Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler or ZVU, all Bukovina German interviewees claimed they had never heard of it. This perception of abandonment by the government and being responsible for their own survival compounded the fatigue and psychological traumas the Bukovina Germans had endured during the previous five years. This reality negatively affected their desires to integrate into GDR society and to resist SED assimilative pressures.

LIFE CYCLES

³¹⁵ Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

In 1945 the average Bukovina German interviewee was 16-years old. While this made them slightly older than the Bessarabian German interviewees, the Bukovina Germans also still had many life events to experience in the GDR. This sub-chapter will analyze the educational and employment experiences and the marriage, divorce and familial life cycles of Bukovina German interviewees in the GDR. These factors will be used to demonstrate the level of personal and group integration in these areas. These and other questions of Bukovina German Resettlers' everyday life experiences in the GDR and their effects on integration are not discussed in the secondary literature.

Education

The educational experiences of most of the interviewees began in Bukovina. Frau K. completed seven years in a Romanian state school and then completed one year of an apprenticeship as a seamstress. When the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations began in 1940 Frau K. was forced to abandon her apprenticeship and never completed it.³¹⁶ Frau W. completed 8th class in Bukovina and would have liked to have continued, but her educational progress was stopped also due to the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations.³¹⁷ For those Bukovina Germans who attended primary or secondary school in Bukovina several reported obstacles to finishing their education later on due to the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, life in Resettler camps, war-time shortages in Poland and due to the horrors of the flight and expulsions. Just as these situations had affected Bessarabian German interviewees, the disruptions in Bukovina Germans' educational progress affected their

³¹⁶ Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

³¹⁷ Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

employment opportunities in the Soviet Zone and feelings of self-worth. These negative factors in their lives later affected their willingness to resist assimilative pressures in local society.

Bukovina German interviewees reported having missed one or two years of schooling in general, much like the Bessarabian Germans. This is revealing as many interviewees felt that the closing of their schools and their consequently limited education negatively impacted their early years in the Soviet Zone. Herr H.'s secondary education was disrupted by the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations and his life in a Nazi Heim-ins-Reich resettler camp in Silesia. After the resettler camp interview process, Herr H.'s family was deemed not acceptable to settle in Poland and was given a farm to work in Pomerania instead. Herr H.'s father had no agricultural background and did not like being forced to work as a farmer. Even though there were several reasons for Herr H.'s decision to voluntarily join the German army, one of them was so that his father and family would be permitted to move from their farm in to the city of Posen. Due to the disruptions in Herr H.'s education, after the war he had no Abitur or other educational qualifications. Because of this situation his employment opportunities were limited and he was forced to work in the mines of the Wismut region for the following 27 years. Herr H.'s health deteriorated due to this job and it was only after severe asthma and lung infections that he was allowed to move away and find employment near Berlin.³¹⁸ Herr H.'s life demonstrates how the disruptions in his education during the war years limited his employment options and negatively affected his health and welfare in the GDR. These experiences further weakened Herr H.'s resolve to resist assimilative pressures in local GDR society as he later claimed Brandenburg as his home as opposed to Bukovina.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Interview on 12/09/2008 with Herr H., born in 1925 in Bukovina, living near Berlin.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

Frau S. is another example of how the normal educational progress of many Bukovina Germans was disrupted. Frau S. reported that her primary school in Romania had a children's organization similar to the Hitler Youth. Frau S.'s father was a socialist and anti-Nazi, so he sent Frau S. to a convent school rather than expose her to pro-Nazi propaganda. Frau S. reported that due to the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, her life in resettler camps, violence in Poland at the hands of partisans, evacuation to Sudetenland for safety and the subsequent expulsion by Czech authorities in May 1945 that she had lost two years of secondary schooling. Frau S. reported that in August 1945 all children were ordered to return to school. Her teachers, who were members of the SPD and KPD, were extremely dedicated to her and the other students. They ran several classrooms in three shifts throughout the day in a partially destroyed building and helped Frau S. achieve her Abitur in 1948. While Frau S. was very grateful for her teachers' help and accomplishment, this example is revealing as Frau S. completed her Abitur when she was 20-years old. This is almost a full three years after the average age of those who complete their Abitur and shows how the traumatic events during the war affected several Bukovina Germans' lives in the GDR. Frau S.'s experiences also showed the integrative effects of positive interactions with GDR locals and government programs. Frau S. was one of the interviewees in this study who spoke in overwhelmingly positive terms about life in the GDR and the programs the SED initiated to help GDR citizens.³²⁰

The rest of the Bukovina Germans could be said to have just moved on despite their educational handicaps. Frau K. and Frau W. both reached the beginning of a secondary education, but due to the troubles of the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations and other war-time situations, left their

³²⁰ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

secondary schooling behind and simply followed their life vocations.³²¹ The same can be said of Herr K. and Herr M. whose education was disrupted by the war and thus were forced to complete apprenticeships rather than go onto secondary school. Herr M. began his apprenticeship as a clockmaker a full four years after the average apprentice due to the disruptions of the war years³²² and Herr K. completed his apprenticeship as a cinema technician a full two years after the average apprentice.³²³ Herr W. completed the 10th class two years after the average GDR teenager, however because of the destitute situation his family experienced in the GDR, and had lived in for many years prior to 1945, Herr W. chose to enter the police force in order to help his family.³²⁴

Secondary Education and Abitur

Just as with the Bessarabian Germans, only one Bukovina German interviewee reported receiving their Abitur or secondary leaving certificate. Frau S. received her Abitur and through her participation in the SED's New Teachers' program was the only Bukovina German interviewee who reported having attended university or taking part in further educational programs.³²⁵ With only seven Bukovina Germans interviewees it is difficult to make generalizations, but when comparing Bukovina German and Bessarabian German interviewees, the Bukovina Germans' energy and motivations to study and achieve seemed to have been much more affected by the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations, flight and expulsions than Bessarabian Germans. The need to excel and outshine SBZ locals was entirely lacking in the interviews with

³²¹ Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³²² Interview on 29/08/2008 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³²³ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³²⁴ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³²⁵ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

Bukovina Germans. The Bukovina German interviewees and their families seemed much more tired and simply wanted the perpetual impermanence in their lives since 1940 to cease. They seemed much more willing to accept what life in the GDR offered rather than trying to actively create results within the hidden transcript of the GDR as the Bessarabian Germans. They did use informal sub-structures in the hidden transcript of the GDR to keep some elements of their Heimat identity and culture alive, but overall they accepted the GDR as the paradigm in which they had to live and lacked the Bessarabian German interviewees' need to maintain outward signs of their separate nature in GDR society. The Bukovina Germans were much more willing to conform.

The handicaps that the majority of the Bukovina Germans reported regarding their education compounded their already existing psychological fatigue. This reality created a situation in which the Bukovina Germans were willing to conform and accept the limited employment options most were given, even though they were not personally pleased with the circumstances. Bukovina Germans, lacking the resistance skill sets that the Bessarabian Germans had created and developed over 125 years under Russian and Romanian administrations, were simply pleased with what they had in the GDR – a job, food, a home, friends and family.

Employment

One can see further evidence of the effects of war-time disruptions in Bukovina Germans' education due to the eclectic and non-academic nature of the majority of the interviewees'

employment fields. After completing her secondary education, Frau S. was very hungry and in a desperate situation as she could not find work. Frau S. eventually found a job in Wittenberge, Brandenburg helping dismantle a factory. The factory pieces were sent back to the Soviet Union as war reparations and Frau S. reported that she worked there because of the warm food the Soviets gave the workers. Frau S. was extremely happy and grateful as a few months later she was accepted into the New Teachers' program as it provided an escape from her desperate circumstances. She began her program in December 1948 and completed study programs in mathematics, natural science and other areas. She reported that most of the New Teachers only had completed primary school due to war-time disruptions in their educations. She received a provisional teaching position and for the next four years completed courses to receive her full teaching qualification through a distance-learning program.³²⁶

Herr K. had completed an apprenticeship through the FDJ as a tractor driver. He was forced, he reported he had no choice in the matter, to go to a small town in Brandenburg and work on a collectivized farm for three years as a tractor driver. It was there that he heard about an opportunity to become a cinema technician. Herr K. completed his apprenticeship as a cinema technician and worked near Schönwalde, Brandenburg until changes brought about after 1990 ended his career.³²⁷

Frau W. reported that she remained a housewife due to her husband's high salary as a physician in East Berlin.³²⁸ Frau K. worked her entire employed life in the GDR as a seamstress.³²⁹ Herr

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³²⁸ Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³²⁹ Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

M. worked as an independent clockmaker and jewelry repairman in the GDR³³⁰ and Herr W. completed an apprenticeship in film production and worked in film studios in Adlershof until changes after the Wende forced him to retire.³³¹

While Stalinization in the GDR affected the economic direction and lives of millions of Resettlers in the areas of industrial and agricultural production, this movement seemed to have not affected the lives of the majority of the Bukovina German interviewees directly. They were able to find their own eclectic little niches in the GDR workforce and continued in these areas until 1990 or their retirements.

Marriage and Divorce

Other areas of the Resettlers' life cycles in the GDR that are almost never discussed in the secondary literature are those that involve family, specifically marriage, divorce rates and the number of children the interviewees had in the GDR. Taking these factors as potential indicators of Bukovina German integration into GDR society the following was reported.

All Bukovina German interviewees married or found "life partners" during their lives in the GDR. A significant difference between Bukovina Germans and Bessarabian German interviewees was, even though two Bukovina Germans later divorced their local spouses and married fellow Resettlers, all other Bukovina German interviewees married local SBZ residents. This is of particular significance as it could potentially explain why Bukovina Germans were

³³⁰ Interview on 29/08/2008 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³³¹ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

more willing to integrate into GDR society and cultures. Marrying locals provided Bukovina Germans with many more integrative experiences compared to Bessarabian German interviewees. Having a local spouse, being surrounded by local GDR cultures and then having children who were acculturated as GDR citizens, could explain why so many Bukovina German interviewees were willing, while still preserving partial Bukovina German identities and cultural practices, to cooperate with SED assimilative measures in the hidden and public transcripts of the GDR.

While two Bukovina German interviewees divorced and later remarried, and with only seven Bukovina German interviewees it is difficult to make generalizations, the majority of the Bukovina Germans showed a tendency to remain married rather than divorcing. This result is revealing once again due to the large number of divorces in Occupied Germany after the war and even more especially when taking into account how prevalent divorce was later in the GDR.³³² Bukovina German interviewees remained married when surrounded by divorcing couples. This reality, especially given that the majority of Bukovina Germans were married to locals, created a multitude of opportunities for integrative interactions with locals in GDR society. However, taking advantage of these integrative opportunities in the public and hidden transcripts of the GDR, just as in the case with Bessarabian Germans, depended on the individual Bukovina German interviewee's desires and motivations.

Children

³³² Mertens, p. 14.

The average birth rate in the GDR was 2.5 children in 1952 and fell to two children by 1970.³³³ Bukovina Germans who reported the number of children they and their partners had fell directly within the GDR average. As previously discussed, the number of children people had in the GDR often coincided with resources available to care for and raise these children.³³⁴ The result showing that Bukovina German interviewees fell within the GDR average serves as potential evidence that they, like the Bessarabian Germans, had attained a level of financial and material integration approximating that of the average GDR citizen.

HEIMAT PRACTICES and CULTURAL PECULIARITIES

The Germanic understanding of the term “Heimat” became much more than simply meaning the place where one was born. Due to constant territorial and political changes throughout the 19th and 20th centuries “Heimat” began to represent safety, protection and belonging in an uncertain world.³³⁵ The SED attempted through cultural and social activities on a national and local level to create a new Heimat that GDR citizens would claim as their own.³³⁶

Palmowski found through his research project and interviews that an internalization of this Heimat concept did not occur among GDR natives. Through this study regarding GDR Resettlers, the same condition was also found among Bessarabian Germans. Through their use of informal sub-structures in the hidden and public transcripts of the GDR, Bessarabian German

³³³ <http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms> (accessed: 30/07/2014)

³³⁴ Mertens, p. 14.

³³⁵ Palmowski, p. 4.

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

interviewees maintained and developed cultural and social ties based on their Bessarabian heritage. This situation was very different for Bukovina German interviewees.

Lacking the resistance skill sets that Bessarabian Germans had developed under Russian and Romanian governments and combining this with Bukovina German fatigue from their war-time experiences and their overwhelming patterns of marrying locals, created a situation where the Bukovina Germans were much less willing to reject the GDR as their new home.

It must be noted that despite this general acceptance of the GDR as their new Heimat, the Bukovina Germans also utilized informal sub-structures such as cooking traditional foods for their GDR-born children, making special trips back to Bukovina and telling their GDR-born children about their lives in Bukovina. However, lacking the resistance skill sets and experiences of the Bessarabian Germans, Bukovina German interviewees treated Heimat cultural practices more like old hobbies they participated in from time to time, rather than a concerted effort as in the case of Bessarabian German interviewees to maintain their Heimat practices and identity.

An interesting example of the differences between Bukovina German interviewees and those from Bessarabia involves two examples discussed previously. Frau V. from Bessarabia claimed that locals believed they were Russians because of her mother's inability to speak High German and her constant use of Swabian dialect. This reaction, and its consequent effects on their integration, did not concern Frau V. or her mother.³³⁷

³³⁷ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Herr K. reported that locals in Brandenburg after hearing his parents speaking in Swabian dialect exclaimed, “Was für Kosaken sind die!” This event shocked and troubled Herr K.’s parents so much that they mutually decided to never speak in Swabian dialect in public again. Herr K. said that publicly his parents did all they could to hide their Bukovina identities and cultural practices. Their goal was to fit in with locals and to avoid unwanted attention. Herr K. also gave the impression that while his mother still made traditional foods for her family, his parents in their private life at home did not perpetuate their Bukovina identity and cultural practices. The desire to fit in and not stand out had affected their use of cultural practices in their own public and private transcripts.³³⁸

While this reality was reported by several Bukovina German interviewees it must also be noted that Bukovina Germans continued Heimat practices within the hidden transcript of the GDR; they were just more muted about it compared to the Bessarabian Germans. When discussing ways in which they kept Heimat traditions alive Bukovina German interviewees spoke about foods from Bukovina and how they continued to make them for their families in the GDR. Herr W. reported that his mother continued to make different types of Bukovina dumplings as well as a dish called *Haluschke* which consisted of a cabbage leaf being filled with meat, rice and onions.³³⁹ Frau W. made *Mamaliga* or maize polenta throughout the GDR era and made sure that the traditional dinner of carp was eaten for Easter and braided bread and Borscht was available for her family on Christmas.³⁴⁰ Frau S. also made Borscht and Mamaliga for her GDR-

³³⁸ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³³⁹ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁴⁰ Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

born children and also made sure that traditional Bukovina eggs were available at Easter as well as dishes using eggplant – commonplace in Bukovina, but a luxury in the GDR.³⁴¹

The transfer of Bukovina German culinary traditions occurred in the GDR just as they had with the Bessarabian German interviewees. Herr K., who like the majority of the Bukovina Germans had married a local GDR resident, reported that his mother taught his wife how to make traditional Bukovina versions of Borscht, Haluschke, Piroggen and other types of dumplings.³⁴²

This information is included as it demonstrates how using informal sub-structures, such as cooking Heimat foods, Bukovina German Resettlers were able to circumvent official bans on the propagation of Resettler culture and continue to transmit their heritage to their GDR-born children. While the Bukovina Germans also used food as a piece of “mobile Heimat”, it must be stressed that the propagation of Bukovina German was often more muted when compared to Bessarabian German interviewees. Bukovina Germans wanted to at the very least adapt and hide within GDR society when Bessarabian Germans did not care if they were similar to SBZ locals or not, just as they had done in Bessarabia. This desire to fit in rather than stand out of course quickened the, at least, partial assimilation of the majority of Bukovina German interviewees by local GDR cultures.

Heimat Gatherings

³⁴¹ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁴² Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

Within the public transcript of the GDR all Heimat meetings were banned. While most Bukovina Germans had more trepidation about their use of informal sub-structures within the hidden transcript by having private, unofficial Heimat meetings when compared to Bessarabian Germans, they still did manage to maintain relationships and some cultural practices with fellow Bukovina Germans.

Herr W. claimed that while they knew Heimat meetings were illegal, he had Bukovina German relatives in Thuringia that they visited often. He also reported that Bukovina Germans had methods of finding fellow Bukovina German Resettlers and in essence any gathering became a muted Bukovina German celebration of the Heimat.³⁴³ Frau K. reported that she and other Bukovina German Resettlers were often afraid to have Heimat gatherings, but that they did find each other at birthday parties and other gatherings.³⁴⁴

One of the advantages to living in East Berlin or so close to Berlin was that the majority of Bukovina Germans knew about the huge Heimat meetings allowed in the public transcript of West Berlin.³⁴⁵ Frau S. added that after the building of the Berlin Wall, Bukovina Germans in the GDR then found each other and were able to be together during birthday parties and other gatherings.³⁴⁶

Visiting Bukovina

³⁴³ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁴⁴ Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

³⁴⁵ Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁴⁶ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

Herr W. reported how he visited Bukovina in 1980. The condition of Czernowitz at the time was so depressing that he said “Ich bleibe hier nicht!” and left. He never returned.³⁴⁷ Herr K. had the same kind of negative experience when he and his daughter travelled to Bukovina. Herr K. reported that the Soviets had burned down all the Bukovina German homes in his hometown of Illischeti. He saw that his old Protestant church had been converted by the Romanians into an Orthodox church. While Herr K. said that he was happy his daughter could see where he was born and where their ancestors had lived, Herr K. reported that it was a sad and somber experience.³⁴⁸

The results from the interviews about Bukovina Germans’ maintenance and propagation of Heimat cultural practices showed that Bessarabian German Resettlers were much more defiant in resisting SED assimilative pressures to accept a new “GDR socialist Heimat”³⁴⁹ than the Bukovina Germans. While the Bukovina German interviewees used similar informal substructures in the hidden transcript as the Bessarabian Germans, such as the continued use of Bukovina cuisine and holiday customs, the utilization of these cultural practices was more along the lines of an occasional hobby that Bukovina Germans took part in rather an energetic focus of their lives. The mental fatigue of the war years, the lack of resistance skill sets and their marriages with locals made the Bukovina German interviewees much less willing to fight SED assimilative pressures.

POLITICS

³⁴⁷ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁴⁸ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³⁴⁹ Palmowski, p. 26-27.

With only seven Bukovina Germans interviewed it is difficult to make broad generalizations, but as a whole the Bukovina German interviewees demonstrated how negative experiences under the Nazi regime and the fatigue from the post-war period affected their political beliefs and desire to participate in GDR political life. This sub-chapter will examine Bukovina German interviewees' political integration into GDR society and involvement in mass organizations such as the FDGB, DSF and the factors that convinced them to join a political party or to avoid them.

State-Run organizations

Herr K. like the majority of the Bukovina German interviewees reported joining the Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaft Bund and Gesellschaft für Deutsche-Sowjetische Freundschaft. Just as with the majority of Bessarabian Germans, the Bukovina Germans reported that joining these SED mass organizations was not an exercise of their political desires and wishes, but was simply a part of their lives in the GDR.³⁵⁰ Frau S. reported how, even though she was not a member of the Freie Deutsche Jugend, she had joined the DSF. Frau S. gave the impression that joining the DSF and other mass organizations was simply part of life in the GDR, rather than an exercise of her political beliefs.³⁵¹

There was some resistance among Bukovina Germans to the SED's pressure to join these mass organizations. Frau K. reported that she refused to join the DSF because she considered the Soviets as those responsible for casting her out of her homeland. This information serves as evidence as to how the negative experiences of the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations and war years

³⁵⁰ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³⁵¹ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

could affect Resettlers' political beliefs and activity in the GDR. This situation consequently affected Frau K.'s political integration into GDR society and even her financial well-being as she never received the financial reward given to GDR workers who belonged to the DSF.³⁵²

Results reported through interviews with Bukovina Germans and Palmowski's study showed a tendency of the majority of GDR citizens to be superficially integrated in the political processes of the GDR, but that privately they had not internalized socialist principles, such as genuine involvement in the FDGB or DSF.

Resettler Activity in Political Parties – or lack thereof

With only seven interviewees it is difficult to make generalizations about Bukovina Germans' political lives in the GDR, but two interviewees reported that they had been members of the SED; the others were not members of a political party. This result shows the potential that Bukovina Germans were slightly more likely to have belonged to a political party than the average GDR citizen.³⁵³

Why interviewees joined the SED

The motivations reported by the two Bukovina Germans who joined the SED differed from the two Bessarabian Germans who joined the SED in that these two interviewees truly believed in socialism. The Bessarabian German interviewees reported being coerced to join the SED due to

³⁵² Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

³⁵³ <http://www.ddr-wissen.de> (accessed: 27/08/2014)

work advancement requirements.³⁵⁴ Herr W. reported that he joined the SED in 1960 because he believed in socialism as a system and liked the idea of everyone being provided for and that there would be no rich people. “Ich hatte das Gefühl, dass in der DDR alles vorwärts ging.” But Herr W. did mention that after the construction of the Berlin Wall and the worsening situation in the GDR he gave up all hope in the SED.³⁵⁵

Frau S. reported a similar experience. Frau S. claimed that due to her learning about the murder of European Jews at the hands of the Nazis, her life for four years in various Nazi and SED resettler camps and a very negative experience in West Germany, that she truly believed in a socialist future for Germany. Frau S. was wonderfully impressed with what she called the *Menschlichkeit* or humanity of GDR society and its government systems. She joined the SED and was politically active, but after several years became disillusioned with political realities in the GDR.³⁵⁶

Why the majority of interviewees did not join a political party

Five of the seven Bukovina German interviewees did not belong to a political party in the GDR. When asked why they had not joined a political party the Bukovina German interviewees gave similar reasons to those given by the Bessarabian Germans. Frau K. claimed that she did not have the time for politics nor did she have interest in political matters.³⁵⁷ Frau W. claimed that

³⁵⁴ Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thüringen.

³⁵⁵ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁵⁶ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁵⁷ Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

since she was a Christian she felt she could not join any political party in the GDR.³⁵⁸ Herr H. said that since he had not chosen the political system in the GDR and that all political parties were “Russenknechte” or Russian servants that he had no desire to participate in the political process.³⁵⁹

The previous answers demonstrate reasons for a lack of political participation that occurred in the GDR, but some Bukovina Germans were not politically active due to life events that happened prior to their arrival in the Soviet Zone. Herr M.’s explained that he had not joined a political party, nor had he ever participated in political activities such as parades on the 1st of May, due to his being forced to march as a Hitler Jugend member in celebration of the news that the Nazis had suppressed the Warsaw Uprising.³⁶⁰ This example is significant to Resettler political integration in the GDR in that many interviewees’ arrived in the Soviet Zone with negative opinions regarding political parties due to their experiences under the Nazi regime. These attitudes and non-existent desires to participate in GDR political life affected their interactions with SED officials and political integration in the GDR.

The answers given by Bukovina German interviewees mirror those given by Bessarabian Germans and other Resettlers. These results show a similarity in attitudes regarding being politically active in the GDR by the average local resident and further confirm Dagmar Semmelmann’s claims that there was an overall ideological and political distance between the Resettlers and the SED regime.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁵⁹ Interview on 12/09/2008 with Herr H., born in 1925 in Bukovina, living near Berlin.

³⁶⁰ Interview on 29/08/2008 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁶¹ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schawartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

RELIGION

This sub-chapter will analyze Bukovina German religious integration into GDR society and discuss the reasons why interviewees remained in or left their religions.

One of the significant differences between Bukovina German interviewees and Bessarabian Germans was that the majority of interviewees from Bukovina were Catholic. Only two Bukovina German interviewees were Protestant. Bessarabian Germans interviewees were overwhelmingly Protestant and had endured religious discriminatory policies under the Tsars' "Russification" policies. Through these experiences the Bessarabian Germans had developed religious resistance skill sets. Bukovina Germans were part of the elite governance structure of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially regarding religion. The Bukovina German interviewees as German-speaking Catholics were always protected and cared for by Austrian imperial officials in Bukovina, unlike the Bessarabian Germans. Protestant Bukovina Germans had been guaranteed religious freedom by the Austro-Hungarian imperial authorities. While the Bessarabian Germans had developed and put into practice for over 80 years an additional resistance skill set regarding religion, that in turn helped them to coalesce and strengthen their individual and group organizational skill sets, the Bukovina Germans never had to develop these resistance skills. After the Bukovina German Resettlers arrived in the traditional Protestant lands of the GDR their Catholic identity and religious practices served as additional characteristics that GDR locals could use to discriminate against Bukovina Germans. This situation increased

Bukovina German interviewees' feelings of feeling foreign in the GDR and intensified their desire to hide themselves in local society.

Another religious reality for many Catholic Resettlers arriving in the Soviet Zone was that due to there not being many Catholics in the local area or any Catholic religious community at all, their choice of marriage partners was extremely limited if they wanted to marry a fellow Catholic. While Frau K. reported that her religiously-mixed marriage to a local Protestant did not bring about many problems,³⁶² it did cause difficulties for several other Catholic interviewees who participated in this study.

A significant difference between Bessarabian Germans and Bukovina German interviewees was regarding their receiving food and other material aid from churches in the Soviet Zone. Several Bessarabian Germans reported receiving aid from their respective churches, but only Frau W. reported receiving help from Catholic Sorbs and Wends when she arrived in the SBZ.³⁶³ This situation is potentially due to the small numbers of native Catholics in the Soviet Zone, but it is also probably due to the reality that most religious help given by Protestant SBZ locals often was given to fellow Protestants in need. While this could be the case, it is also compelling that the two Protestant Bukovina German interviewees also did not report receiving any aid from their respective churches in the Soviet Zone. The churches of the GDR had helped alleviate some of the Bessarabian Germans' material hardships, the Bukovina Germans reported being left on their own.

³⁶² Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

³⁶³ Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

This situation is significant regarding its effects on Bukovina German integration also because of the psychological help the churches provided Bessarabian Germans. The churches were very important as they were one of the few structures allowed in the GDR public transcript where Resettlers could use them in the hidden transcript to privately speak about their traumatic pasts. The churches provided mental and emotional solace. Many Catholic Resettlers settled in areas in the Soviet Zone where no Catholic communities existed. While the majority of Bessarabian Germans had a psychological outlet readily available in their Protestant churches, Bukovina Germans often found no religious community where they belonged. This reality intensified the isolation that many Bukovina Germans felt during their early years in the Soviet Zone and might explain the more intense mental and emotional fatigue regarding their past experiences that was present during the interviews with Bukovina Germans when compared with Bessarabian Germans. The lack of an outlet for their war traumas and the combination of their non-existent religious resistance skill sets, being surrounded by a SBZ religious culture different from their own and their marriages with Protestant locals translated into the absence of a vigorous desire to stand out among local cultures when compared to Bessarabian German interviewees.

Religious Activity or lack thereof

Due to a variety of reasons including the SED's atheistic pressure on GDR citizens, especially in the area of high-profile jobs in the public sector,³⁶⁴ the number of non-religious GDR residents jumped from 6% in 1950 to 31.5% by 1964³⁶⁵ and ultimately reached 75% by 1990.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ BLHA, Rep. 672/16 Nr. 105 Ministerium des Innern, Bl. 69.

³⁶⁵ Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 103.

³⁶⁶ Raabe, p.157.

Despite difficulties finding Catholic religious communities after their arrival in the Soviet Zone and the atheistic environment there, the majority of Bukovina Germans reported that they found Catholic churches to attend (as many were built due to the arrival of millions of Catholic Resettlers in the GDR) and that they had remained active in their respective religions throughout the GDR era. The Bukovina German interviewees, much like the Bessarabian Germans, reported that remaining active in their respective religions or not was a matter of complete personal control and choice. All Bukovina German interviewees reported that they did not feel pressure to choose one way or another by SED officials or local society.

Five out of the seven Bukovina German interviewees were Catholic and two reported having a Protestant background. It is compelling that the two Bukovina German interviewees who left or stopped believing in their respective religions had joined the SED and believed in the socialist future of the GDR. The five Bukovina German interviewees who remained active or who continued to believe in their respective religions showed a much higher rate of religious activity and belief than was the GDR norm.³⁶⁷

When asked why she was not religious, Frau S. claimed that due to her mother's, as she saw it, religious fanaticism combined with her father's lack of religious belief and difficulties with a local priest in the GDR and resulted in her lack of desire to being involved with religion at all.³⁶⁸

Herr W.'s family was not active in their Protestant faith and after SED political training,

³⁶⁷ Raabe, p.157.

³⁶⁸ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

including lists of atrocities perpetrated by Christians against so-called witches, heretics and others over the centuries, Herr W. became disenchanted with religion as a whole.³⁶⁹

DISCRIMINATION, ACCEPTANCE and SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Even though Herr K. reported having troubles integrating into local society in Brandenburg,³⁷⁰ and Frau K. reported that she was discriminated against when she first arrived in the Soviet Zone,³⁷¹ the Bukovina German strategy of trying to fit in as soon and silently as possible into local society seemed to have worked. The majority of Bukovina German interviewees claimed that they had not been discriminated against by locals after a short time had passed. While the majority of Bessarabian German interviewees used their resistance skill sets to maintain their cultural and separate nature during their lives in the GDR, the Bukovina Germans made their focus fitting in with locals which in turn brought about less problems and discrimination when compared to Bessarabian German interviewees. All Bukovina Germans were asked if they felt like they were outsiders in GDR society and only one, Herr K.,³⁷² claimed that to be the case. One might say that the Bukovina Germans were much more integrated with GDR locals, even though it usually on a superficial public level.

With only seven Bukovina Germans being interviewed it is difficult to make generalizations, but it seems that their strategy of trying not to stand out and fit in affected some Bukovina Germans'

³⁶⁹ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁷⁰ Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

³⁷¹ Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

³⁷² Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

personal, inner identities. Four of the Bukovina German interviewees reported that they saw themselves as *Bukowiner* or Bukovina Germans and as having kept their original homeland identities. This result is significant as it shows an almost even split between those who maintained their original homeland identities and those who self-identified themselves as “GDR citizens” or as having taken on an identity of a local GDR culture. When comparing these results with those from the interviews with Bessarabian Germans, the majority of Bessarabian Germans self-identified with their original homeland identities and rejected the GDR as their new homeland. It would seem that the resistance skill sets that the Bessarabian Germans possessed and their continued use of informal sub-structures in the hidden transcript of the GDR had allowed them to maintain their original homeland identities. The Bukovina Germans’ lack of these skill sets, combined with their strategy of wanting to fit in rather than stand out and their marriages with locals brought about a potential integration rate of 42% when considering the self-identifications that Bukovina German interviewees gave themselves. This shows a much higher rate of potential integration into GDR society than that of the Bessarabian Germans.

It would seem that the answers to the questions asked in the previous chapter: “Does government-enforced denial of one’s identity change one’s identity?” and “Can adopting local customs in the areas where one settled change one’s identity?” is partially, yes. Despite the continued use of Heimat practices in the hidden transcript, such as cooking foods from Bukovina and other cultural activities, if the individual Resettler chose to hide the characteristics that made them different from GDR locals and acquiesce to SED assimilative pressures, then changes in one’s identity potentially occurred. Such was the case with almost half of the Bukovina German interviewees.

WHY DID THEY STAY?

Since half of the Bukovina Germans continued to claim their old regional identities and the majority had not joined a political party due to qualms with SED policies one could ask, why did these Bukovina German interviewees remain in the GDR? Why did they not leave for West Germany as the other 838,300 GDR Resettlers had?³⁷³

When asked why they had stayed in the GDR, one Bukovina German interviewee gave an answer that coincided with the Totalitarian theory's explanation of GDR citizens' interactions with the SED regime. Herr M. claimed that it was his fear of getting shot if he attempted to cross the GDR's western border that prevented him from fleeing to the FRG. However, later in the interview Herr M. gave an additional reason which was more similar to other Bukovina German interviewees: that his family and relatives were in the GDR and that he did not want to leave them.³⁷⁴

The Bukovina Germans reported that their lives had reached a level of normality that they were not willing to give up. This security and safety of a "normal life" was cherished by the Bukovina Germans, especially after the years of perpetual impermanence they experienced during the Heim-ins-Reich program, life in resettler camps, further evacuations, the expulsions and then the chaos of their lives after they arrived in the Soviet Zone. This claim of normalization or that

³⁷³ Heidemeyer, p. 41-44.

³⁷⁴ Interview on 29/08/2008 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

they lived “normal lives” can also serve as a potential indicator of the level of social, cultural and material integration of the Bukovina German interviewees had achieved by the mid-1950s.

Frau K.’s mother was handicapped and was very happy to have found a job and a house for her family in Saxony. Because her mother was happy to stay, after the chaos of the war years, Frau K. was content to stay in the GDR as well.³⁷⁵ Frau W. who had relatives in West Berlin and who travelled often to countries like Switzerland, claimed that she and her Sudeten German husband stayed because they had created a good life for themselves in the GDR.³⁷⁶ Herr W., who had joined the SED, stayed because he believed in socialism, but he also claimed that he stayed because he had an income, he felt the GDR was his home and then added, “Nicht alles im Westen war honig.”³⁷⁷ Herr H., who had very strong anti-SED feelings, claimed that he and his wife had actually left the GDR and had settled on a farm in Bavaria. They could have stayed in West Germany, but chose to return to the GDR to be with relatives and, as Herr H. reported, he felt that the area around Zeuthen, Brandenburg just outside of Berlin was his *Zuhause* or home.³⁷⁸

One of the more lengthy and unique explanations as to why a Bukovina German stayed in the GDR came from an experience that Frau S. had in the British Occupation Zone. Frau S.’s grandmother lived in Osnabrück, Lower Saxony. Frau S., her mother and brother had all decided to leave the GDR before 1961 and live with their grandmother. When Frau S. arrived in Osnabrück she was appalled that the local official in charge of GDR Republic refugees told her

³⁷⁵ Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

³⁷⁶ Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁷⁷ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

³⁷⁸ Interview on 12/09/2008 with Herr H., born in 1925 in Bukovina, living near Berlin.

that she could work in a local soup kitchen peeling potatoes and doing other menial work. When she and her brother explained that they were students and were currently working towards their Abitur or secondary leaving certificate the official told them that they would not be able to attend the local secondary school and that the kitchen work was their employment option. Frau S. and her brother did not accept this as the final answer, made more inquiries and were finally able to attend secondary school in Osnabrück. Frau S. and her brother only had their GDR secondary schools uniforms consisting of black trousers and a white shirt. They wore these uniforms to school and after taking their seats were immediately humiliated by the teacher in front of the other students and told that they were not welcome. Even though Frau S.'s mother wanted to stay in Osnabrück with her mother, Frau S. and her brother begged their mother to return to the GDR due to their negative experiences with the local official and secondary school teacher and their desire to finish their Abitur in the GDR's educational system. Frau S.'s mother acquiesced and the three returned to their former lives in the GDR.

Frau S. claimed that from her experiences in Osnabrück she believed that refugees and expellees had a more difficult life in West Germany than in the GDR and she felt this perception was also confirmed by expellee relatives who lived in West Berlin. Frau S. further claimed that she stayed because of the positive aspects of living in the GDR, especially regarding educational opportunities. Frau S. said that only three of her schoolmates stayed in the GDR, while all the rest fled to West Germany. She claimed that all three who stayed in the GDR were able to study at university while not one who fled to the FRG was able to study due to the cost involved. Frau S. then claimed that she and her family "nach der Mauer, wir haben ein normales Leben

gelebt.”³⁷⁹ After the chaos of the war years a “normal life” is exactly what most Bukovina German interviewees craved. They found safety and security in the GDR and were not willing to abandon it.

³⁷⁹ Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

CHAPTER THREE

DANUBE SWABIANS

Just as experiences prior to 1945, that are often not mentioned or analyzed in the secondary literature, affected Bessarabian and Bukovina German integration into GDR societies and cultures, the unique backgrounds and experiences of Danube Swabians prior to their arrival in the Soviet Zone affected their use of sub-structures in the hidden transcript of the GDR and consequently their integration.

Danube Swabian is a collective term for ethnic Germans who formerly lived in Hungary, the Banat region, Serbia and Croatia. After the Turkish withdrawal in the 18th century the Austrians encouraged resettlement of these areas by ethnic Germans to serve as a border protection along the new Turkish boundaries.³⁸⁰ These ethnic German settlers came from Swabia, Hesse, Franconia, Bavaria and Alsace-Lorraine³⁸¹ and since the majority sailed down the Danube to their new homes the group became known as the Danube Swabians.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Stefan Wolff, "Introduction from Colonists to Emigrants: Explaining the 'Return-Migration' of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe", in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p.5.

³⁸¹ Josef Volkmar Senz, *Geschichte der Donauschwaben: von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, (Wien: Amalthea Verlag, 1993), p. 17.

³⁸² Frantziöch, p. 35-36.

Eventually 1.5 million Danube Swabians lived in the lands of Romania, Yugoslavia and Hungary in 86 exclusively German villages and 336 predominantly German villages.³⁸³ After the *Ausgleich* (Austrians handing over powers to the Hungarians) in 1867 several “Magyarization” policies went into effect in Hungarian-controlled lands. These assimilative efforts were aimed at Serbs, Romanians and ethnic Germans.³⁸⁴ Just as the Bessarabian Germans developed resistance skill sets while under Russian and Romanian administrations, the Danube Swabians developed similar skills to withstand governmental efforts and pressures to assimilate them. An example of this resistance was when Danube Swabians living in Hungarian-controlled lands circumvented laws designed to impede the creation and growth of non-Magyar ethnic clubs, newspapers and other associations. The Danube Swabians created ethnic German cultural institutions under the guise of credit unions, cooperatives and other economic institutions.³⁸⁵ These skills and the choice of when and how to use them in the public and hidden transcripts of Hungary, Yugoslavia and other lands later affected Danube Swabian group and individual integration into GDR societies and cultures.

After WWI ethnic Germans in former Hapsburg territories found themselves under the jurisdiction of new entities such as the newly created Republic, and later, Kingdom of Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Danube Swabians, especially in the new Slavic kingdom, reacted to this change by founding numerous ethnic German societies³⁸⁶ only to have most declared illegal by the new government.³⁸⁷ Danube Swabian frustration and anger

³⁸³ Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.5.

³⁸⁴ Reimann, *Donauschwaben*, p. 26.

³⁸⁵ Wolff, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 146.

³⁸⁶ Senz, p. 217-220.

³⁸⁷ Wolff, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 147.

translated into gaining additional skills as they organized themselves socially and politically. These self-organizational abilities would later be used surreptitiously by Danube Swabian Resettlers in the hidden transcript of the GDR to maintain Heimat relationships and transmit Heimat customs to their GDR-born children.³⁸⁸

Support for the Nazi regime among the Danube Swabians differed from country to country and group to group. For example, many Danube Swabians served in the Yugoslavian army when the Nazis invaded in April 1941.³⁸⁹ However, once Nazi control of the regions coalesced Danube Swabians were drafted en masse into the German military.³⁹⁰ For alleged and very real cooperation with the Nazi regime, an infamous example being the Seventh SS-division “Prince Eugen” and its largely Banat German composition, Danube Swabians became targets of Yugoslav partisans.³⁹¹ Approximately 400,000 Danube Swabians lived in the Banat, Batschka, Slavonia and other areas when the Soviets arrived in Yugoslavia in 1944. Thousands were evacuated by Nazi authorities, but many were also left behind.³⁹² The 12,000 Danube Swabians who remained in their original Heimat regions were deported to forced labor camps in the Soviet Union. The remaining 170,000 had their property confiscated and were consigned to live in Soviet work and concentration camps in their Heimat areas. 50,000 of the 170,000 Danube Swabians who remained died due to starvation, illness and execution.³⁹³ Of the 425,000 Danube Swabians who survived the war and its aftermath, 290,000 settled in Germany with 80,000 finding a home in Austria.

³⁸⁸ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr K., born 1932 in Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

³⁸⁹ Senz, p. 227.

³⁹⁰ <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=56#donauschwaben> (accessed: 07/09/2014)

³⁹¹ Frantziöch, p. 36-37.

³⁹² Beer, p. 90.

³⁹³ <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=56#donauschwaben> (accessed: 07/09/2014)

Evacuations of October 1944

While Danube Swabians were not part of the Nazi regime's Heim-ins-Reich program like the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans, the majority experienced the evacuations from Hungary and Yugoslavia in October 1944. Due to the encroachment of the Soviet army and attacks by Yugoslav partisans, the Nazi regime ordered the evacuation of tens of thousands of Danube Swabians to safety zones such as the Sudetenland. Six of the seven Danube Swabians who participated in this research project came from the same region in Croatia and all six were evacuated with their families in October 1944 to areas surrounding Erfurt, Thuringia.³⁹⁴

EXPULSION

Frau R. as the only Danube Swabian not from Croatia, experienced the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Hungary in August 1947.³⁹⁵ Frau R.'s family was taken to her local train station, along with several other ethnic Germans, and put on a train by Hungarian officials. She reported that all ethnic Germans on the train had no idea where they were going, which was a common experience among Resettlers who experienced expulsions from their Heimat regions. Frau R. and her family eventually arrived in a ZVU Resettler camp in Pirna, Saxony. It seems that by autumn of 1947 that ZVU and SED officials were better prepared for the arrival of these late expellees compared to those who arrived in 1945. Frau R.'s experience, while difficult, was

³⁹⁴ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau G., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

³⁹⁵ <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=56#donauschwabern> (accessed: 07/09/2014)

much more positive compared to other Resettlers' expulsion and arrival experiences. While the majority of Resettler interviewees experienced difficulties finding housing due to the great shortage in the Soviet Zone, after their short stay in the Resettler camp, Frau R. and her family were given a two-room apartment by the local housing authorities in Auerbach, Saxony. Frau R. and her family's experience continued to be singular among Resettlers interviewees who participated in this research project as a local butcher gave her family two beds and the local Volkssolidarität provided them with other furniture. This help from the government and locals is unique when compared with what the majority of Resettler interviewees reported regardless of Heimat origin and could be why the fatigue and anguish present in the interviews with Bukovina Germans was entirely missing from Frau R.'s testimony.³⁹⁶

ARRIVAL and SETTLEMENT

Danube Swabians from Croatia had a very different arrival and settlement experience from the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans. All interviewees from Croatia arrived near Erfurt, Thuringia between October and November 1944. Most of the Bessarabian and Bukovina German interviewees arrived in the regions of the future GDR in early spring 1945. When the interviewees from Croatia arrived in Thuringia, Nazi authorities were still in charge and had maintained order. The Danube Swabians received housing, food and aid immediately. The majority of Resettlers who participated in this project arrived in the SBZ to chaos, scarcity and confusion. While many Danube Swabians experienced difficulties in the early years of their stay

³⁹⁶ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

in the regions of the future SBZ, the hardship, fatigue and anguish present in most Resettlers' interviews were missing when listening to the Danube Swabians tell of their arrival.

Interviewees from Croatia claimed that things did change for the worse once the Soviets arrived. Herr B. reported how the local official in Erfurt, Thuringia who was charged with caring for Herr B. and his family, constantly referred to them "Familie #3". They had no names, no identity; they were simply a number. This abuse and negative treatment continued as Herr B. and his family were forced to work in local agricultural fields surrounding Erfurt. Herr B. and other Resettlers in the area were taken advantage of and used as replacements for the slave laborers who were sent home after the war. Herr B.'s being taken advantage of and treated poorly in the early days of the Soviet Zone affected his personal political integration into the GDR as he wanted nothing to do with the SED in the future.³⁹⁷

Viewing Resettlers as replacement for Nazi-era slave labor was commonplace throughout the Soviet Zone. Frau H. and her family were evacuated to Erfurt by Nazi authorities, but after the arrival of the Soviets, Frau H. and her family were forced to leave and work a confiscated aristocratic estate in Mecklenburg. Frau H. had no doubt that she was being used against her will as a replacement for the slave laborers who recently had left the region. This reality affected Frau H.'s opinion of Soviet and SED authorities and her early experiences in the SBZ negatively affected her willingness to claim the GDR as her new Heimat.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

³⁹⁸ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

It must be noted that the experiences of the Danube Swabian interviewees were not always very different from the norm. One of the characteristics that some Danube Swabians from certain areas had, like some Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans, that affected their integration into GDR society was their inability to speak High German. Frau R. reported a similar situation in that after she arrived in Auerbach, Saxony following the expulsion that neither she nor her family could speak High German. She and her family's ability to speak Swabian dialect while in Hungary helped preserve their cultural ties to other Danube Swabians, but in a small town in Saxony it led to difficulties in her school, with locals and her parents were forced to hire a private German tutor.³⁹⁹

Just as Bessarabian and Bukovina German interviewees had reported negative experiences with locals, Herr K. reported a similar cultural problem in Erfurt, Thuringia. Danube Swabian women would wear their traditional costumes when going about their everyday activities and business in Erfurt. Herr P. reported that due to their strange dress that locals publicly "haben die Frauen als Zigeuner beschimpft".⁴⁰⁰ One can see how the resistance skills that many Danube Swabians had developed under years of oppression by Hungarian and Yugoslav administrations were used by the interviewees in the GDR. They were much more like Bessarabian Germans in their reactions. Just because someone criticized them did not mean that they changed their ways, especially regarding their use of informal sub-structures in the hidden transcript. Herr K. commented further how still to this day he speaks Swabian dialect with his wife who is also an ethnic German expellee from Croatia. The Danube Swabians had kept and maintained their cultural and societal structures under oppressive governments and the GDR was not going to be

³⁹⁹ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

any different. When pondering the pre-1945 experiences of the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans and those of the Danube Swabians one can begin to comprehend how the peculiar characteristics of each Heimat group affected Resettler integration in the GDR. This analysis is not found in the secondary literature apart from Ute Schmidt's study regarding Bessarabian Germans.

Government Aid and SED Reactions

Even though the majority of Danube Swabians had a much more positive experience during their arrival than Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans, the situation was still dire for many Resettlers. The following example is included as all interviewees from Croatia settled in Thuringia and one can sense the frustration of officials in Altenburg, Thuringia when writing the Landesamt des Innern in Thuringia:

von weiteren Zuweisungen Vertriebener Abstand zu nehmen, da das "Aufnahmesoll" des Kreises Altenburg. Zur Kenntnisnahme folgendes, mit dem in den nächsten Tagen aufzunehmenden Transport Umsiedler in Stärke von 1.000 bis 1.400 Personen und den schon untergebrachten 18.000 Umsiedlern, sowie 12.000 Westevakuierte und 2.000 Berliner, ist unser Aufnahmesoll in Höhe von 18.000 damit reichlich erfüllt. Es bereitet schon sehr große Schwierigkeiten diesen letzten Transport Umsiedler in unseren Landgemeinden unterzubringen...Ich bitte, von weiteren Zuweisungen Abstand zu nehmen.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰¹ ThHStAW, Ld. Thür, Mdl, Nr. 3826, as recorded in Manfred Wille (ed.), *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, p. 272.

Frau G. confirmed that the smaller villages of Thuringia had been overrun by Resettlers as almost 30% of the students in local schools were from expulsion areas.⁴⁰² Herr P. also confirmed the huge numbers of Resettlers in Thuringia and their effects on the area's resources when he reported that the village of Ringsleben, Thuringia where he settled had grown from a pre-war population of 600 to over 1,000.⁴⁰³ This competition for resources built up great antagonism between locals and the new arrivals.

Regarding SED programs and Danube Swabian participation in these governmental schemes, the information from interviewees was quite limited. Only one Danube Swabian reported her family's involvement in the Bodenreform movement. Frau H. whose family had been forced by the Soviets to leave Thuringia and work as laborers on a confiscated aristocratic estate were later were given a Bodenreform parcel in 1950.⁴⁰⁴ It could be possibly the fact that so many of the Danube Swabian interviewees were employed in non-agricultural areas, such as sales or the trades, that could explain their lack of involvement in the Bodenreform movement. It is also interesting to consider if Frau H.'s family had not been sent by Soviet authorities to Mecklenburg against their will and allowed to remain in Thuringia if their family would have been involved in the Bodenreform movement at all.

A commonality between the Danube Swabians and Bessarabian and many Bukovina Germans was their united perception that the SED regime had not helped them in any way. Herr A. reported that since he and 120 Danube Swabians from Croatia settled in the village of Elxleben outside of Erfurt, that it was their mutual help and aid that saw them through the difficult

⁴⁰² Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau G., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁰³ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

times.⁴⁰⁵ Any monetary payments made by SED officials to Resettlers,⁴⁰⁶ Umsiedlerwoche collection drives for the new arrivals or other SED programs to alleviate Resettler suffering were either not experienced by the Danube Swabians or not remembered. Just as with other Heimat groups, this feeling of abandonment by the SED regime adversely affected Danube Swabians' desires to engage with government officials. This choice and reaction further affected Danube Swabian integration into GDR society.

LIFE CYCLES

A possible explanation for not remembering if the SED helped their families could be due to the Danube Swabians' much younger age compared to Bessarabian and Bukovina German interviewees. In 1945 the average Danube Swabian interviewee was 8.5-years old. This makes the Danube Swabians the youngest Heimat group to have participated in this research project and makes their input very much a *Kriegskinder* or children of war contribution. This sub-chapter will analyze Danube Swabian educational, employment and familial life cycles during the GDR era. These results will be utilized to discover the level of personal and group integration into local societies and cultures. These and other questions regarding their everyday life experiences in the GDR are generally not discussed in Danube Swabian Resettler secondary literature.

Education

⁴⁰⁵ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr A., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁰⁶ BLHA, Rep. 333 SED-Landesvorstand Brandenburg Nr. 574, Bl. 64.

Since the Danube Swabian interviewees were much younger compared to other Heimat groups, many of their educational experiences began in the Soviet Zone. Regarding their educational development as Resettlers in the GDR, several reported that Resettlers made up a significant proportion of the student population in their schools. Herr B. reported that in his village of Elxleben, just outside of Erfurt, Thuringia, Resettler children were a significant percentage of the students in his primary school.⁴⁰⁷ Herr P. claimed that almost 50% of the students in his 5th grade class in the village of Ringsleben, near Erfurt, were fellow Resettlers from Breslau, Yugoslavia and Hungary.⁴⁰⁸

Frau G. also confirmed this educational reality in the GDR when she reported that after beginning her schooling in the village of Mühlberg, near Gotha, Thuringia, that 15 of the 40 pupils were Resettlers. She further claimed that many were evacuees from the Ruhr valley region. This serves as confirmation that some who were evacuated from their native regions due to WWII bombardments remained in the Soviet Zone rather than returning to West Germany. It also confirms that in GDR society evacuees were seen and called Resettlers in the GDR.⁴⁰⁹

The educational experiences of a few Danube Swabian interviewees actually began in Croatia and Hungary. Several Danube Swabians who were young enough to be involved with their primary or secondary schooling before the evacuations of 1944 reported, like many Bessarabian and Bukovina German interviewees, several disruptions to their educational development. These Danube Swabian interviewees also reported how these disruptions had negative effects on their lives and employment opportunities later in the GDR.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁰⁹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau G., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

Frau F. reported that after starting her primary education in Croatia, her education was stopped due to the evacuations of 1944 and the chaos of the war. Frau F. reported an experience that many other Resettler interviewees found very embarrassing and that was how many Resettlers were forced by educators to repeat certain school levels due to their trailing behind the academic abilities of their peers.⁴¹⁰ A number of Resettlers found this situation intolerable as they would often be assigned to classes with students much younger than themselves. These Resettlers' embarrassment increased dramatically after meeting children their own age and hearing comments about their lack of intelligence or possible mental handicaps.

Herr A. reported that he just began his 4th year in a Hungarian primary school when the evacuations of October 1944 occurred. This would have been sufficiently traumatic for a 12-year old boy, but to make matters worse, in the chaos of the evacuations he was separated from his family and ended up in an orphans' home in Austria. Missing children were a common occurrence among evacuees, expellees and refugees.⁴¹¹ It was often through the Red Cross's *Suchdienst* that families were later reunited. Herr A. filled out a Red Cross *Suchdienst* identification card and then waited. One year later he received word that his parents were evacuated to Thuringia and was reunited with them. Herr A. estimated that due to the chaos of his life he had missed two years' of primary school. His experience was much different from that of Frau F. above. Due to the large numbers of Resettler children in the schools of Elxleben, Thuringia, Herr A. was not held back, but advanced several levels during his first year. While Herr A. did not experience the ridicule of students his age, as he was now in their class as well,

⁴¹⁰ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau F., born in 1938 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴¹¹ BLHA, Rep. 250 Landratsamt Guben-Frankfurt/Oder Nr. 277, „Betreuung der Umsiedler, 1946-1947“, Bl. 89-91.

he did blame the chaos of the war and his being too rapidly advanced for his lack of academic skills, especially in the area of writing in High German. This academic handicap affected Herr A.'s feelings of self-worth and his early employment options in the GDR. As an older student, without sufficient academic skills, Herr A. was not able to attend secondary school. He felt as though he was forced due to his lack of education to complete an apprenticeship as a butcher. It was only later after attending a technical training academy that he was able to overcome these academic handicaps and find a job that he truly wanted and valued.⁴¹²

An even more tragic example of the effects of the evacuations of 1944 and the war on the educational development of the interviewees is that of Frau H. Frau H. completed 6th class in Croatia and then during her 7th grade year was evacuated with her family to Thuringia. With the chaos of the war's end, Frau H. never completed her 7th year. Once the Soviet army arrived, authorities forced Frau H. and her family to move to Mecklenburg and work on a confiscated aristocratic estate. Frau H. never received more schooling. Frau H.'s employment options included working on the aristocratic estate and then later on her family's Bodenreform parcel. Frau H. returned to Erfurt and could only find a job working in the rail yards of the local train station. It was only much later, after Frau H. participated in a further studies accountancy program, that she found a job with the local government and the self-respect she had desired.⁴¹³

As the only Danube Swabian not to have experienced the evacuations of 1944, Frau R.'s experiences were unique in multiple respects. As discussed previously, Frau R.'s educational progress was also affected by her expulsion to Auerbach, Saxony. Frau R. reported that while

⁴¹² Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr A., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴¹³ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

she had attended a Hungarian school until the expulsions of 1947, and thus had not missed any schooling, her first school years in Saxony were very difficult. Her fluency in Hungarian and Swabian dialect had been very useful in Hungary, but her inability to speak and write High German handicapped her education during her early years in the SBZ. This affected her acceptance at the local school and among her classmates, which consequently made her arrival experience more negative. Her parents hired a private tutor for Frau R. and after strenuous efforts Frau R. was able to speak High German and found acceptance among her Saxon peers.⁴¹⁴

The previous examples show how the evacuations of 1944, the chaos of the war's end and the expulsions of 1947 affected the educational lives and employment options of Danube Swabian interviewees. The negative impacts on their feelings of self-worth, ridicule from SBZ classmates and the limited job options several experienced affected many interviewees' integration into GDR society. It was often only through further studies that Danube Swabians were able to feel secure within themselves and gain some respect from locals that any level of integration was even attempted.

Abitur and Further Studies

With only seven Danube Swabians interviewed, and almost all coming from Croatia and living near Erfurt, it is difficult to make generalizations about Danube Swabian educational life in the GDR. However, it is noteworthy that just as with the Bessarabian and Bukovina interviewees, only one Danube Swabian completed a secondary leaving certificate. While many factors such as personal desire and motivation could affect a person's participation in the secondary education

⁴¹⁴ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

system in the GDR, it would seem that the war and their pre-1945 experiences did affect Danube Swabian interviewees' educational progress and ability to gain entrance to secondary school. Frau G. was the only Danube Swabian who reported receiving her Abitur.⁴¹⁵ Since many interviewees reported that the war negatively impacted their educational development and job opportunities in the GDR, and that many later found the jobs they had truly desired after completing distance-learning programs, it would seem that the war's effects had marginally forced the majority of Danube Swabians to complete apprenticeships as tailors, butchers and masons. This situation negatively affected many Danube Swabian interviewees' perception of their lives in the Soviet Zone and integration into local society during the early years of their stay in the GDR.

Frau G. is also the only Danube Swabian interviewee who studied at a university at the traditional age of a university student. Frau G. attended a technical university in Berlin and after 4.5 years completed a degree in business administration. She found work immediately and was later promoted to a position in an economic research center and after 1990 she worked in the Thuringian Department of Statistics. Frau G. was one of the few Danube Swabian interviewees who never spoke about her educational and employment life in the GDR in a negative light. She was very happy during her schooling, university education and work experiences in the GDR.⁴¹⁶ This serves as confirmation to the previous claim that if an interviewee's educational and employment experiences were negative or embarrassing that this could affect one's opinion about life in the GDR. Viewing one's possibilities in the GDR in a negative light also affected several interviewees' personal integration into GDR society. The contrary was also true as in the

⁴¹⁵ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau G., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

case of Frau G. The ability to perceive one's future in the GDR in a positive way translated into a greater desire to attempt integrating into local society.

The Danube Swabians' negativity about their educational progress and employment experiences changed later in life through participation in further studies opportunities that the SED made available to GDR citizens.⁴¹⁷ Frau R., who arrived in Soviet Zone not being able to speak High German, was permitted through a 3-year distance-learning program to become a certified teacher. She held this position in Auerbach, Saxony until 1992.⁴¹⁸ Frau H. who was only able to complete 6th grade in primary school due to war-time disruptions was working in the Erfurt rail yards and not necessarily happy with her employment. Frau H. completed a further studies program in accountancy and was promoted to the accountancy department of the rail yard. Through this educational opportunity and change in job Frau H. and was much happier with herself and her work.⁴¹⁹ Herr A. who had completed an apprenticeship as a butcher, later was able to participate in business administration training and managed a *Konsum* store in Erfurt.⁴²⁰

Herr P.'s participation in further studies opportunities brought about one of the most unique employment experiences in this research project. Herr P.'s educational progress was disrupted by the war and due to academic handicaps he completed an apprenticeship as a tailor. After working several years in Erfurt he was granted a study post at a technical university in Berlin. Herr P. completed his degree in international commerce at 45 years of age and then worked the next three years in Mongolia managing the clothing material trade between the GDR and

⁴¹⁷ Fulbrook, *People's State*, p.216.

⁴¹⁸ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

⁴¹⁹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴²⁰ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr A., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

Mongolia. Due to his service to his country, Herr P. was allowed to return to Erfurt and work for the remainder of the GDR era as an independent tailor and shop owner.⁴²¹

When Danube Swabian participation in further studies opportunities is compared with the participation of the GDR populace in general one can see that the Danube Swabian interviewees were much more likely to participate than the average GDR citizen.⁴²² Danube Swabians also demonstrated that their opinions of the GDR, SED officials and desires to integrate with local society depended greatly on their outlook of their future in the GDR. If their perception was that they were alone or abandoned by the government or locals, as was the case directly after the war, and that life was negative, then Danube Swabian integration into GDR society suffered. Those interviewees who were able to overcome their war-time educational handicaps through participation in further studies were much more positive about their lives and experiences in the GDR. This perception, whether negative or positive, depended on the individual Resettler and had a great impact on their individual and hence group integration into GDR society.

Marriage and Divorce

It is difficult to make generalizations about Danube Swabian marriage and family cycles with only seven interviewed, but they did demonstrate similar patterns to the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans.

⁴²¹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴²² *Statistisches Taschenbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1964*, p. 156.

All Danube Swabians married or found “life partners” during their lives in the GDR. Danube Swabians mirrored a Bukovina German life cycle pattern as five out of seven married local SBZ residents. As discussed previously, marrying locals had great potential to affect an individual Resettler’s integration into GDR society as it increased a Danube Swabian’s interactions with locals.

Danube Swabians also followed the general trend established through the interviews with Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans of remaining married while being surrounded by divorcing couples in the GDR.⁴²³ Only one Danube Swabian interviewee experienced a divorce.

Children

The average birth rate in the GDR was 2.5 children in 1952 and fell to two children by 1970.⁴²⁴ The Danube Swabian average regarding number of children fell directly within the GDR average. As previously discussed, the number of children people had in the GDR often coincided with resources available to care for and raise these children.⁴²⁵ This result showing that Danube Swabians fell within the GDR average serves as potential evidence that they, like the Bukovina Germans, had attained a level of financial and material integration approximating that of the average GDR citizen.

HEIMAT PRACTICES and CULTURAL PECULIARITIES

⁴²³ Mertens, p. 14.

⁴²⁴ <http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms> (accessed: 30/07/2014)

⁴²⁵ Mertens, p. 14.

One of the great evidences regarding the importance of pre-1945 experiences and how they affected the integration of GDR Resettlers, and which are rarely discussed in the secondary literature, can be seen when one compares the Danube Swabians with Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans. The Danube Swabians, just as the Bessarabian Germans, had developed over decades several types of organizational and personal resistance skill sets when confronted by Yugoslav and Hungarian assimilative efforts. The Danube Swabians, like many of the Bessarabian German interviewees, kept their culture and Heimat practices alive and, in subtle ways, open in public by using these skill sets they brought with them to the GDR. Even though the majority of the Danube Swabians, like the Bukovina Germans, had married SBZ locals, they were much less integrated into GDR society and much more willing to stand out, like the Bessarabian Germans. They had been strange and different in Croatia and Hungary and, while often personally painful if they were discriminated against in the Soviet Zone due to their cultural and Heimat practices, this was acceptable.

All Danube Swabian interviewees reported circumventing SED bans on Heimat meetings by organizing activities permitted in the public transcript of the GDR where surreptitiously the majority of attendees happened to be fellow Danube Swabians. While Bukovina German interviewees seemed to be more isolated from their country fellows, Danube Swabians reported numerous occasions where Danube Swabians settled in the GDR in large groups near each other. Frau R. reported that it was very easy for fellow Danube Swabians from Hungary to meet as over 300 families from the same Danube Swabian village in Hungary settled around Auerbach, Saxony. Weekend get-togethers, Fasching, New Year's and birthday parties were all occasions

on which ethnic Germans from Hungary near Auerbach could meet, practice Hungarian dances, share Swabian foods and talk about the old Heimat.⁴²⁶

Herr A. reported how his parents would organize Danube Swabian dance nights in Elxleben, Thuringia. Heimat music, costumes and dances were prevalent. However, this all stopped when authorities forbade Herr A.'s parents from organizing these Heimat festivals in 1952.⁴²⁷ But despite these bans Herr A. and other Danube Swabian interviewees found subtler ways to use sub-structures in the hidden transcript of the GDR to continue their Heimat celebrations.

Herr P. reported a similar situation in his village of Ringsleben, Thuringia. Several Danube Swabian families from Croatia settled in the area and Herr P.'s father organized dance hall parties in the summer complete with Heimat music and Danube Swabian traditional costumes. Herr P. reported that after hosting these parties for three years that his father was ordered to desist by SED officials. Herr P. reported that his father and other Danube Swabians circumvented these bans by hosting private Danube Swabian get-togethers, but also that they all met and enjoyed Danube Swabian culture during weddings and other activities allowed under SED policy.⁴²⁸

Danube Swabians not only organized these surreptitious activities in the hidden transcript of the GDR in Thuringia, but they occurred elsewhere as well. Frau H., whose family had been forced

⁴²⁶ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

⁴²⁷ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr A., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴²⁸ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

to move to Mecklenburg by Soviet authorities, reported how Danube Swabians in Mecklenburg had secret parties with each other where they would sing Heimat songs and talk about Croatia.⁴²⁹

Almost all Danube Swabian interviewees reported keeping their cultural traditions alive through additional practices. Frau G. continued to sing traditional songs and make Croatian Goulash, noodle dishes and *Speckkuchen* for her family in the GDR.⁴³⁰ Frau H. also continued to sing traditional Heimat songs to her GDR-born children and to make them traditional Danube Swabians dishes such as *Krautfleckerl*.⁴³¹

The continuation of Danube Swabian cultural practices is especially significant to interviewee personal integration given the overwhelming rate of marriage with SBZ locals. Even though the majority of Danube Swabians were surrounded inside and outside of their homes by the cultures of Thuringia and Mecklenburg, the Danube Swabian interviewees maintained their Heimat cultural practices. It is interesting to note that the transfer of Danube Swabian cultural practices also occurred between SBZ locals and Danube Swabians when, for example, Herr B.'s local Thuringian wife learned Croatian and Danube Swabian cuisine from his mother.⁴³²

Further cultural practices included passing on traditional language skills. Herr A., who married a fellow Danube Swabian from Croatia, reported how he and his wife still to this day speak to each other in what he called *kroatisches Platt* and how his children can understand this dialect.⁴³³

⁴²⁹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴³⁰ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau G., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴³¹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴³² Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴³³ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr A., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

One of the rare results of these interviews when compared with other Heimat groups was that not one Danube Swabian reported visiting Croatia during the GDR era. This could possibly have to do with GDR relations with Yugoslavia and its independent path taken in the socialist world. Herr P. visited his native German village in Croatia in 1997. He reported it as being a sad occasion as the old Danube Swabian Catholic church was in ruins among other disappointing observations.⁴³⁴ Frau R. on the other hand had a much different experience. Frau R.'s grandmother was allowed to remain in Hungary and consequently Frau R.'s family visited Hungary every year during the GDR era. This is potentially one of the reasons why both of Frau R.'s GDR-born daughters are fluent in Hungarian.⁴³⁵

POLITICS

With only seven Danube Swabians interviewed for this project it is difficult to make broad generalizations about Danube Swabian political integration into GDR society, but as a whole Danube Swabian interviewees showed evidence of Dagmar Semmelmann's claim that Resettlers tended to have kept an "inner distance" ideologically and politically from the SED regime.⁴³⁶ Not one Danube Swabian interviewee joined the SED and not one Danube Swabian interviewee had a positive perception regarding the SED government.

State-Run organizations

⁴³⁴ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴³⁵ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

⁴³⁶ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schwartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

Regarding their membership in the GDR's mass organizations Danube Swabians gave similar impressions as the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans. Belonging to these mass organizations was simply part of the average worker's life in the GDR rather than an exercise of their political desires or will.

Herr B. who claimed to have "keine Interest" in politics or anything political was a member of every mass organization possible in the GDR. He participated as a child in the Junge Pionere, then as a teenager in the Freie Deutsche Jugend. Once he began his employed life he became a member of the Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaft Bund and Gesellschaft für Deutsche-Sowjetische Freundschaft. However, his membership in these mass organizations was always presented as part of his employed life and not as his political life or his political beliefs.⁴³⁷

Frau H. perceived her membership in the FDGB and the DSF more as a job requirement. She claimed that if she wanted a job working for the GDR railway system that membership in these mass organizations was necessary. As Frau H. had only completed 6th grade of primary school, due to war-time disruptions in her education, her job choices were limited and so she joined.⁴³⁸

Resettler Activity in Political Parties – or lack thereof

With only seven Danube Swabian interviewees it is difficult to make generalizations about Danube Swabian political integration in the GDR, but with only one Danube Swabian having joined a political party in the GDR, and he claimed he was forced to, it could be potentially said

⁴³⁷ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴³⁸ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

that Danube Swabians were overwhelmingly less likely to belong to a political party when compared to Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans and the GDR populace at large.⁴³⁹

Not one Danube Swabian interviewee joined the SED. This is highly significant as an indicator of Danube Swabian political integration and opinions regarding the political realities of living in the GDR. This perception was confirmed when in the interviews not one Danube Swabian reported a positive opinion about the SED regime.

Herr A. is the only Danube Swabian to have joined a political party. He claimed that it was explained to him that if he wanted to become a manager of a Konsum store in Erfurt and participate in the educational training involved, he had to join a political party. While Frau H. from the previous example perceived having to join mass organizations as simply a job requirement, Herr A. felt like he was forced to join a political party and was angry about the situation. As Herr A. had strong negative opinions about the SED he chose to join the Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands or LDPD.⁴⁴⁰

Why the majority of interviewees did not join a political party

Six of the seven Danube Swabian interviewees never joined a political party in the GDR. When asked why they had not joined a political party the Danube Swabians gave similar reasons to the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans, but were much more vehement in their anger and disgust with the SED regime. When asked why she had not joined a political party in the GDR, Frau H.

⁴³⁹ <http://www.ddr-wissen.de> (accessed: 27/08/2014)

⁴⁴⁰ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr A., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

angrily opined “Alle Parteien und alle Politiker sind Lügner!”⁴⁴¹ Frau G. had equally intense opinions. When asked why she had not joined a political party Frau G. exclaimed “Das System war nicht akzeptabel und die Blockparteien waren Mitläufer!”⁴⁴²

The Danube Swabians, compared to other Heimat groups, were one of the most religiously-active who participated in this project. Religious activity and beliefs in an atheistic political environment also affected several interviewees’ decisions to join a political party in the GDR. Frau F. claimed that it was her Catholic beliefs that prevented her from joining the SED and that becoming a member of one of the Blockparteien “war keine Frage!” Frau F. added that her daughter was prevented from studying in the GDR because of her activity in her local Catholic youth group. This seemed to be another motivation for Frau F.’s lack of political participation in the GDR.⁴⁴³

Sometimes Danube Swabians simply wanted to avoid the SED as much as possible. Herr P. reported that he found the SED so controlling and oppressive at times that he wanted to limit his contact with the regime as much as possible and thus he did not join the SED. When asked why he did not join one of the Blockparteien Herr P. answered, “dort war man auch nicht frei.”⁴⁴⁴

The previous answers demonstrate reasons for a lack of political participation that occurred while living in the GDR, but Frau R. was not politically active due to events that occurred prior to her arrival. Frau R. reported that as a teacher in Auerbach, Saxony she had to attend a

⁴⁴¹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today’s Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁴² Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau G., born in 1942 in today’s Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁴³ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau F., born in 1938 in today’s Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today’s Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

Parteilehrjahr or SED political training, but did not join any political party. When asked why she had not, Frau R. said that it was because of her family's expulsion from Hungary and other experiences during the war that convinced her not to join a political party in the GDR.⁴⁴⁵

RELIGION

All Danube Swabian interviewees reported having a Catholic religious background. Despite difficulties finding local Catholic religious communities⁴⁴⁶ and the atheistic environment of the Soviet Zone, six out of seven Danube Swabian interviewees reported remaining active in their Catholic faith during the GDR era. This is highly significant as no other Heimat group in this research project reported such a high rate of religious activity. This outcome shows the results of Danube Swabian resistance skills in action when taking into account the large percentage of Resettlers and GDR locals who either became atheists or who left their respective churches.⁴⁴⁷

Religious Activity or lack thereof

Danube Swabian interviewees had similar backgrounds to Bukovina Germans. The majority were German-speaking Catholics and citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for centuries. One of the main differences between these two groups was the development of resistance skill sets. Living under Magyarization policies and then Slavic legal suppression of ethnic German cultural entities, the Danube Swabians were much more like the Bessarabian Germans in their abilities to circumvent official bans and develop societal organizational structures in the hidden

⁴⁴⁵ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁴⁷ Raabe, p.157.

transcripts of Hungary and Yugoslavia. While the Danube Swabian interviewees experienced the same difficulties of finding local Catholic communities in the Soviet Zone and had an even higher rate of marriage with Protestant GDR locals when compared to Bukovina Germans, the Danube Swabians were able through their use of pre-war resistance skill sets to remain active in their Catholic faith and demonstrate their cultural heritage openly when compared to Bukovina Germans. This resulted in a combination of Bukovina and Bessarabian German experiences and social integration in the GDR as the Danube Swabians were like the Bessarabian Germans in maintaining their original Heimat identities and culture without hiding who they were, but more like the Bukovina Germans in their abilities to fit in with GDR locals.

Due to the limited numbers of Catholic adherents in the SBZ several Danube Swabians married Protestant GDR locals. This caused great difficulties at times for Catholic Resettlers interviewed for this project and affected some Resettlers' personal interactions with relatives. Frau R. reported how her relatives were very disappointed when she married a local Protestant from Auerbach, Saxony, "das war schlecht in dieser Zeit." She reported that this decision caused great turmoil in her marriage and resulted in all of her children not being baptized. Frau R. is the only Danube Swabian interviewee to have left her religion and did so in 1974.⁴⁴⁸ However, this was not always the case. The majority of mixed-religion marriages with local Protestants were much more positive experiences for the Danube Swabians. Herr B. was married to a Protestant Thuringian and never gave the impression that a difference of religion had made his married life difficult. Herr B. also reported remaining active in his Catholic faith throughout the GDR era.⁴⁴⁹ Frau H. reported that despite her first and second marriages to Protestants from Mecklenburg and

⁴⁴⁸ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

⁴⁴⁹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

Thuringia she remained active in her Catholic faith and all her children were baptized and raised Catholic.⁴⁵⁰

While the Danube Swabians were similar to the Bukovina Germans in that most were a Catholic minority surrounded by Protestants in one of the birthplaces of the Reformation, their reactions to this reality was much more like the Bessarabian Germans. Just as it did not matter to the Bessarabian Germans whether or not they fit in to GDR society, the Danube Swabians did not care if they were a Catholic minority married to Protestant locals. This situation did not seem to bother and affect them as much as the Bukovina Germans. The Danube Swabians accepted that they were Catholics without local churches, they married local Protestants they fell in love with, all the while maintaining their Catholic faith and their cultural identity while the Bukovina Germans tended to try to hide who they were. This result serves as confirmation of the existence and use of pre-war resistance skill sets by Bessarabian Germans and Danube Swabians in the GDR. It did not seem to matter to the Danube Swabians that they could not utilize the psychological outlet of the churches in the GDR to deal with the traumas of the war and expulsions. The Danube Swabians had already developed societal structures and internal resistance skill sets under Hungarian and Yugoslav administrations which they then used in the GDR to maintain their cultural and religious identities, but all the while fitting in more with local society when compared to Bessarabian German interviewees. This seems to have been especially true due to the large numbers of Danube Swabians who settled close by each other in the GDR.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

DISCRIMINATION, ACCEPTANCE and SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Due to the Danube Swabians' arrival in the future SBZ either prior to the chaos of 1945 or after it their settlement stories in the GDR were much more positive when compared to those of the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans. This does not mean that Danube Swabians did not experience discrimination and ill treatment by SBZ locals.

Herr P. reported an incident of discrimination which occurred in Erfurt, Thuringia shortly after Danube Swabians arrived there. While going about their daily activities of shopping and running errands Danube Swabian women would wear their traditional costumes from Croatia. When Erfurt locals saw this they publicly humiliated the Danube Swabian women and Herr P. claimed that "Sie waren als Zigeuner beschimpft".⁴⁵¹ While this incident would clearly have affected Danube Swabians' early opinions about locals in Erfurt and their desire to interact with them, the resistance skills of many Danube Swabians came into play. Just because someone criticized them did not mean that they changed their ways. One can see the resistance skills at work in the lives of the Danube Swabians with great similarity to those of the Bessarabian Germans. Danube Swabian interviewees did not hide their cultural peculiarities and try to fit in with GDR locals like Bukovina Germans, but they were also less vehement about this than Bessarabian Germans. One could say that they had found a medium point between these two extremes and this was also evident in Danube Swabians' retention of their Heimat identities.

When asked to self-identify himself or what identity he considered he had during the GDR era, Herr A. claimed that "Ich war immer zwischen zwei Stühlen. Ich war ein zugezogener Deutsch

⁴⁵¹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

der auch in der DDR gelebt hat, aber der nicht von Kommunismus überzeugt war.”⁴⁵² One could use this as a statement for the majority of Danube Swabians when taking into account their attitudes towards the SED, the GDR government and integrating into local societies. This statement also shows evidence of the creation of plural or multiples identities in some Danube Swabian interviewees, and indeed, the same result was reported by many Resettlers interviewed for this project.

When writing about the process of creating plural or multiple identities in immigrant communities Wolfgang Bergem wrote:

The balance in identity construction and preservation between segregation and assimilation is difficult to maintain for diaspora communities...While bilingualism and biculturalism, on the one hand, open a window of opportunity to construct a plural identity that manages to overcome traditional ethnic boundaries, on the other hand, the necessarily growing contact and exchange between a majority culture increases the dangers of an initially gradual, yet inevitable complete assimilation.⁴⁵³

While no Heimat group in this research project experienced a complete integration or assimilation by GDR cultures and societies, Herr A. and other Resettlers did experience the creation of a plural identity or “amalgamated self-identification” through their marriages with locals, activities in local societies and the continued use of their resistance skill sets brought with them from Croatia and Hungary. Herr P., while being anti-SED in his viewpoints, an active Catholic during the GDR era and married to a local Thuringian, self-identified himself as a

⁴⁵² Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr A., born in 1932 in today’s Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁵³ As quoted by Wolff, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 10.

Danube Swabian and “DDR Burger” or GDR citizen.⁴⁵⁴ Frau F. also claimed her pre-arrival identity and that “hier (the GDR) war Zuhause.”⁴⁵⁵

It is compelling how growing up in the GDR could affect one’s self-identification even though that person detested the SED regime. Herr B. had remained an active Catholic in a hostile GDR environment to religious activity. Herr B. also had overwhelmingly negative opinions about the SED and the regime itself. However, being born in 1942, Herr B. had experienced his complete primary education, apprenticeship, employed and family life in the GDR. While he continued to practice Heimat activities within the hidden transcript of the GDR, and thus maintained and preserved a connection to his Danube Swabian origins, it is significant that Herr B. self-identified himself as a GDR citizen. Apparently it was possible for a person to hate the SED, its policies and the regime, but due to life experiences in the GDR, still view the GDR and its regions as one’s home.⁴⁵⁶

While some Danube Swabians experienced different levels of personal integration into GDR society, and thus plural or multiple identities were created, not all Danube Swabians self-identified in this manner. Frau H. self-identified solely as a Danube Swabian.⁴⁵⁷ Frau R. self-identified solely as an ethnic German from Hungary.⁴⁵⁸ Both of these interviewees exhibited a greater connection with their Heimat regions and cultures and their considerable use of informal sub-structures in the hidden transcript of the GDR could have been a factor in their sole self-identifications.

⁴⁵⁴ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today’s Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁵⁵ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau F., born in 1938 in today’s Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁵⁶ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today’s Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today’s Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

While Danube Swabians had experienced some discrimination and difficulty in the beginning of their stay, much less than the Bessarabian and Bukovina German interviewees reported, the majority of the Danube Swabians reported feeling like they were not an outsider or stranger in GDR society. While all Danube Swabians expressed anti-SED opinions and had very little to do with the regime, they were also much more likely and much more willing to speak of the GDR as their home or self-identify themselves as GDR citizens when compared to Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans. This outcome could be the result of the combination of several factors, including the Danube Swabians' extremely young age – most had experienced their whole educational and employed lives in the GDR. Danube Swabian interviewees seem to have found a medium ground between the vehemence of the Bessarabian Germans regarding preservation of their cultural identity and the Bukovina German strategy of silently trying to fit into GDR society as the SED wanted. Danube Swabian interviewees maintained their cultural identities openly like the Bessarabian Germans, but were much more integrated into GDR society like the Bukovina Germans.

WHY DID THEY STAY?

Since most Danube Swabian interviewees had so many misgivings towards the SED and its government, how and why did they eventually consider the GDR their home? With over 800,000 Resettlers having fled to the FRG,⁴⁵⁹ why did these Danube Swabians not leave as well?

⁴⁵⁹ Heidemeyer, p. 41-44.

When asked why they had stayed in the GDR, one Danube Swabian interviewee gave an answer that coincided with the Totalitarian theory's explanation of GDR citizens' interactions with the SED regime. Frau H. claimed that she feared possible reprisals by SED officials against her relatives in the GDR and that is why she remained.⁴⁶⁰ However, Frau H. was the exception, all other Danube Swabian interviewees gave answers that did not support the Totalitarian theory's explanation of how people were forced to remain in the GDR due to Soviet military force.

Much like Herr H. from Bukovina,⁴⁶¹ Herr P. and his wife who lived and married in Thuringia were actually living in West Germany prior to 1961. Herr P. was having great difficulty finding work and he and his wife could not find their own housing and were living with relatives. The situation had reached a point where Herr P. told his wife, based on their life experiences previously in the GDR, that they should return to the GDR and build a life there. It is significant to note that Herr P., a Resettler who had actually fled to the FRG, chose to return of his own volition because he felt life was better in the GDR.⁴⁶²

Perceiving life as better in the GDR also prevented Frau G. from leaving for the FRG. When asked why she had stayed in the GDR, Frau G. listed several reasons that portrayed the GDR in a very positive light including its educational system, that she had received a scholarship for her university studies in Berlin and that she doubted if she could get a job in West Germany with two children. Frau G. saw the child care system in the GDR as superb for a working mother and opined that in the FRG this was not the case and it was better for her to stay.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁶¹ Interview on 12/09/2008 with Herr H., born in 1925 in Bukovina, living near Berlin.

⁴⁶² Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁶³ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau G., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

There seems to exist a cultural peculiarity among people with Swabian origins – their love of houses. Frau V. from Bessarabia found it an indicator of success and a source of pride that her parents, she and her husband and all of their sons had built and owned their own homes.⁴⁶⁴ This pride of home ownership was demonstrated among other Bessarabian Germans and also in the interviews with several Bukovina Germans. This same feeling and perception regarding houses was also reported by Danube Swabian interviewees as a reason for remaining in the GDR.

When asked why he had stayed in the GDR, Herr B. reported that he had stayed because he had completed his apprenticeship in Thuringia, had grown up there, his friends from school were nearby and then Herr B. added “und meine Eltern haben ihr Haus in 1952 gebaut. Ich habe mein Haus in 1972 gebaut...und in 1985 habe ich das Haus meiner Töchter gebaut.” Given Herr B.’s vehement disgust for the SED and its government, it was puzzling how and why home ownership would be a personal reason why he would remain in a political paradigm that he detested. It was also noteworthy that for Herr B. the fact that he built homes for himself and his daughter several years after 1961, home ownership was still a reason in the 1970s and 1980s to have remained in the GDR.⁴⁶⁵

Frau R. also had negative opinions about the SED, but demonstrated this same Swabian mentality when after giving several reasons why she stayed in the GDR added “wir haben unser Haus in 1958 gekauft.”⁴⁶⁶ Apparently home ownership is an indicator in Swabian culture of

⁴⁶⁴ Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁴⁶⁵ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today’s Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁶⁶ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

pride, permanence and personal achievement and to leave their houses, friends, jobs and educational opportunities for the unknown in the FRG was not acceptable to the Danube Swabian interviewees.⁴⁶⁷

It would appear that the Danube Swabians' lives, much like the Bessarabian and Bukovina German interviewees, had reached a degree of normality in the GDR after the chaos of the evacuations of 1944 and expulsions from Hungary in 1947 that they were not willing to give up. This unwillingness to abandon what they had achieved in the GDR prior to 1961 and their decisions to remain, especially when one had experienced life as an expellee in the FRG,⁴⁶⁸ serve as a potential indicators of the level of social, cultural and material integration the Danube Swabian interviewees had attained by the time the Berlin Wall was built.

⁴⁶⁷ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau F., born in 1938 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁴⁶⁸ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

CHAPTER FOUR

FLIGHT and EXPULSION

The previous three chapters analyzed the social, economic, religious and political integration of individual interviewees from specific Heimat groups in order to explore unique characteristics that affected each Heimat groups' degrees of integration into the cultures and societies of the GDR. The following chapters will take a macro viewpoint and analyze how Resettlers as a whole integrated into local cultures and societies of the GDR.

As shown through the interviews with Bessarabian Germans, Bukovina Germans and Danube Swabians each Heimat group had its own customs, culture and other peculiarities that they brought with them to the Soviet Zone. These unique characteristics and skill sets factored into individuals' and Heimat groups' choices and actions in the hidden and public transcripts of the GDR. These choices and actions consequently affected the level of integration achieved.

There was a great variety of nuanced differences in integrative experiences when comparing Bessarabian Germans, Bukovina Germans and Danube Swabians to one another. The Resettlers interviewed for this project represent an even more diverse group than the previous three Heimat groups would suggest. Sudeten Germans were found to be the most vehement and angry, feeling themselves as unjustly victimized by the expulsions; Pomeranians and Silesians showed the greatest willingness among Heimat groups to conform to the atheist and socialist pressures of the

SED; Carpathian Germans continued their separate existence while surrounded by various GDR cultures just as they had done in Slovakia for over 700 years; and there were differences in the life strategies and choices between *Reichsdeutsche* (German citizens prior to 1937) and *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans who lived outside Germany's 1937 borders) that affected their integration in GDR society.

Psychological Impact of Flight and Expulsions on Integration

Just as particular characteristics of the various Heimat groups affected integration into GDR society, so did the psychological traumas and diverse flight, expulsion and other displacement experiences endured by the Resettlers. When discussing the horrors refugees and expellees survived a great deal of the secondary literature simply chronicles these events and rapidly advances to the next general topic in the GDR Resettler narrative. There is not a great amount of analysis of the psychological, mental and emotional impacts the Resettlers' wartime experiences had on their later lives in the GDR.⁴⁶⁹ As was evident through the interviews with Bukovina German Resettlers, the impact of psychological trauma and mental fatigue had great effects on their abilities and desires to attempt to integrate and participate in GDR society. Dagmar Semmelmann noticed how the 15 Resettlers she interviewed kept an "inner distance" between themselves and the SED regime.⁴⁷⁰ Semmelmann's analysis focused on the political beliefs and experiences of the Resettlers. However, it has become clear through this study's interviews with 230 GDR Resettlers that the traumas they experienced prior to and shortly after their arrival in the Soviet Zone affected their ability and desires to integrate into GDR society. In other words,

⁴⁶⁹ Ute Schmidt's research is one of the few secondary works that does analyze generational impacts of the expulsions in the lives of GDR Bessarabian Germans.

⁴⁷⁰ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schwartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

while in other studies Resettlers might simply be reported as having a general anti-SED opinion, this research project argues that there were additional psychological and mental factors that affected the development of some Resettlers' anti-SED attitudes, rather than simply some of them having anti-communist opinions. Additionally, as was shown in the analysis of Bukovina German interviews, a Resettler's psychological trauma and mental state could affect that individual's integration into local society, rather than solely just social or language differences being responsible. The inclusion of the following examples is not meant to repeat the horrors chronicled in secondary works,⁴⁷¹ but to reinforce the concept, as with the information gained from Bessarabian German, Bukovina German and Danube Swabian interviewees, of how the traumatic experiences prior to their arrival in the Soviet Zone affected Resettlers' desires and abilities to integrate into GDR society. In order to place these experiences and their psychological impacts in context an interview with a British psychologist working in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is included.

In November 2008 an interviewee from East Prussia living near Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern recommended that I interview a British psychologist in the area who worked with Resettlers and their descendants.⁴⁷² Mr. D. estimated that three out of his 100 patients were Resettlers and 50 were children or grandchildren of GDR Resettlers. While the number of patients who were Resettlers was small, Mr. D.'s insights into the impacts of war-time traumas on Resettlers themselves, how these situations affected their children and how a Resettler's psychological state could affect their integration into local society are invaluable to this study.

⁴⁷¹ Example: *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*. Hrsg. Theodor Schieder.

⁴⁷² Interview on 22/10/2008 with Frau H., born in 1943 to an East Prussian family, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Mr. D. began by addressing the psychological effects of the mistreatment of Resettlers by locals in Mecklenburg and SED Resettler policies. He remarked that the combination of the inability to be able to speak about their past traumas from their flight and expulsion experiences due to bans by the SED regime and the lack of caring and interest from locals at the time, led many Resettlers to mentally turn “inward” in an attempt to cope with their pasts. Resettlers’ isolation only intensified when several did not want to “burden” their family members with talking about the horrors they experienced, thus leaving them alone to try to heal themselves which often had disastrous repercussions for Resettler familial relationships.

Mr. D. commented that due to the horrors of the flight and expulsions these three Resettlers were already suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He explained further that the mental and emotional processes of turning inward were made worse during the GDR era because mental health workers were paid and controlled by the government. Mr. D. said that his current patients knew that the GDR mental health workers would be biased and reiterate SED policy, particularly regarding any atrocities perpetrated by Soviet soldiers, and that things revealed during therapy would not be kept confidential. Mr. D. claimed that this feeling that they had nowhere to turn for psychological relief and having to grapple with past traumas by themselves, led many to turn inward and resulted in a high level of dysfunctionality in Resettler families.

Through his Resettler patients and patients who are descendants of Resettlers, Mr. D. reported that this dysfunctionality took on many forms such as a lack of emotional and mental stability, horrid mood swings, sporadic and unwarranted bouts of anger, depression and health ailments

with no apparent physical explanation (psychosomatic disorders) such as asthma and heart disease.

Mr. D also spoke about how alcohol abuse among Resettler fathers who returned from prisoner-of-war camps gravely affected Resettler families. He mentioned how in several cases through speaking with the GDR-born children of Resettlers that the “father figure” that several grew up with was not their biological father. Due to the war, many Resettler women had lost their husbands. In the immediate post-war period there was also an explosion of divorce throughout Occupied Germany.⁴⁷³ Resettler women either remarried or moved in with male partners in the Schwerin area. Mr. D. reported that many Resettler children had memories of physical violence and sexual abuse perpetrated against them by their mothers’ new husbands or partners. This abuse then manifested itself in the lives of the Resettlers’ GDR-born children through psychological dysfunctions such as compulsive disorders, sporadic anger, anxiety, depression and being overly attached, Mr. D said “clingy”, to their own children.⁴⁷⁴

While Palmowski gave political reasons for the rejection by GDR citizens of the socialist Heimat the SED offered them, and Dagmar Semmelmann focused on the political reasons why most Resettlers held an “inner distance” between themselves and the SED regime, the previous information is included in order to emphasize that there were psychological reasons why or why not interviewees were able to or had the desire to attempt to integrate into GDR society. Many Resettlers, as Mr. D.’s experience with Resettler patients and their descendants demonstrated, were psychologically traumatized by their war era experiences. They arrived in the Soviet Zone

⁴⁷³ Mertens, p. 14.

⁴⁷⁴ Interview on 15/11/2008 with Mr. D., born in the UK, received his *Diplom* in Psychology from the University of Hamburg.

where they were forbidden to speak about these horrible events, thus preventing their mental and emotional healing. Their new SBZ neighbors did not want to hear about these experiences, rarely cared and heaped further persecutions upon the Resettlers. Psychological help was not available, as Resettlers knew that whatever they confided in mental health professionals might be reported. All of this created in many Resettlers a resignation to turn inward, away from the SED regime and GDR society in an attempt to cope with past psychological traumas, resulting in the prevention or postponement of several interviewees' cultural and societal integration for a number of years.

Interviewees' Displacement Experiences

The following examples are included to demonstrate the disparate experiences Resettlers endured from 1940 to 1950 and to emphasize, as shown in the case of the Bukovina German interviewees, the concept that the traumas the interviewees endured and the unique characteristics of each displacement experience affected Resettler willingness and ability to integrate into local GDR cultures and societies. This information is rarely differentiated in this way in GDR Resettler secondary literature.

Displacement experience: *Evakuierte* and *Ausgebombte*

The first type of displacement interviewees experienced outside the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations in 1940 was that of the *Evakuierte* (evacuees) or *Ausgebombte* (victims of Allied aerial bombardments). Frau L. was born in 1937 in Stettin, Pomerania to parents who had moved there

in the 1930s. She and her mother are the quintessential example of the evacuees and Ausgebombte:

Im Frühjahr (1943) fing das an mit den schweren Luftangriffen auf Stettin...brannte alles rund herum, es war furchtbar! Und da es gesagt worden, 'alle Mütter mit kleinen Kindern müssen die Stadt verlassen. Es gab keine Lebensmittelkarten. Mein Vater musste bleiben.'

Frau L. and her mother were then evacuated to a small village near Torgau, Saxony where they lived until the end of the war. Frau L. commented that in her school in Torgau (1943) several classmates were also evacuees from Cologne, Leipzig and other cities where "schon so viel Luftkrieg war." She said, "Da müssten überall die Mütter mit den Kindern aus....und man hatte nicht mehr seine gewohnte Umgebung. Man hatte nichts. Man wurde überall herum gestoßen. Das war eine ziemlich schwierige Zeit."⁴⁷⁵

This example has many similarities with Frau L. from Bessarabia's experiences as an 11-year old Heim-ins-Reich evacuee from the previous chapter: evacuation; the confusion as a child living these events; the constant movement; the uncomfortable reality of being in a foreign environment; perpetual impermanence. These experiences created in some interviewees an emotional and psychological fatigue that later affected their desires to integrate into GDR society. Frau L. for various reasons including the psychological traumas of the war era, remained separate from GDR society and political activity throughout the entire existence of the GDR. As shown through the interviews with Bukovina Germans the traumas many Resettlers experienced, especially as children, affected them psychologically and this reality consequently

⁴⁷⁵ Interview on 16/12/2008 with Frau L., born in 1937 in Pomerania, living in Dresden, Saxony.

affected some Resettlers' abilities to integrate into GDR society. There were many non-politically motivated reasons why Resettlers did or did not integrate into local cultures and societies. This information is rarely discussed in the secondary literature.

Displacement experience: Evacuee by Nazi decree

A contrast to Frau L.'s aerial bombardment traumas and memories, was the evacuation of Frau H.'s family following Nazi officials' orders to do so. Frau H. born in 1943 in Kreis Tilsit, East Prussia. While Frau H. was too young to remember this period, she shared the stories she had been told about how the local women and children were evacuated from the area. Tilsit, East Prussia bordered the Soviet Union and was one of the first German areas to be bombarded and attacked by Soviet soldiers. Frau H.'s father worked for the German railway system and made arrangements for his family and others to escape via train. When analyzing individual Resettlers' integration into GDR one can see great differences between Frau L. from the previous example and Frau H. Frau H.'s family was able to bring much of their property and supplies with them. Frau H. reported that they were able to bring beds, her baby crib, even a clock which belonged to her grandfather. She and her family arrived in Auerbach, Saxony in September 1944 and local Nazi authorities saw to their resettlement in a nearby village.⁴⁷⁶ Frau H. and her family's displacement experience, while traumatic in its own right, involved much less bloodshed, death and loss when compared to the majority of interviewees. Due to the ease with which Frau H. and her family were relocated, they dealt with much less prejudice from locals (as they had brought much of their own property and were not seen as competitors for scarce

⁴⁷⁶ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau H., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Auerbach, Saxony.

resources) and had a much easier time choosing to engage in local Vogtland society than other Resettlers. It is significant to note the tremendous contrasts that occurred in Frau L. and Frau H.'s families regarding desires to and abilities to integrate into GDR society, partially based on one family's ability to bring property with them and provide for their own needs. These examples are included to demonstrate the compelling distinctions that each unique displacement experience had on the desires and abilities of Resettlers to attempt to integrate into GDR society.

Displacement experience: Flight and Expulsion combined

A great variety existed in the ways in which the Resettlers experienced the flight from the Soviet army. An example of a more complicated flight experience combined with the expulsions is that of Frau M. born 1932 in Sätzig, East Brandenburg. Frau M. was probably one of the most upset of the interviewees who shared their experiences. The reason being was "das ich nur gestern Zuhause war, ist alles wieder noch mal...aufgebrochen, nicht? Man hat damit zu kämpfen." This serves as evidence that the traumas of the past were often constantly present in the minds of the interviewees and shows the effects that memory consolidation might have on various Resettler perceptions and memories of the past. Frau M.'s experiences are included as they serve as additional evidence that many interviewees arrived in the SBZ psychologically scarred and mentally fatigued. This reality not only affected Bukovina German life strategies and choices in the hidden and public transcripts of the GDR, but also affected other Resettlers' integration into GDR society as well.

Frau M. claimed that the local *Bürgermeister* and *Ortsbauernführer* in Säpzig had specifically told the populace that those who tried to leave their homes would be shot. The Soviets arrived in the area and “innerhalb einer Nacht war unser Gehöft voll mit Panjewagen.” The women were gathered together and had to cook for the Soviet soldiers. Frau M.’s family noticed a number of Germans escaping to the surrounding forests and they decided to do the same. With a basket in one hand and a bag in the other Frau M. and her family set off in the snow on one of the few flight journeys reported by interviewees that headed eastwards, rather than west. She and her family largely wandered from one place to the next, always being forced out. This journey lasted six weeks and they eventually arrived near Landsberg, Neumark. In the beginning of May they started their journey southwest towards home and found Poles and Soviets living in homes throughout Säpzig. Their family farm was empty. They were allowed to remain for six weeks and apparently none of the German residents knew what was coming. On the morning of 22 June 1945, Frau M. and three friends left for the city of Küstrin to see if they could find laundry detergent for their families. After arriving in Küstrin they were told by residents that “wir in zwei Stunden raus hier...wir Deutschen müssen alle raus.“ Frau M. ran towards Säpzig only to find no one was there. She ran to a nearby town that was on the Oder River where expellees from all over the region were being sent. It was there that she found her family. As they crossed the bridge barefoot and with nothing in hand the Polish secretary of the new Polish mayor of Säpzig stood on the bridge and said “so, bis hierher habe ich Euch gebracht. Da drüben steht der Hitler mit seinen LKW’s, der wartet nur auf Euch. Aber am liebsten wurde ich alle totschiessen.“ Frau M., her family, neighbors and friends who had just wandered aimlessly for several months trying to avoid Soviet troops were now expellees. “Wohin? Es war keiner da der sich um uns gekümmert hat...wir waren niemand. Wir hatten auch keine Papiere...alles waren

Ruinen.⁴⁷⁷ They followed the road of ruins and hunger until, from Frau M.'s perspective, they were housed with a very angry, selfish farmer in Obersdorf, Brandenburg. Like many Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans, Frau M. arrived in the Soviet Zone dazed, confused, hungry and having nothing. This was an extreme beginning to her new life in the SBZ and due to the sufferings during her nearly three month flight experience, the shock of her expulsion by the Poles and the abuse meted out to her by locals, Frau M. had no desire to attempt to integrate into local society for several years.⁴⁷⁸

Displacement experience: Expulsion only

Several interviewees never had a flight experience at all, but rather only an expulsion. Many of these included the Sudeten Germans. Herr K. was born in 1930 in East Bohemia on the Silesian border into a family of farmers. His father, after the annexation of the Sudetenland by the Third Reich, was elected mayor of their small village of Wichstadt and entered the Nazi party. As the Soviets drew near Herr K.'s father was warned by another official to grab what he could and take his family westwards. Herr K.'s father said that he had never treated the Czechs badly and that, as a farmer, his livelihood was there in Wichstadt and so they stayed. On 22 May 1945 Czech partisans arrived in Wichstadt and gathered all men between 16 and 60-years old to the church square.

Alle wurden grausam verprügelt und dann hat man also ein sogenanntes 'Volksgericht' abgehalten und Leute die man irgendwie schon auf einer Liste hatte, bestialisch

⁴⁷⁷ Interview on 04/10/2008 with Frau M., born in 1932 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview on 04/10/2008 with Frau M., born in 1932 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

ermordert. Darunter eben auch mein Vater einfach, weil er Deutscher und Bürgermeister gewesen war. Es war insofern, wie gesagt grausam. Man hat ihn die Geschlechtsteile abgeschnitten noch lebend. Man hat ihn die Stiefel ausgezogen und Bretter an die Füße genagelt. Und hat ihn dann schließlich erhängt. Hat ihm noch ein Hakenkreuz in die Stirn geschnitten und so hat man also zehn Männer bei uns aus dem kleinen Dorf umgebracht...und wir könnten, ja, zur DDR-Zeiten darüber möglichst gar nicht reden.

Herr K.'s mother was alone responsible for the care of her six children and two parents. Ten days later on 3 June 1945 Czech partisans returned to Wichstadt and gathered all Germans to the market square. They were separated into two groups; one group consisted of Germans who were to stay and work. The others were told that they had 30 minutes to pack a small suitcase and rucksack and return to the square in preparation to leave for the "Reich" (they were going to evict them over the Silesian border). "Wir wussten nicht was soll man in der halben Stunde einpacken. Die kleinen hatten noch nichts gegessen....es wurde ein bisschen was schnell zusammen, und dann müssten wir wieder da sein. Und dann hat man uns zur Grenze getrieben...und hat uns angedroht mit Todesstrafe ja nicht wieder zurück zukommen."⁴⁷⁹

One can only imagine what it would have been like for a 14-year old boy to witness the torture, execution and further maiming of his father's body. Then this pain was compounded by the further shock and worry of not knowing where to go following their expulsion and endless weeks of wandering in the Soviet Zone. The psychological damage to Herr K., and as he added the inability to speak about these horrors during the GDR era, affected Herr K.'s life, mental state and desires to associate with SBZ locals for several years. Once again it is significant to

⁴⁷⁹ Interview on 10/02/2009 with Herr K., born in 1930 in Sudetenland, living in Meissen, Saxony.

contemplate how often in the secondary literature political attitudes and beliefs are given as explanations as to why Resettlers kept an “inner distance” between themselves and the SED regime, when it is possible, and so claimed by many Resettlers in their interviews, that additional factors such as the traumas of the flight and expulsions affected Resettlers’ desires and abilities to integrate and interact with the SED regime and local societies.

Displacement experience: Prison-of-War in Soviet custody

Other Resettlers neither experienced the flight or an expulsion. First among these are the *Heimkehrer* or German POW’s. Herr W. was born in 1922 in Nossberg, East Prussia into a farming family. Chaos was the post-war norm regarding Herr W.’s family. His father was imprisoned by the Americans. His mother was in Thuringia. His 16-year old brother was *verschleppt* or abducted by the Soviets and sent to the Ural Mountains where he died from tuberculosis in 1947. Herr W.’s wife and her parents were refugees heading west. Herr W.’s baby son had been very ill. Soviet soldiers overcame his wife and her parents’ refugee group and poured all the powdered milk for her baby son on the ground – the baby died soon thereafter.

Herr W. himself was held as a prisoner of war by the Soviets. This meant that Herr W.’s life for the next four years would be spent in Tallinn, Estonia. He described his first work detail as mainly having to do with construction and reconstruction of the harbor in Tallinn. This work continued, but then also began to include other projects such as rebuilding the city’s theatre. The years passed until finally on 2 January 1949 Herr W. helped lead a hunger strike among 3,000

German POW's across eight POW camps. The POWs were disaffected because they had been told they were to go home in 1948, but that had not occurred. As one of the leaders of the strike Herr W. was sent afterwards to work in a quarry. After the quarry he was sent to work on a road construction detail laying asphalt for a road between the Ukraine and Moscow. Herr W. had an accident in which both his legs were broken. He then worked as a plumber in a POW hospital. Finally word came in December 1949, around the time of Stalin's birthday, that Herr W. and other POW's would be released. Herr W. was sent to the GDR and spent ten days in the Gronenfelde POW camp in Frankfurt an der Oder. His wife and her parents had settled in Ludwigslust, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern after their flight. It was there that Herr W. reunited with his family on New Year's Eve after being a POW for 3.5 years.⁴⁸⁰

While Herr W. had been in the Hitler Youth and a member of the Nazi party, and consequently might have always had anti-communist views, it was his experiences as a POW in the Soviet Union, his hatred towards the Soviets due to his brother and baby son's deaths, the fact that his mother-in-law had been raped by Soviet soldiers on two occasions and other pre-1945 experiences which created in Herr W. an absolute loathing and hatred towards the SED, the Soviets and the GDR governance system as a whole. Herr W. claimed in the interview that because of these events he wished revenge against the Soviets and decided to actively fight the SED. Herr W. spied for the American government for several years and was eventually caught by Stasi officers. For this offence, he was imprisoned for over 10 years. This example is singular and unique among all the Resettlers interviewed for this project, but once again shows the importance of understanding Resettlers experiences before they arrived in the Soviet Zone and how these events affected their social and cultural integration into GDR society.

⁴⁸⁰ Interview on 27/10/2008 with Herr W., born in 1922 in East Prussia, living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg.

Displacement experience: Prison-of-War in Western Allied custody

Another displacement experience that was reported by a few interviewees was being a POW imprisoned by the Western allies. Herr P. was born in Kreis Leitmeritz, Sudetenland in 1927. In Jan 1945 he was made a soldier, received his training and then sent to Italy. In May 1945 he was imprisoned by the Americans, who handed him over to British authorities. After the war, still a POW, he volunteered to work on an airstrip in Bari, Italy. He was there until 1946 when he was asked by a British official to go to Britain and help with the harvest. None of the SBZ POWs wanted to go to Britain – “wir wollten nach Hause”. The following day Polish soldiers who had fought with the British in Italy asked the German POW’s “wer geht nicht mit?” This coercive tactic worked well as the remaining German POW’s ‘volunteered’ to go to Britain and help bring in the harvest.

Herr P. sailed by ship to Glasgow, Scotland and was transferred to ‘Camp Ivy Bridge’ near Plymouth, England. Herr P. still thought of himself as a POW as he used the word *entlassen* or “released” later in his interview. The POW’s worked in a variety of areas. They built homes for the residents of Plymouth due to the destruction caused by German bombing during the war. In total Herr P. estimated that they built close to 3,000 housing units in Plymouth. Approximately one year later he was summoned to the main office and told that it had been a great mistake that he and the others had not been sent home from Italy. He and the other POWs said goodbye to their English friends and boarded a ship on 1 January 1948 sailing to Germany. They arrived in

a camp in Münster, Westphalia. He had made contact with his parents who had been expelled from Sudetenland. They lived in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. He was taken to the Soviet Zone border and was about to cross when the train director said, “Komm hierher. Gehst du zum Russen?...Du kannst bei mir bleiben so lange du willst...geh nicht zum Russen, du kommst nicht nach Hause, du kommst nach Sibieren!“ Confused for a moment, Herr P. remembered that his father had told him not to fear coming to the Soviet Zone. He crossed the border and reunited with his father and mother. While he was happy to see his family again there were also feelings of confusion and bewilderment. „Ich bin zurück gekommen in ein fremdes Land. Die Heimat habe ich verloren.“⁴⁸¹

One can see the great differences that occurred in Resettler integration when taking into account the concept that each Resettler had their own unique displacement experience. This is especially true when comparing Herr P.’s experiences in England to those of Herr W. in the Soviet Union. While Herr W. spied for the Americans and actively fought the SED due to his horrendous experiences with the Soviets, Herr P. who did not have any interactions with the Soviets during the war, joined the SED, spoke positively about life in the GDR and socialism in general. While not conclusive, it is possible that the mere fact that Herr P. had not had any interactions with Soviet soldiers or officials during the war that it was possible for him to accept and thrive in a Soviet-controlled system in the GDR. This reality led to many more integrative experiences and affected Herr P.’s desires to try to engage with locals and the SED regime.

⁴⁸¹ Interview on 05/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1927 in Sudetenland, living in Ribnitz-Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Displacement experience: *Verschleppte* or Abductees

A similar displacement experience to that of the POWs occurred with those ethnic Germans who were *verschleppt* (abducted) to the Soviet Union. Only two interviewees were abductees, but many Resettlers spoke about brothers, sisters, neighbors or other people who had been forcibly taken to the USSR by Soviet soldiers. Most of the interviewees' tales involving family members or friends being abducted to the Soviet Union often ended with the somber conclusion that these people never came back. Frau S.'s experiences as an abductee are included to emphasize again how each unique displacement experience affected Resettlers' desires and psychological abilities to engage or integrate into GDR society.

Frau S. was born in 1921 and lived three kilometers from the Oder River in East Brandenburg. Frau S.'s father died working on the family farm in 1942 and thus it was just Frau S., her mother, her sister and a Polish *Zwangsarbeiter* (forced laborer) at home. Frau S. and her family made preparations to flee the Soviet army, but by the time they were leaving locals informed them that it was too late – the Soviets were already in the area. On the 2nd and 3rd of February 1945 the Soviets arrived in Frau S.'s town. Frau S. said that they just waited in their room „und haben nur gewartet auf die Dinge die da kommen...na ja, halbe Stunde später...dann kamen sie rein ‚Frau, komm‘.“ Frau S., her sister and mother were raped several times over the next few days by Soviet officers and soldiers. Then a Soviet officer arrived, flashing a badge and interviewed her. She did not realize it at the time, but later concluded that he was part of the Soviet secret police (NKVD). He asked her if she had been a member of the Nazi party. She said that she had. The NKVD officer set out a piece of paper for her to sign. She refused, not being able to read what

was on the paper in front of her. The NKVD officer insisted and she acquiesced. Due to her signing a probable confession, she was then forced to march to the local county seat, Schwiebus. There she and many others were crammed tightly into a building. Frau S. said that at night she could hear men screaming in nearby rooms. After being in Schwiebus for a time Frau S. was sent with other abductees on a train to Moscow. People died along the way due to extreme cold and hunger. When the train stopped, all of the dead were gathered and put into a separate train wagon. When that wagon was full, the bodies were then emptied into the surrounding forests. “Ein Bild da steht mir immer vor Augen, in den Fernem, weit. Hier war Wald, und hier war Wald-Wald, und da waren so viele schwarzen Vögel. So viel da haben die hingbracht....wir waren nicht die erste Zug da...die Vögel haben sich getroffen bei der Toten.”⁴⁸²

Upon arrival in Moscow they were taken out and told to shower in a huge hall meant for soldiers. Soviet officers watched them as they showered and took some female abductees and raped them. Frau S. and the group then left Moscow and traveled for three weeks to Kolomna, 114 kilometers from Moscow. When they arrived in Kolomna those who had the strength walked to where they were being led, those who did not, fell into the snow and died. They were housed in two German military tents and put immediately to work in a local mine. Due to her ill health, Frau S. worked in the abductee camp itself. As the months began to pass, Frau S. found herself with the other abductees working in a variety of areas. Frau S. also worked in agriculture and home construction in the city of Kolomna. In 1947 Frau S. was allowed to write a card to her mother and she learned that her mother and sister were living in Fürstenberg an der Oder, the future Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg. Finally in 1948, three years after her abduction, Frau S. was able

⁴⁸² Interview on 27/02/2008 with Frau S., born in 1921 in East Brandenburg, living in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg.

to leave the Soviet Union. She reunited with her mother and sister in Fürstenberg an der Oder and settled there, only a few kilometers from her home town.

Frau S. claimed that she was not a vehement Nazi and as proof she said that they had always treated their Polish forced laborer well. In other words, she, in her opinion, was not an evil racist Nazi found in documentaries or films. These words are included due to the further consequences that her experiences in the USSR had on Frau S.'s integration in the GDR. Frau S. said that in the GDR everyone who had been an abductee in the Soviet Union was considered anathema and that the abductees had somehow deserved the treatment they received in the USSR. Frau S. found this treatment to be unwarranted because she did not perceive herself as a vehement Nazi and that she had unjustly suffered in the Soviet Union. This reality in the SBZ affected Frau S. in several ways, but especially in the area of employment opportunities. Frau S. claimed that no abductees were admitted to the SED's Neulehrer or New Teachers' program. One could say that this was also tied in with the Denazification processes the SBZ was going through during this time as the SED was trying to rid the education professions of Nazis and Nazi sympathizers. Frau S. worked menial jobs for the rest of her employed life in the GDR. She married, had children, but never gave the impression that she was ever overjoyed to live in the GDR. While she was very integrated with locals, due to her literally being from the nearest town and having several family friends in Fürstenberg an der Oder before the war, her engagements with the SED regime and officials were non-existent. Frau S. in the interview was one of the most 'broken' interviewees in this project and the sufferings she endured during her abduction and then the discrimination she endured after her arrival in the SBZ affected her integration and acceptance of the GDR as her new socialist Heimat.

Displacement experience: Civilians held in Soviet custody

Another displacement experience where the interviewee did not flee from the Soviets or live through an expulsion was that of people kept prisoner by Soviet authorities for several years in Kaliningrad Oblast (formerly East Prussia). Frau F. described what she experienced as an 8-year old girl after the fall of Königsberg, East Prussia where she was born and raised. She and her mother did not take part in the flight because of her sick grandmother, so they remained in their house on edge of the city. After living through the bombardments of the city and a Soviet grenade attack, which she wished she had not survived as “nachher sind wir durch die Hölle gegangen, die war viel schlimmer,” the second-wave of Soviet soldiers arrived on 9 April 1945 and “die hatten Zeit. Die nahmen sich dann die Frauen vor. Das ist für mich als Kind die schlimmste Erinnerung, diese, diese Vergewaltigung der Frauen, vor Kindern vor alten Leuten...alles was weiblich aussah.“ After the mass rape the Soviet soldiers then collected the survivors and marched them through the cratered city streets filled with dead horses and dead people. Those who could not keep up with the group, including children and old women, were shot. Frau F. and the group were brought to the Pregel River where many of the women were taken away by soldiers and raped repeatedly; some did not return.

The next day the Soviet soldiers marched Frau F. and the other survivors past the cadavers of some of the women who had been raped and killed the previous night. Some had their breasts cut off, others had their stomachs slit open, it was “ein ganz furchtbares Massaker”. Frau F.

believes the soldiers showed them this massacre in order that they would all be “schön gefügig...beim nächsten Mal”. They were then taken to barracks where the adult women were raped over a period of a week. Frau F. and her mother escaped from that place.

Ironically, Soviet soldiers became a source of salvation for Frau F., her mother and grandmothers (Frau F.’s father’s mother also joined them by that time). The children begged at the Soviet cafeteria for food. The cook made them sing for their food and always emphasized that „dein Vater“ had shot off his missing finger. Nevertheless, the cook always made sure that all the children were fed. Frau F.’s mother was a seamstress and found work in a Soviet-run sewing shop. This work kept the family barely fed as the compensation was one piece of bread for one day’s work. They remained on the outskirts of Königsberg “und dann in Frühjahr in 1948 im März von einem Tag zu anderen kriegten wir die Nachricht morgen...am Viehbahnhof...da hatten wir uns einzufinden. ...Wir waren nur Haut und Knochen...wir sind da rein im Viehwaggon und als der Zug dann voll war von Deutschen (und fuhr los)...dann haben alle Deutschen da drin gesungen ‘oh Dank deine Gott’.”⁴⁸³

As Mr. D., the British psychologist working in the Schwerin area, claimed the psychological damage done to many of the Resettlers is incalculable. What would be the psychological damage to a young girl who witnessed what Frau F. witnessed? Additionally, there was also physical damage Frau F. and her mother had to overcome. After arriving in the Soviet Zone they both spent six straight months incapacitated in hospital. Locals were forced to take Frau F. and her mother in due to the SED’s housing of Resettlers policy, which caused conflict with locals. Frau

⁴⁸³ Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau F., born in 1937 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

F., just as many of the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans reported, missed four whole years of schooling due to her confinement in the Kaliningrad Oblast. She was embarrassed as she was often much older than her fellow students and completed her primary education and apprenticeship at a much older age. Frau F. and her mother arrived in the Soviet Zone wrecks of humanity and their experiences with SED policies and locals only deepened their psychological wounds. All of these events affected Frau F.'s mother's integration into local society for most of her life and also Frau F.'s integration into GDR society. As mentioned previously, the effects of experiences the Resettlers had prior to their arrival in the SBZ on their integration into the cultures and societies of the GDR are rarely analyzed in the secondary literature.

Displacement experience: *Wolfskinder*

The following displacement experience is particular to East Prussia as well. Because of sickness, war and hunger thousands of children in East Prussia lost their parents. Also, due to the scarcity of food parents in East Prussia could not feed their children. These hungry children wandered aimlessly all over East Prussia begging for help and food. These children were called *Wolfskinder*. Thousands of these *Wolfskinder* illegally crossed the border into Lithuania to beg for food or find help. Frau H. born in 1933 near Königsberg had not lost her parents and siblings as other *Wolfskinder* had, but due to great hunger decided to go beg for food in Lithuania. "Die sind immer auf den Züge...sind so viele Kinder gefahren, auf den Zügen gesprungen...ich hatte erstes Mal immer Angst, weil... wir sollten nicht nach Litauen. Und dann hatte ich solche Angst immer, aber dann hatte ich gedacht ,das ist egal. Wenn du unter die Räder kommst denn ist eben

vorbei' und...bin ich auch aufgesprungen."⁴⁸⁴ That was the first time that Frau H. as a 13-year old girl jumped a train to go to Lithuania. She returned from Lithuania only to jump a second train in 1946. After her arrival in Lithuania she heard news that all Germans had been forced out of the Kaliningrad Oblast (East Prussia). Frau H. thought to herself "was willst du bei den Russen? Dann bleibst du lieber in Litauen." She remained in Lithuania working in various households as a servant girl - "mal hier gearbeitet, mal da und auch da geschlafen." Her last job was helping build streets in the community where she lived. After five years officials in Lithuania told her that she had to leave. She arrived in a camp in Bischofswerda, Saxony where she immediately tried to find her parents. Her mother had tried earlier to find Frau H. through the Red Cross, but they were unable to find her in Lithuania because she lived in a "versteckte Ecke." After finishing her three-week quarantine Frau H. left the camp to live with her parents in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.⁴⁸⁵

What were the psychological effects on Frau H. of living most of her teenage years in a foreign country foraging for herself? Just as with other Resettlers, due to years missed of schooling, Frau F. was consigned to work in factories and menial jobs.

Frau K. had to bury her mother at 12 years of age and then care for her siblings in East Prussia. The hard work she did in Lithuanian households and factories led to the physical deformity and breakdown of her hands.⁴⁸⁶ Frau K.'s husband was also one of the *Wolfskinder* in East Prussia. He had almost died several times due to starvation and his physical growth and height had been

⁴⁸⁴ Interview on 01/12/2008 with Frau H., born in 1933 in East Prussia, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Interview on 09/10/2008 with Frau K., born in 1935 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

affected by malnutrition. A meaningful result is how their experiences as *Wolfskinder* affected Herr K. and Frau K.'s integration into GDR society. Both had been *Wolfskinder* and both had experienced horrifying events in East Prussia. However, both accepted the SED's claim that the GDR was for peace and that socialism was the way forward for Germany. Herr K. and Frau K. engaged with SED government officials and enthusiastically supported the SED leaders' plans for the future of the GDR.⁴⁸⁷ This was singular, as most Resettlers who experienced similar events tended to loathe and detest both the SED and the Soviet Union. Once more, the experiences these Resettlers had prior to their arrival affected their integration into local cultures and societies in the GDR and often was an exercise of their agency.

Reactions to the traumas of displacement experiences later in life

While the next situation is not a displacement experience and only affected one Resettler, this example is included to show how the traumas of the flight and expulsions followed the interviewees throughout their lives. Frau K. was born in 1929 and came from Pomerania. She experienced a flight trek with horse-drawn wagons in March 1945. She and her family found a home with relatives near Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Frau K. studied agriculture and received her degree in Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Frau K. worked as an agricultural teacher on the island of Usedom until 1956 when rumors spread that Usedom was to be made Polish territory. Frau K. claimed that her first flight experience eleven years prior was difficult enough and that potentially having to go through additional expulsions was too much to bear. She decided that rather than remain in the GDR she would go to West Germany in order to

⁴⁸⁷ Interview on 09/10/2008 with Herr K., born in 1934 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

avoid having to take part in any other displacement journeys. Frau K. packed her bags and made ready to go to West Germany, but due to familial pressure and concerns she remained in the GDR and moved to Anklam.⁴⁸⁸ This example is included to show the effects the flight and expulsions had on Resettlers. Even after several years the psychological traumas had not healed and created in some interviewees a tendency to overreact or act irrationally in trying to avoid similar situations to their flight and expulsion experiences.

More evidence that Resettlers were traumatized by what they had been through was shared by Herr S. who fled the Soviet army with his mother. Herr S. and his mother arrived and settled in the area of Neuruppin, Brandenburg. Herr S. claimed that for years after the end of the war whenever it would thunder and lightning very heavily at night, he would find his mother sitting on her suitcase in the living room, staring towards the window. Herr S. believed that this was his mother's reaction to the loud crashes of the lightning and thunder and their similarity to the "noises of war" (artillery, tanks and explosions) and the trauma she lived when the Soviet army arrived in their Heimat area. He believed that storms with the lightning and thunder reawakened in her the memory of needing to pack and flee. Herr S. claimed that his mother always had a suitcase packed just in case.⁴⁸⁹

The previous two examples are included to serve as evidence for what Mr. D., the British psychologist working in the Schwerin area, claimed concerning the psychological effects of the flight, expulsion and other displacement experiences on the mental and physical health of his Resettler patients and their descendants. These events are chronicled in the secondary literature,

⁴⁸⁸ Interview on 01/12/2008 with Frau K., born in 1929 in Pomerania, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview on 30/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1930 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

but very rarely are the psychological effects on Resettlers ever analyzed or discussed. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, dysfunctional families, mental instability, depression, misuse of alcohol and physical and sexual abuse were very common in Resettler homes. These mental issues and problems also affected Resettlers' abilities and desires to engage or to choose to integrate with local cultures and societies.

Coping with the traumas of displacement experiences: Suicide

In order to counteract the temptation to think of the preceding information and analysis as overly emotional the following is included to show that potentially thousands of Resettlers had been brought to such a mental, emotional and physical state that they saw ending their own lives as the only escape from the horrors of their pasts and the great unknown of the future. This dire situation was confirmed in July 1945 by Frau F., an official in charge of Resettler care in Dresden, Saxony:

In Sachsen und Thüringen besteht keine Aufnahmemöglichkeit. Wir haben für Dresden 500.000 Lebensmittelkarten; dagegen haben wir schon 535.000 Menschen in Dresden. Wir sind nicht nur gezwungen, die Flüchtlinge nicht aufzunehmen, sondern müssen sogar Dresdner ausweisen...Besonders katastrophale Verhältnisse herrschen in Görlitz, wo wir nicht wissen, was wir machen sollen. Unter den Ausgewiesenen ist eine regelrechte Selbstmordepidemie entstanden, so daß an der Neiße reihenweise des Morgens oft 60 bis 70 Menschen sich an den Bäumen aufgehängt haben. Wir haben diese Dinge mit der

Kommandantur besprochen. Es ist aber etwas, was wir nicht lenken können, weil es wie eine Heuschreckenplage kommt.⁴⁹⁰

This report confirms that many of the Resettlers had been mentally and emotionally affected by their displacement experiences and while much of the secondary literature ignores this reality, this study claims that these psychological conditions greatly affected Resettlers' choices, actions and integration in GDR society.

⁴⁹⁰ BarchP, DO 1, Mdl, 10, ZVU, Nr. 28, Bl. 31 – 38, as recorded in Manfred Wille (ed.), *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), p. 196.

CHAPTER FIVE

ARRIVAL and SETTLEMENT

Taking into account the effects of the flight and expulsion on interviewees, potentially millions of Resettlers arrived in the Soviet Zone psychologically traumatized and in physical deterioration due to the hardships they endured during the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations; stays in Nazi resettler camps often lasting years; surviving Allied bombing raids; Polish partisan attacks; ethnic Czech reprisals; fleeing from Soviet troops in freezing conditions, only to be captured and raped and beaten; being expelled by former neighbors and being robbed of all their property; losing family members to starvation and surviving as Wolfskinder in Lithuania and East Prussia. Having lived through these horrors many interviewees, especially those from Czechoslovakia, saw themselves and their loved ones as victims – victims of Nazi policies and wars; victims of Czech, Polish and other partisan and government reprisals; and victims of Cold War politics.

The physical and mental fatigue that millions of Resettlers struggled with was only made worse by difficulties after their arrival. This chapter will discuss Resettler arrival and settlement in the SBZ and their often negative treatment by locals. This reaction often compounded psychological and physical damage and fatigue the Resettlers were already feeling. This in turn affected Resettlers' abilities and desires to integrate into local society. Resettler involvement with Soviet

and SED officials and government programs will be investigated as well as interviewees' feelings regarding these programs. Were most Resettlers unaware of SED's Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler and other governmental schemes to alleviate Resettlers' suffering, just as the majority of Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans had been? What were results of these programs on overall Resettler integration into the cultures and societies of the GDR?

Soviet and SED authorities' preparation

Due to the arrival of the Resettlers the post-war population in the regions of the Soviet Zone had increased by 17.8% from pre-war levels.⁴⁹¹ Even though a war which cost the lives of millions had just occurred, the SBZ actually experienced a post-war population increase.

Soviet and SED officials were overwhelmed and unprepared to receive and care for the millions of ethnic Germans arriving in the Soviet Zone. According to Philipp Ther, the Soviet Zone suffered the greatest out of all Occupation zones⁴⁹² due to its proximity to the expulsion areas. The Soviet zone was often the first point of contact refugees and expellees had with Occupied Germany. This meant that the Soviet Zone was the source of food, clothing, provisions, help finding loved ones and other governmental programs for millions despite their final destination. An example of the severity of the situation was a report by officials in the border city of Guben, Brandenburg. At various times, usually depending on the rate of expulsion by Polish authorities or the violence against ethnic Germans in Poland, trains arrived in Guben with 6,000 ethnic

⁴⁹¹ Wille, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 265.

⁴⁹² Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 56.

Germans a day.⁴⁹³ This reality that existed throughout the Soviet Zone exhausted governmental and locals' resources, supplies and willingness to help.

In order to care for and organize the settlement of the millions of newly arrived Resettlers, SED and Soviet officials organized the Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler (Central Administration for German Resettlers) in September 1945.⁴⁹⁴ The ZVU operated at local and district levels and was charged to alleviate the physical suffering of Resettlers and to hasten their integration into SBZ society.⁴⁹⁵

ZVU officials began by creating the new designation of "Umsiedler" or Resettler rather than "Vertriebene" or "Flüchtlinge" in order to avoid political problems with Soviet officials, but also to create an image of permanency for the Resettlers – the Soviet Zone was to be their new home.⁴⁹⁶ Several interviewees became agitated when speaking about this and angrily emphasized that they were not "re-settlers".⁴⁹⁷ It seemed as though they were angry with SED and Soviet officials for trying to expunge their sufferings and identity as victims. Several interviewees angrily explained that they were not re-settling in the SBZ, but that they had been forced from their homes and had their property stolen – they were not in the Soviet Zone out of choice as the term "resettler" would suggest.

Part of the chaos that Resettlers experienced after arriving in the SBZ was due to Soviet and SED officials' directives not being followed. For example, SMAD authorities directed in July 1945

⁴⁹³ BLHA, Rep. 250 Landratsamt Guben-Frankfurt/Oder Nr. 275 ,Betreuung der Umsiedler, 1945 -1948', Bl. 105.

⁴⁹⁴ Seraphim (1955), p. 8.

⁴⁹⁵ Barch, DO/2 101, ZVU, 'Ein Jahr Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler', Bl. 2.

⁴⁹⁶ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 60.

⁴⁹⁷ Interview on 01/08/2008 with Herr H., born in 1935 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

that Resettlers from certain regions were to settle in specific areas.⁴⁹⁸ Local governments and officials acting in their communities' desires to conserve resources for themselves often created circumstances or situations in which the Resettlers were forced to leave.⁴⁹⁹ There were subtle ways in which locals accomplished this result, but there some outright attacks and other negative actions taken against Resettlers. SED officials reported that:

In Dresden und Pirna verlud man ahnungslose Menschen auf Elbschiffe, die stromabwärts in Marsch gesetzt wurden. So trafen ohne Absprache und Anmeldung drei Schiffe mit 2.078 Sudetendeutschen in Torgau (Provinz Sachsen) ein. Die bald hoffnungslos überbelegte Kommune, in die auch der Landrat des Kreises Borna LKW-Transporte mit Vertriebenen bringen ließ, verweigerte – da kein Abtransport der Ankommenden mit der Eisenbahn in andere Regionen zustande kam – weitere Anlandungen.⁵⁰⁰

After experiencing the horrors and traumas of the expulsions, these Resettlers from Czechoslovakia who were not wanted in Dresden and the surrounding areas, were put onto random boats and shipped down the Elbe River. Then, not wanted by their destination city, were sent elsewhere. Situations like this convinced many Resettlers early on that they were on their own to survive and that SBZ officials and people were cold-hearted, unfriendly and unwilling to help.

⁴⁹⁸ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 59.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 59-60.

⁵⁰⁰ Manfred Wille (ed.), *Die Sudetendeutschen in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands*, as quoted in Manfred Wille (ed.), *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, p. 177.

A detailed description of this was given by Herr H. and is included to show the effects on perceptions, opinions and willingness that arrival and settlement experiences had on Resettlers' energies and willingness to accept the SBZ as their new home.

Resettler camp system in the SBZ

One of the aspects of the Resettler narrative that is rarely included in the secondary literature is regarding the ZVU's system of Resettler camps. The following information is included as this was often the first experience Resettlers had with SED officials and since this first impression was often negative and shocking, it had lasting effects on many Resettlers' desires to engage with the SED regime and Resettler integration into GDR society.

As often accompanies such rushed and mishandled situations as the flight and expulsions, epidemics and hygiene became a huge problem in areas through which refugees and expellees traveled or where they settled. Throughout the Soviet Zone 30,000 cases of typhoid were registered in the months of August and September 1945 alone.⁵⁰¹ SMAD officials blamed the Resettlers for these outbreaks⁵⁰² and ordered the ZVU to create a system of containment and quarantine camps for the newly arrived Resettlers. The following is an excerpt from the Soviet orders creating these camps and the expected numbers of Resettlers to arrive in the Soviet Zone:

Es müssen aufgenommen werden:

Aus Polen 1.530.000 Personen

Aus der Tschechoslowakei 2.250.000 Personen

⁵⁰¹ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 59.

⁵⁰² Barch, DO/2 101, ZVU, Bl. 21.

Aus Ungarn 500.000 Personen

Aus Österreich 39.000 Personen

Aus Jugoslawien 5.000 Personen

Die Provinz Mecklenburg organisiert ein Durchgangslager an der polnischen Grenze und zwei Durchgangslager an der Grenze der Provinz Brandenburg. Die Provinz Brandenburg errichtet drei Durchgangslager an der polnischen Grenze und zwei an der Grenze des Landes Sachsen. Das Land Sachsen errichtet vier Lager an der tschechisch-slowakischen Grenze; die Provinz Sachsen zwei Lager an der Grenze des Landes Sachsen; das Land Thüringen zwei Lager an der Grenze des Landes Sachsen. Die Durchgangslager werden an den Orten errichtet, wo Rückwanderer Lager gestanden haben, oder an anderen Orten, die freien Wohnraum zur Verfügung haben. Termin für die Vorbereitung der Durchgangslagern 10.10.45.⁵⁰³

A variety of structures were used as the main buildings for these Resettler camps. Old military bases, military barracks, former concentration camps and even pig sties⁵⁰⁴ were transformed to hold the newly arrived Resettlers.⁵⁰⁵

The main purpose of each camp was to systematically delouse and cleanse all Resettlers in order to prevent further epidemics.⁵⁰⁶ The unfortunate reality is that thousands of Resettlers who had been healthy fell ill in these camps and died.

⁵⁰³ MLHA Rep. K Mdl, Nr. 6511, Bl. 255 – 257, as recorded in Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, p. 58.

⁵⁰⁴ Interview on 01/08/2008 with Herr H., born in 1935 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

⁵⁰⁵ MLHA Rep. K Mdl, Nr. 6511, Bl. 255 – 257, as recorded in Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, p. 96.

The Brandenburg *Ministerium des Innern* when writing its “Historisches Bericht über die Arbeit in der Umsiedlerbewegung von 1945 – Mai 1948 im Land Brandenburg“ in 1948 reported that many of the Resettlers who had died in ZVU camps had done so due to diphtheria, heart disease, typhus and exhaustion from their flight or expulsions.⁵⁰⁷

The camps were used as political instruments to try to win and indoctrinate the hearts of the Resettlers.⁵⁰⁸ SED officials gave ample time to the Volkssolidarität, FDJ (Free German Youth) and other organizations⁵⁰⁹ to make political speeches, show films, hold meetings and distribute literature all with the focus of encouraging Resettler participation in SED plans for Germany’s socialist future.⁵¹⁰

When one contemplates what it was like for the Resettlers, being forced into an awful holding pen, being surrounded by death, misery, hunger and boredom and then the people who the Resettlers felt were responsible for all of this were preaching their ideology forcefully, it is not surprising that these experiences left many Resettlers with little desire to engage with SED officials or GDR society once they left the camps.

Settlement and Government Aid

⁵⁰⁶ Barch, DO/2 101, ZVU, Bl. 21.

⁵⁰⁷ BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 203 MdI, Nr. 1166, „Historisches Bericht über die Arbeit in der Umsiedlerbewegung von 1945 – Mai 1948 im Land Brandenburg, 1948“, Bl. 25.

⁵⁰⁸ Rainer Schulze, “The Struggle of Past and Present in Individual Identities: the Case of German Refugees and Expellees from the East”, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 39.

⁵⁰⁹ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato p. 43-45.

⁵¹⁰ BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 203 MdI, Nr. 1166, „Historisches Bericht über die Arbeit in der Umsiedlerbewegung von 1945 – Mai 1948 im Land Brandenburg, 1948“, Bl. 26-27.

Several of the issues that confronted Resettlers after they left the ZVU camps have been dealt with earlier in this work, however the following information is included as not all SED programs were discussed due to Bessarabian, Bukovina and Daube Swabians lack of participation in some schemes, but also to show that those programs already discussed were also experienced by Resettlers from other areas like Sudetenland, East Prussia and Pomerania.

Umsiedlerkredite or interest-free loans were offered to Resettlers to buy additional necessities, but few interviewees remembered receiving the 300 Reichsmarks or the Umsiedlerkredite. Those who did receive the interest-free loans used them for a variety of reasons. Frau T. born in 1930 in East Prussia used her loan to buy a bicycle for her husband, so he would not have to walk so far to and from work. She also bought a washboard, material for drapes and gardening tools.⁵¹¹ Herr M. born in 1931 in Silesia reported that his family received an interest-free loan of 200 Marks in order to buy a table. The family then made payments of five Marks a month until the loan was paid off.⁵¹² .

Even though SED officials were trying with the limited resources they had interviewees either reported that they had been abandoned and left to survive on their own, or that the amount of government aid was so small that their negative opinions of SED officials and GDR society gained from in ZVU camps and through their interactions with SBZ locals were deepened. This entrenchment of negative thinking regarding the SED regime and locals affected Resettler desires to engage and integrate into local cultures and societies.

⁵¹¹ Interview on 15/11/2008 with Frau T., born in 1930 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁵¹² Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Silesia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

Housing Crisis

War destruction combined with the arrival of millions of Resettlers brought the housing shortage in the SBZ to its breaking point. SMAD and SED authorities housed Resettlers in military barracks, concentration camps, schools, barns, pig sties, chicken coops and other structures. These were all purported as suitable housing for Resettlers by SED officials.⁵¹³ Despite Resettlers living in dwelling such as chicken coops or cow stalls, there were still 1.9 million people without housing in the SBZ in October 1946.⁵¹⁴

Castles were not just used for as construction materials, but also as another unique housing option for interviewees. The Resettlers often had such miserable and poor living conditions on these estates that it added to the aversion and negativity many already felt towards Soviet and SED officials. Several interviewees, including Frau G. and Frau A. both Carpathian Germans living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, reported that after the expulsion from Slovakia they were housed in a local castle. Their experiences in the castle were far from positive as these places were often reported as being cold, drafty and even having rats and other hygienic problems.⁵¹⁵

Using chicken coops, cow stalls and empty castles had not solved the housing problem as there were hundreds of thousands of Resettlers without shelter. Soviet and SED officials initiated

⁵¹³ LHA Rep. K BV Magdeburg, Nr. 217, Bl. 24, as recorded in Manfred Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I, Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), p. 164.

⁵¹⁴ Ther, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 72.

⁵¹⁵ Interview on 12/11/2008 with Frau A., born in 1931 in Slovakia, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

governmental housing inspections and forced quartering with locals. Local officials searched homes in order to ascertain which were not filled to capacity. Those homes which were being underutilized were then assigned to take in Resettlers and house them. This policy created a great deal of friction and mutual anger between locals and Resettlers and further aggravated any potential Resettler integration into local societies for a number of years.

As with other SMAD and SED mandates this policy of housing inspections was not uniformly or vigorously enforced. Some local officials hoped that the slower they conducted the housing inspections the less likely Resettlers would be assigned to live in their communities.⁵¹⁶ In the post-war era local SBZ authorities it was difficult to give the hungry, homeless Resettlers priority in food and housing allocations when locals were suffering from want and homelessness due to war-time destruction themselves.⁵¹⁷

Discrimination by Locals

Negative treatment and personal examples were analyzed in the previous chapters, but it is necessary to emphasize that Resettlers from Pomerania, Slovakia and other regions had similar interactions with locals as well.

The competition for resources between the two groups allowed discriminatory practices to continue and grow in several areas. One discriminatory practice was that of allotting fewer

⁵¹⁶ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 63.

⁵¹⁷ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 284.

ration cards to Resettlers compared to locals largely to convince the new arrivals to leave.⁵¹⁸ This discrimination also affected Resettlers and their quest to find employment in the Soviet Zone. The director of the *Sozialamt* for Landkreis Guben wrote to the head of the *Bezirksverwaltung für Arbeit und Sozialwesen* and claimed that locals were the culprits in the continued unemployment of many Resettlers in the area:

Auf das Schreiben vom 18.11.1946 teile ich Ihnen mit....Innerhalb unseres Landkreises ist die Unterbringung der Umsiedler sehr schwer, desgleichen die Unterbringung in einem Arbeitsprozess. Teilweise liegt es an der Struktur des Landkreises, aber vielfach auch an der Böswilligkeit der hiesigen eingesessenen Bevölkerung. Die in den Dörfern eingesetzten Umsiedler-Ausschüsse können sich teilweise auch nicht durchsetzen und gesetzliche Bestimmungen bestehen leider nicht, die uns die Möglichkeit geben würden, zwangsweise gegen die Betreffenden vorzugehen, um den Umsiedlern einigermaßen eine anständige Unterbringung zu gewährleisten.⁵¹⁹

Many Resettlers could only find work bringing in the harvest and participating in other agricultural activities. Locals often misused Resettlers as replacements for the *Fremdarbeiter* (slave labor or POW's) who had returned to their homelands.⁵²⁰

After all that the Resettlers had experienced, including for many their mental and psychologically-damaged state, discrimination by locals and officials reinforced their perceptions

⁵¹⁸ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 36.

⁵¹⁹ BLHA, Rep. 250 Landratsamt Guben-Frankfurt/Oder Nr. 273 „Betreuung der Umsiedler, 1945-1946“, Bl. 24.

⁵²⁰ MLHA, Rat des Kreises Güstrow, Nr. 129, as recorded in Manfred Wille (ed.), *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR Dokumente. I Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, p. 92.

that they alone were responsible for their own survival and that the SBZ was not going to welcome them.

Denazification and its Effects on Resettlers

As discussed previously with examples from Bukovina German and Danube Swabian testimonies, the processes of Denazification affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of Resettlers' lives in positive and negative ways. As reported earlier, Frau S. from East Brandenburg was abducted and sent to work in a Soviet mining community due to her Nazi party membership. Her life in the SBZ was also complicated as her Nazi party membership and the fact that she had been held by authorities in the Soviet Union were obstacles in finding employment in the GDR.⁵²¹ Denazification included the removal of former Nazi party members from public employment and at times the confiscation of these people's homes and properties.⁵²² The consequences of this policy was that there were hundreds of thousands of government jobs left empty. Tens of thousands of Resettlers benefited from these vacancies as they either filled them outright or were trained to fill these positions. By 1950 more than 72,000 Resettlers worked as state office workers.⁵²³

Another gap in the SBZ labor force where Resettlers benefitted greatly was that of school teaching. In Nazi Germany teaching and indoctrinating children and youth was seen as essential and often Nazi party members worked as school teachers. The process of Denazification left

⁵²¹ Interview on 27/02/2008 with Frau S., born in 1921 in East Brandenburg, living in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg.

⁵²² Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr S., born in 1933 in Sudetenland, living near Radeberg, Saxony.

⁵²³ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 268.

thousands of teaching positions vacant, which were generously filled by Resettlers. This hiring and training of Resettler teachers grew to the point that by 1950 more than one-third of teachers in the GDR had originated from “expulsion areas”.⁵²⁴

Bodenreform

The Soviets and SED authorities initiated a redistribution of aristocratic estates in the SBZ throughout the late 1940s. By 1947 millions of hectares had been assigned to the Neubauer or New Farmers.⁵²⁵ This program affected the lives of numerous interviewees as 43.3% of all allotments had been given to Resettlers.⁵²⁶ This policy allowed New Farmers to claim the goods, machinery and animals confiscated by the previous owners. This gave great hopes to the Resettlers who had experienced so much up to that point. Resettlers felt enlivened at the prospect of replacing the farms they had left behind in their old Heimat; of having their own homes, instead of being quartered with locals; and putting an end to the eternal impermanence they had felt for the previous six years. The reason that the Bodenreform movement is significant in the integration of Resettlers is due to its overwhelming failure. Because the program was carried out with a tremendous lack of supplies and success it only exacerbated the frustration and anger Resettlers had felt towards the SED regime and locals.

In 1947 only 63,000 of the 210,000 New Farmers lived in housing of their own.⁵²⁷ In order to help alleviate this housing crisis SED officials ordered that 37,000 New Farmers homes be built.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

Ther points out that this was monumental as this meant that almost all building resources in the SBZ were going toward New Farmer housing construction.⁵²⁸ However, the result, as with so many SED attempts to help Resettlers, was extremely disappointing. Even with an ambitious building program there were still 26,000 New Farmers who did not have their own homes.

The extreme shortages of construction materials was confirmed by Herr D. born in 1928 in Pomerania. Herr D. served as mayor of a small village in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern for several decades where over 70% of the village's population consisted of Resettlers. Almost all Resettlers in the village were New Farmers and had received their Bodenreform parcels. Herr D. confirmed the insufficient materials and funds to fulfill many of the programs for Resettlers. Herr D. himself received a 'Resettler' loan for 12,000 Marks from the government to build a house. This money was exactly half the amount of money required for the construction of one home. Herr D. also dealt with constant material shortages. Once Herr D. smuggled one kilogram of butter into West Berlin in order to get the nails he needed to finish his house.⁵²⁹

The circumstances that most Resettler New Farmers worked under and the immediate results of the Bodenreform program were disastrous. Local authorities were often charged with the division of Bodenreform land. This resulted in Resettlers receiving poorer quality farming parcels when compared to local New Farmers.⁵³⁰ This further discrimination of Resettlers by SBZ locals entrenched negative opinions the Resettlers had. Chronic machinery and animal labor shortages were so common that the majority of New Farmers had to plow their allotments

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 179.

⁵²⁹ Interview on 12/11/2008 with Herr D., born in 1928 in Pomerania, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁵³⁰ Arnd Bauerkämper, "Social Conflict and Social Transformation in the Integration of Expellees in Rural Brandenburg, 1945-1952", in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 288.

themselves, without the aid of horses.⁵³¹ The situation was made worse by a number of Resettler New Farmers who lacked any agricultural knowledge and experience.⁵³²

These horrible conditions resulted in a huge exodus from the Bodenreform program by New Farmers and specifically the Resettlers. Between 1945 and 1946 over 900 Resettler families gave up their Bodenreform allotments in Brandenburg. In 1947 alone more than 2,000 Resettler families had done the same.⁵³³

Resettlers remembered and perceived the Bodenreform movement as being one more SED failure in a long list of failures and offences. The frustration with these failures grew as other attempts by the SED to alleviate Resettlers' suffering through the Umsiedlerwoche and other collection efforts were hugely disappointing.⁵³⁴ The realization that many Resettlers had that any SED effort was a failure and that locals would not help them cemented Resettlers' conclusions that they were on their own to provide for themselves in the Soviet Zone.

SED efforts to expunge Resettler existence from the public domain

The Resettlers' were at a breaking point. The horrors experienced before their arrival, the inability for the SED regime to care for them and the maltreatment by SBZ locals had extinguished most Resettlers' desires to make the Soviet Zone their new home. What the SED

⁵³¹ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 64-65.

⁵³² Seraphim (1955), p. 16.

⁵³³ BLHA, Ld. Br. Rep. 203 MdI (Ministerium des Innern), Nr. 1166, „Historisches Bericht über die Arbeit in der Umsiedlerbewegung von 1945 – Mai 1948 im Land Brandenburg, 1948“, Bl. 15-16.

⁵³⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

did next was even worse if they had hoped the Resettlers would accept the GDR as their new socialist Heimat.

The political situation suddenly and quickly changed for the ZVU and Resettlers in the Soviet Zone. Eastern Europe and its communist parties went through a series of purges after 1945. The SED began its own party purge from 1948 onwards with the goal of creating “a party of the new type” based on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.⁵³⁵ The purpose of the subsequent “anti-cosmopolitan” purges beginning in 1948 in the Soviet Union⁵³⁶ which swept across Eastern Europe throughout the early 1950’s (the Rajik trial in Budapest in September 1949⁵³⁷ and the Slansky trial in Prague in November 1952⁵³⁸ serving as prime examples) was to destroy “particularism” (special interests and groups continuing to exist rather than assimilating into the socialist whole) and force uniformity in Eastern Europe. These anti-cosmopolitan purges claimed as most of their victims Jewish or pro-Jewish communist leaders such as Paul Merker in the GDR. The reason that this is significant to the Resettler narrative is that Paul Merker was the SED “expert” on Resettler affairs in the GDR.

Merker had made constant efforts to try to alleviate Resettler suffering. He had also made a multitude of calls for the SED regime to pay compensation to Jewish victims of the Nazi government.⁵³⁹ Merker’s stance on the Jewish compensation question and help for Resettlers were very unpopular with GDR officials. From a SED viewpoint these demands put the needs or

⁵³⁵ Herf, p. 107.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., p. 108-109.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p. 114.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

identity (Herf quoted the SED view of Marx's teaching of "stubborn Jewish otherness")⁵⁴⁰ of one particular group in GDR society above the needs and identity of society at large. Instead of acquiescing to these "particularist" demands, East European governments held trials and imprisoned many thousands of people in an effort to eliminate non-conformity.⁵⁴¹ The Resettlers were caught in this alignment of political and social movements. From the perspective of SED officials the Resettlers were a great hindrance in their relations with its socialist neighbors, i.e. Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. It is possible that with money and resources not available to fund Resettler programs and continued Resettler resentment of how they were being treated in the GDR that the SED created a situation on purpose to force Resettlers to accept their lot in the GDR or to leave.

The arrest of Paul Merker and the dissolution of the ZVU's national and local Resettler offices wholesale were just the beginning in forcing conformity on GDR Resettlers.⁵⁴² The next step in the SED's efforts included the banning of even using the term "Resettler". State and local governments immediately stopped using the term.⁵⁴³ They then began to publicly stigmatize the term "Resettler" as being equal to that of "Nazi"⁵⁴⁴ in order to force silence and compliance on the part of Resettlers. It is ironic that a term that was invented by SED officials had become too "particularist" to be used in official party channels.

In one fell swoop the Resettlers, who had been the focus and recipient of great governmental attention and programs for almost three years, "officially" ceased to exist. Even official police

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p. 146.

⁵⁴² Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 232.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 231.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 238.

documents stop referring to individuals as “Umsiedler” for the most part after 1950,⁵⁴⁵ but as Heike Amos showed through her study of Stasi files the SED regime kept special watch on the Resettlers throughout the existence of the GDR.⁵⁴⁶

The SED learned that while they had tried to erase the Resettlers from public discourse they continued to exist and were disgruntled with living conditions in the GDR. The Volkskammer of the newly established GDR decided to help the Resettlers with the passage of a new law in 1950: *Gesetz zur weitem Verbesserung der Lage der ehemaligen Umsiedler*.⁵⁴⁷ This law made provision for assistance in several areas, especially education. Studentships in the newly formed *Arbeiter-Bauern Fakultäten* (educational institutions) were set aside specifically for children of Resettlers. Financial credits were also made available to the Resettlers.⁵⁴⁸ Schwartz and Ther suggested that the SED had ulterior motives when adopting the Resettler Assistance Law to appease Resettler anger regarding the newly cemented ‘Peace Border’, i.e. Oder-Neisse border agreement with Poland.⁵⁴⁹

Stalinization and Industrialization in Resettlers’ lives

Under Stalin’s orders the SED began an industrialization process to change its economy and society. Redirecting economic resources towards industrial output made shortages among Resettler Bodenreform participants even more drastic.⁵⁵⁰ Given their frustration with material

⁵⁴⁵ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 238.

⁵⁴⁶ Heike Amos, *Die Vertriebenenpolitik der SED 1949 bis 1990*. (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009).

⁵⁴⁷ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 163.

⁵⁴⁸ Meinicke, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 76.

⁵⁴⁹ Schwartz, *Vertriebene und “Umsiedlerpolitik”*, p. 31.

⁵⁵⁰ Donth, p. 348.

shortages in farming communities and the discrimination at the hands of SBZ locals, many Resettlers willingly returned their Bodenreform allotments⁵⁵¹ and went to work in the new industrial complexes⁵⁵² such as Eisenhüttenstadt. The ‘melting pot’ that was created in these socialist industrial centers created one of the first opportunities for Resettlers to, on a macro-level, establish relations with native SBZ residents as they too were new to these areas. In Hoyerswerda, Eisenhüttenstadt and other Stalinist industrial complexes Resettlers were given higher paying jobs, equal opportunities in employment (compared to close-knit communities in Mecklenburg for example) and greater chances for social equality and interaction with SBZ natives.⁵⁵³ It was through this process of Stalinization that Resettlers in the GDR began to be accepted by locals.⁵⁵⁴

The Stalinization of the GDR continued next with the collectivization of farms in 1952.⁵⁵⁵ While a great many Resettlers had moved to the industrial centers, many Resettlers, especially Bessarabian Germans, had remained and worked on their Bodenreform parcels. These Resettlers were forced by the SED regime into collectivized farms or Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft.⁵⁵⁶ Herr W. born in 1931 in Pomerania and his mother worked one of the 70 New Farmer parcels in their small village in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. With a population of over 70% Resettlers Herr W. and his mother had stayed and retained their New Farmer allotment rather than move to an industrial center. In 1953 the SED forced residents of the village to form a collectivized farm or LPG. Herr W. said that they joined willingly, but in

⁵⁵¹ Bauerkämper, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 292.

⁵⁵² Seraphim (1955), p. 11-12.

⁵⁵³ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 269.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

1960 when the LPG's were made larger, that he did not join willingly.⁵⁵⁷ Many Resettlers did not like their changed status from independent New Farmers to workers on a large collectivized farm and many fled to the FRG.

17 June 1953 was a turning point for many Resettlers. With chronic material and housing shortages, lack of employment opportunities, no success with the Bodenreform movement and the SED treating Resettlers as Hitler's revanchist 'fifth column'⁵⁵⁸ many Resettlers decided it would be better to leave the GDR. These negative circumstances combined with Resettler economic hopes that the passage in 1952 of the *Lastenausgleich* in West Germany, a law that "equalized" war burdens and allowed for war damage and loss compensation to be paid to refugees and expellees,⁵⁵⁹ would give them a better life.

Ther pointed out that just as the GDR was bringing its Resettler policies to a full stop, West Germany made greater help available to the refugees and expellees in the form of monetary compensation, aid and political participation.⁵⁶⁰ A belief of a better life in the West prompted many refugees and expellees to leave the GDR. From 1949 to 1961 approximately 2.75 million *Republikflüchtlinge* (former GDR residents who left and settled in West Germany) fled the GDR. Out of these 2.75 million approximately 30.5% or 838,300 were GDR Resettlers.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁷ Interview on 12/11/2008 with Herr W., born in 1931 in Pomerania, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁵⁵⁸ von Plato, Meinicke and von Plato, p. 87.

⁵⁵⁹ Daniel Levy, "Integrating ethnic Germans in West Germany: the early postwar period", in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 27.

⁵⁶⁰ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 73.

⁵⁶¹ Heidemeyer, p. 41-44.

Pertti Ahonen explained how the refugees and expellees were exactly what Chancellor Adenauer needed in West Germany as a way to protect his hold on power. Adenauer felt that a unified “neutral” Germany would have tilted all of Germany towards the Soviet Union⁵⁶² and precluded himself and the CDU from control over national politics. The Resettlers in the GDR found themselves in an odd situation – being wanted and appreciated for their political value in West Germany, but at the same time being pushed out of the GDR for the exact same reasons.

⁵⁶² Ahonen, p. 87.

CHAPTER SIX

LIFE CYCLES

With the average interviewee being 12-years old in 1945 the Resettlers still had many life events to experience after their arrival and settlement in the Soviet Zone. Taking these factors as potential indicators of macro-level integration into local societies and cultures this sub-chapter will explore issues such as the educational, employment, marriage, divorce and familial life cycles of the Resettlers in the GDR. Which fields of employment did the interviewees enter? Were there distinctly macro-level patterns in Resettler marriages and divorces or did they fit in with the GDR norms? How many children did the interviewees have compared to the GDR populace in general? These and other questions of Resettlers' everyday life that affected integration are rarely discussed in the GDR Resettler secondary literature.

Education and Vocational Training

The educational experiences of most interviewees began in their homelands. For those Resettlers old enough to be involved with their primary or secondary schooling at the time, many reported how their educations were stopped due to the war. Interviewees from Pomerania reported having their education interrupted as schools were closed and turned into military hospitals. Other

interviewees, especially those from Sudetenland also reported that in 1944 their schools were closed in order to function as military hospitals⁵⁶³ and as refugee centers for ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe.⁵⁶⁴ As with the Bessarabian and Bukovina Germans' testimonies, many interviewees' educational progress was stopped due to the lack of teachers as many had been drafted into military service.⁵⁶⁵

In general the Resettlers reported having missed 1-1.5 years of schooling, but as discussed earlier the amount of education missed also depended greatly upon the interviewee's experiences prior to their arrival in the SBZ. The following examples serve as further evidence that events and experiences peculiar to certain Heimat groups, which are rarely analyzed separately in the secondary literature, later uniquely affected Resettlers' individual and group integration into GDR society.

Examples of how events in particular Heimat regions could affect one's education and employment include several Resettlers from Sudetenland. They mentioned not only that the war stopped their education, but that other events, such as the post-war closure of all German schools by Czech authorities⁵⁶⁶ and their internment in Czechoslovakian detention camps increased their educational handicaps.

One of the most extreme examples of post-war educational loss was that of Frau F. from Königsberg. Frau F. and her mother had been detained by Soviet authorities for three years in

⁵⁶³ Interview on 05/01/2009 with Herr W., born in 1932 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.

⁵⁶⁴ Interview on 17/02/2009 with Frau I., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt.

⁵⁶⁵ Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr M., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Chemnitz, Saxony.

⁵⁶⁶ Interview on 24/02/2009 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Sudetenland, living in Weimar, Thuringia.

East Prussia and were finally released in 1948. Due to her detention and the war-time bombardment of Königsberg Frau F. had lost over four years of schooling. This says nothing to the effects that the horrors witnessed by Frau F. during this time had on her abilities to learn.⁵⁶⁷

The circumstances when the Resettlers arrived in the Soviet Zone also affected several interviewees' education. Herr M.'s schooling had been negatively affected due to the flight and expulsion, but Herr M.'s education was also gravely affected due to the chaos that was omnipresent in the SBZ after the war. Herr M. and his family could not find a place to live and wandered for such a long time in the Soviet Zone that he eventually began 1st class at 8.5-years old, a full 2.5 years older than the majority of the children in his class.⁵⁶⁸

In an attempt to make up for this lost time in Resettlers' schooling, teachers and educational authorities in the Soviet Zone employed various tactics. Frau N. from Sudetenland reported that she was only able to attend the 1st class in her primary school for a limited time during the war. After hostilities ended she and her family were put into an internment camp by the Czechs. After being held in the camp for one year, Frau N. and her family were expelled in 1946 to Grebbin (near Bitterfeld). By this time she was not only behind in the knowledge acquired by students her age, but was also older than students with whom she studied. Due to this situation Frau N. was advanced rapidly through several classes.⁵⁶⁹ This skipping of classes in order to join children their own age was reported by several interviewees and affected their feelings of self-

⁵⁶⁷ Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau F., born in 1937 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁵⁶⁸ Interview on 21/10/2008 with Herr M., born in 1939 in Silesia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁵⁶⁹ Interview on 16/02/2009 with Frau N., born in 1938 in Sudetenland, living near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.

worth and abilities to get the job they desired as many lacked the basic knowledge and skills required.

This lack of knowledge and skills affected several interviewees' opinions about the SED regime and locals as many were forced into certain employment fields due to their interrupted educations. An example of this situation was Herr L. from Sudetenland. Herr L. was on the cusp of finishing the 8th class when the war ended and he and his family were expelled in July 1945. Due to the expulsion Herr L. did not receive an 8th class Abschluss (completion certificate). By the time his family had settled in the GDR he was much older than the other children in 8th class. Herr L. felt that it was for these reasons, his lack of an Abschluss and being "too old" to be in 8th class, that he was relegated to work on local farms. After working on agricultural properties for four years and an academic future closed to him, Herr L. felt he had no other choice but to complete an apprenticeship in metal work in 1951.⁵⁷⁰

Another significant difference between educational experiences had to do with the age of individual Resettlers. Younger interviewees who had been socialized in the GDR and had completed their primary and secondary education wholly in the GDR showed a greater tendency to speak positively about the GDR when compared to those who began or their completed their education prior to the war.

All of these experiences, where they were educated, the embarrassment of being with younger students in school, having one's intelligence questioned, lacking basic educational abilities affected many interviewees' opinions of the SED regime, self-esteem and satisfaction with their

⁵⁷⁰ Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr L., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Chemnitz, Saxony.

lives in the Soviet Zone. This dissatisfaction consequently affected their willingness to interact with locals and accept the GDR as their new home and is significant when considering the lack of macro-level integration of the Resettlers during their first years in the SBZ.

Completion of Apprenticeships

While many interviewees had an academic path in secondary school shut to them due to disruptions in their education there were other movements and processes that affected Resettler employment directions and consequently their integration into local societies. The following statistics are included to show the effects that educational disruptions, Denazification and Stalinization had on the employment opportunities and futures of several interviewees. 53.8% or 124:230 interviewees claimed to have completed an apprenticeship of some kind. Six of these 124 interviewees completed their apprenticeships in their homeland before the end of the war and almost all were related to farming and agriculture.

While a variety of apprenticeship areas were reported by the 118 interviewees who completed their training in the GDR, the most commonly reported apprenticeship included machinery work, mechanical repairs and other industrial skilled labor. While education and employment choices can be affected by a great many factors including personal desires and abilities, this result potentially shows that many of the Resettlers were forced into these areas due to war-time educational disruptions and that they had arrived at apprenticeship age as the Stalinization of the GDR economy began.

The second most reported apprenticeships were both *Büroarbeit* and *Landwirtschaft*. 9.8% or 12:124 of the interviewees reported completing an apprenticeship having to do with office or secretarial work. This category included the jobs of *Stenotypisten*, working in a bank and anything else related to *Büroarbeit*. 9.8% or 12:124 of the interviewees completed apprenticeships related with farming and agriculture. These results show the potential effects of Denazification, the dismissal of tens of thousands of state office workers and the new Stalinization programs requiring agricultural specialists for the new collectivized farms that enveloped GDR young people, especially the Resettlers. All of this information is essential when contemplating the integration of interviewees who completed apprenticeships in the GDR into local societies. As discussed previously, if an interviewee felt like they were forced into these educational and employment directions when they desired something else, their already negative opinions of the SED regime were aggravated and consequently their willingness to accept the GDR as their new home decreased.

One can see the effects of Stalinization when one analyzes apprenticeship completion rates. All interviewees completed their apprenticeships in the GDR during the late 1940s and 1950s. The birth year 1940 had a 75% or 3:4 of the interviewees completing an apprenticeship. Those born in 1941 had 80% or 8:10 having completed an apprenticeship. 1942 reported 58.3% or 7:12; 1943 reported 55.6% or 5:9; and then both 1944 with 9:9 and 1945 with 4:4 reported a rate of 100% of interviewees completing an apprenticeship. These younger Resettlers arrived in the GDR as all of these processes and movements collided. They replaced the work force killed in

the war, were put into governmental offices and departments vacated due to Denazification efforts and filled the factories during the Stalinization of the GDR's economy.

Secondary Education and Abitur

Not all interviewees had an academic future shut to them, but those who fell into this category were by far the minority. 2.2% or 5:230 of the interviewees completed their Abitur while still in their Heimat region. 17.4% or 40:230 of the interviewees reported having completed their Abitur in the GDR. This result included those interviewees who completed their Abitur as a teenager or later through further studies program.

Analyzing the difference between Resettler men and women and their collective Abitur completion rates the following was observed. 2.8% of 106 female interviewees completed their Abitur in their original Heimat regions and 17% or 18:106 women obtained their Abitur in the GDR. 1.6% or 2:124 male Resettler interviewees reported completing their Abitur in their original homeland while 17.7% or 22:124 received their Abitur in the GDR. There were more men than women in the pool of interviewees, so results show that statistically speaking nearly the same amount of men as women completed their Abitur in the GDR.

The only pattern among Abitur completion rates based on Heimat origin was seen in the Pomeranians. With 25% or 6:24 the Pomeranians had the highest percentage of any group receiving their Abitur. This is impressive as other Heimat groups, such as the Sudeten Germans,

had three times as many participants than the Pomeranians. Apart from personal desires and abilities, an additional possible explanation for this result is the Pomeranians' willingness to conform to the public transcript of the SED regime. Pomeranians' often had fewer personal and public qualms with the SED's socialist policies and programs in the GDR. While other Heimat groups resisted or had nothing to do with the SED, as was the case with Sudeten Germans, the Pomeranians conformed to SED wishes and consequently their educational and employment longings were more often fulfilled when compared to other Heimat groups.

When considering where the interviewees lived, such as Saxony or Brandenburg, and Abitur completion the category of 'several residences' group reported the highest number of secondary certificates received. With 37.5% or 15:40 of the 'several residences' group reporting having completed their Abitur a potential link between the degree of education one had with a greater amount of personal mobility when compared to the GDR populace in general. Additionally, those in the 'several residences' group were more likely to be members of the SED party or speak about the GDR in positive terms when compared to other interviewees.

Further Studies and University Education

Resettlers who completed an apprenticeship, even in an industrial or mechanical area, were not always precluded in the GDR from gaining further educational qualifications. One of the great advantages to living in the GDR and one that was constantly lauded by the majority of interviewees was how plentiful and affordable educational advancement was in the GDR. Many

interviewees reported that it was through further study opportunities that they gained the self-respect and jobs that they had desired for a long time. An example of this reality is Herr Z. born in Silesia in 1937. Herr Z. completed an apprenticeship as a *Mechaniker* in 1956 and found work in a factory. He then went to *Abendschule* (evening school) and completed his Abitur in 1969. Herr Z. then attended Humboldt University in East Berlin and completed a degree in *Bibliothekswissenschaft* (library science) in 1974.⁵⁷¹ He worked the remainder of the existence of the GDR in a university library in Dresden, Saxony. This example and other interviewees' study experiences are important in the integration of Resettlers in GDR society. As their personal satisfaction with themselves, their lives and their opportunities became more positive their willingness to accept the GDR as their new home increased.

28.7% or 66:230 of the interviewees reported having attended and studied at a university or Hochschule. Included in this statistic are all those who later in life, through *Fernstudium* (distance learning), *Abendschule* or other means studied and received some kind of educational qualification through universities in the GDR. When taking into account the fact that there were slightly more male interviewees who participated in this study than women, gender played only a small role as to whether or not Resettlers studied at university.

42.4% or 28:66 interviewees who reported having received an educational qualification through a university were women. The male university study rate was 57.6% or 38:66. These numbers seem significantly high when one takes into account the following data from the GDR's *Staatlichen Zentralverwaltung für Statistik* regarding the number of students in *Direktstudium*, *Fernstudium* and *Abendschule* at universities and Hochschulen throughout the GDR:

⁵⁷¹ Interview on 16/10/2008 with Herr Z., born in 1937 in Silesia, lived during GDR in Dresden, Saxony.

Year	Total Student Population	Number of Female Students	% Female
1955	74,742	19,141	25.6%
1958	82,819	23,114	27.9%
1959	89,099	23,985	26.9%
1963	115,673	29,959	25.9% ⁵⁷²

These years were selected specifically as this was the time period when most of the interviewees took part in their university or higher education studies. With a 42.4% university participation rate Resettler women were much more likely to attend university than the average GDR female citizen. This information also showed a closer ‘gender gap’ between male and female Resettler university participants than the general GDR population at large.

The host of examples of educational opportunities that the interviewees took advantage of confirm Dagmar Semmelmann’s conclusion regarding her Oral history project and Alexander von Plato’s research: that the Resettlers, when compared to locals, were more focused on and achieved a greater level of educational accomplishment and advancement in the work place when compared with the local population.⁵⁷³ Also, the previous examples show that Resettler participation in these educational programs improved interviewee feelings of self-worth, increased their positive interactions with locals and decreased their negative feelings regarding living in the GDR. This began a process for some interviewees that brought an end to their turning inward away from GDR society and made them more willing to attempt to integrate into local cultures.

⁵⁷² *Statistisches Taschenbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1964*, p. 156.

⁵⁷³ Dagmar Semmelmann, in Hoffmann and Schwartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

Employment

After the Resettlers gained their educational training in a variety of areas they entered the work force. The type of job, conditions of employment and satisfaction with their employment affected several interviewees' integration into the cultures and societies of the GDR.

While many interviewees who had completed apprenticeships followed the large percentage of the GDR populace who worked in industrial or factory work,⁵⁷⁴ teaching was the most common profession among this study's interviewees irrespective of their Heimat origin. This result includes Resettlers who completed apprenticeships and then later taught in technical institutes and primary and secondary school teaching. As Denazification efforts left many teaching positions vacant, the SED used thousands of Resettlers as New Teachers or Neulehrer to shape the new GDR generation. By 1950 more than one-third of teachers in the GDR had originated from "expulsion areas".⁵⁷⁵

When analyzing when the interviewees were born and what employment they held during the GDR period, it was observed that teaching was represented from the birth years 1924 through 1944. There was not a particular birth year cohort who became teachers, but rather teaching was represented by almost all birth year groups. Those involved as "scientist managers" in their fields tended to be born between 1933 and 1942. This result could support the earlier argument

⁵⁷⁴ *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* 1970, p. 1 and 19.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

that those born from 1930-42 tended to take advantage of further studies and to replace the generations who had been lost to war and Denazification. A peculiar aspect of Resettler employment and birth year is that among those born between 1931-45 not one interviewee was permanently employed in agriculture. When considering those interviewees born throughout the 1930s and 1940s who worked in a factory environment, the Resettlers had not completely left the worker fields behind. This result supported an earlier finding that several Resettlers reached apprenticeship age around the time of Stalinist industrialization. These interviewees were brought into *die Produktion* in the factories.

Education and employment are crucial in understanding the integration of Resettlers into the cultures and societies of the GDR, as it is through these events that the majority of interviewees felt positively about their lives in the GDR and began to create connections with locals. Interviewees reported that it was through their educational accomplishments and employment fields that locals began to partially accept them as belonging in local communities. Through interviews with GDR locals and Resettlers it was made apparent that as the interviewees began to build their lives, get jobs, get married, acquire homes and other material possessions that they were no longer perceived as the wandering exotic beggars they had met in 1945. Most interviewees reported the earlier vehement animosity many locals expressed towards them began to subside by the late 1950s. It is at this time that Resettlers began to lose their hesitancy of interacting with locals and engaging in society. It is through the positive effects of education and employment that they gained the respect that they had wanted and began the process of a partial integration with local cultures and societies.

Marriage and Divorce

The final areas of the Resettlers' life cycle in the GDR to be examined involve family, specifically marriage, divorce rates and the number of children the interviewees had. The question existed as to what patterns could be found in lives of the Resettlers in these areas and if they could be used as indications of personal and group integration into GDR society.

Out of 226 interviewees who answered or spoke about marriage (four interviewees did not mention marriage at all) only 12 had never married. This means that 95% or 214:226 of the interviewees did marry with five interviewees reporting that they had "life partners". This result showed that the Resettlers had an overwhelming propensity to having been married rather than remain single. The interviewees also showed a great tendency to having remained married rather than divorcing.

There was a huge number of divorces in post-war Germany and the divorce rate steadily increased in the GDR. Mertens explained how in the GDR "...die familiäre soziale Absicherung hatte im paternalistischen Staatsozialismus eine wesentlich geringe Bedeutung."⁵⁷⁶ As the legal and economic independence of women increased in the GDR and more state-run childcare facilities were built in the GDR the divorce rate in the GDR grew dramatically.⁵⁷⁷ This created a situation in which the economic and social repercussions of divorce especially for women became almost non-existent in the GDR. This made divorce a more common option for couples with difficulties, thus making the low divorce rate among Resettlers even more significant. This

⁵⁷⁶ Mertens, p. 17.

⁵⁷⁷ Fulbrook, *People's State*, p.118.

is especially true when one considers that the divorce rate in the GDR in 1989 had reached 40 divorces per 100 marriages.⁵⁷⁸

While Bukovina Germans and Danube Swabians tended to marry GDR locals, the interviewees on a macro-level tended to be like Bessarabian Germans and marry fellow Resettlers. Statistically-speaking the Resettlers comprised approximately 24% of the total GDR population. One would expect the probability of a Resettler-Resettler marriage (a Resettler marrying another Resettler) to be approximately 12%. Out of 226 Resettlers who spoke about marriage, 202 interviewees mentioned whether or not their spouse was also a Resettler. (The eight 'pre-1945 marriage' interviewees were removed from the 226 as they more than likely would have been married to a fellow Resettler in the old Heimat. All Resettler-Resettler marriage possibilities were included, for example: an interviewee who had married a local, later divorced and then remarried a fellow Resettler would be included in this group.) Out of this group, 46% or 93:202 interviewees had been married at one time to another Resettler. This result is very compelling as the interviewee Resettler-Resettler marriage results almost quadruple the statistically expected Resettler-Resettler marriage rate. This is significant as it potentially shows the level of hostility that existed during the interviewees' early years in the SBZ. When most were getting married the relationship with locals was such that they found love, friendship and life partners among fellow Resettlers. This reality is significant when contemplating macro-level Resettler integration as marrying locals increased integrative experiences while marrying fellow Resettlers who were, on a macro-level, disliked by locals could hamper, stop or discourage interviewee integration into the local cultures and society of the GDR.

⁵⁷⁸ Mertens, p. 25.

Fecundity

Moving from marriage to children, there were 222 interviewees who answered the question regarding their having children or not. As previously discussed, having children can serve as an indicator of the material and financial accomplishments and integration of Resettlers into GDR society. 92% or 204:222 interviewees said that they had children, leaving 8% or 18:222 who did not. In the GDR the average birth rate was 2.5 children per woman in 1952. This fluctuated throughout the rest of the 1950's and 1960's, falling to two children per woman in 1970.⁵⁷⁹ When comparing the GDR birth rate averages for the period between 1952 and 1970, when most of their children were born to the Resettlers, interviewees' fecundity rates fell within the GDR norm.⁵⁸⁰

The number of children people had in the GDR often coincided with resources available to care for and raise these children.⁵⁸¹ The result that the interviewees fell within the GDR average serves as potential evidence that they as individuals and as a group had attained a level of financial and material integration near to what the average GDR citizen possessed.

Insecurity after the Wende

The last aspect of education and work that affected many of the interviewees, due to their younger nature, was the chaos that followed the Wende in 1989-90. While not one of the interviewees outright wished that the Wende had never occurred, it is possible that having

⁵⁷⁹ <http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms> (accessed: 30/07/2014)

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Mertens, p. 14.

experienced the great uncertainty and economic insecurity of the 1990s influenced the way in which the Resettlers remember their lives in the GDR. Herr S. living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern told about the post-Wende time of the *Treuhandanstalt* and how GDR factories and businesses were sold into private hands.

The Treuhand was a special trust first created to take charge of and then liquidate all properties owned by GDR political parties:

”Zur Sicherung von Vermögenswerten von Parteien oder ihnen verbundenen Organisationen wird das Vermögen der Parteien und der ihnen verbundenen Organisationen, juristischen Personen und Massenorganisationen, das am 7. Oktober 1989 bestanden oder seither an die Stelle dieses Vermögens getreten ist, unter treuhänderische Verwaltung gestellt.Die treuhänderische Verwaltung....führt das Vermögen an die früher Berechtigten oder deren Rechtsnachfolger zurück. Soweit dies nicht möglich ist, ist das Vermögen zugunsten gemeinnütziger Zwecke, insbesondere der wirtschaftlichen Umstrukturierung....“⁵⁸²

Additional duties of the Treuhandanstalt were then to take control of and liquidate or oversee the privatization of state-owned properties such as factories and businesses.⁵⁸³ Herr S. from the previous example reported how a “Wessi Firma” came and bought the VEB Baubetrieb he worked for and how, in his opinion, this West German company then piece by piece dismantled the entire operation. In Herr S.’s opinion the “Wessi Firma” had bought the construction

⁵⁸² Guido Toussaint, *DDR-Parteivermögen und die Treuhandanstalt: Aktuelle Rechtsprobleme bei der treuhänderischen Verwaltung*, (Köln: Verlag Kommunikationsforum GmbH, 1993), p. 3.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 10, 82 and 131.

company he worked at only to destroy it.⁵⁸⁴ Herr L. living near Chemnitz, Saxony said the same. He worked during the GDR in a VEB factory that made tools. He also felt that the West German company that bought his factory through the Treuhand did not care about the workers and cared only about profits. Many of the factory workers were made redundant, as was Herr L.⁵⁸⁵ A possible reason for the actions of businesses that bought up GDR enterprises, laying off workers, etc., might lie in the explanation that:

”Daten der Volkszählung von 1981 – danach blieben die Relationen nahezu konstant – noch 37,1% der Berufstätigen als Produktionsarbeiter eingestuft.“ Ohne diese Zahlen weiter zu problematisieren, lassen sie doch erkennen, daß der Berufsalltag in der DDR wesentlich traditioneller geblieben war und daß der 1990 einsetzende Transformationsprozeß im industriellen Bereich mit den Arbeitern einen großen Teil der ostdeutschen Gesellschaft betrifft...“⁵⁸⁶

It could be that the “Wessis” (derogatory term used sometimes in the former GDR to refer to ‘West’ Germans) were not out to take advantage or destroy the former GDR as perceived by some of the interviewees, but rather that since the GDR had remained behind regarding modernization of its economy and industry that the post-Wende economic processes brought about sudden and painful changes for the former GDR citizenry. Either way, the fact that approximately 70% of all jobs at GDR enterprises were lost when sold off or otherwise administered by the Treuhandanstalt⁵⁸⁷ supported the interviewee perception that the Treuhand

⁵⁸⁴ Interview on 23/10/2008 with Herr S., born in 1941 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁵⁸⁵ Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr L., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Chemnitz, Saxony.

⁵⁸⁶ Peter Hübner, “Arbeiterklasse als Inszenierung? Arbeiter und Gesellschaftspolitik in der SBZ/DDR“, in Bessel and Jessen (eds.), p. 202.

⁵⁸⁷ Ahbe, p. 28.

was horribly destructive to their lives and well-being. Many of the Resettlers, after being let go by the often West German-owned companies found themselves too old to find new work.

The majority of the interviewees were born in the 1930s and 1940s and thus were between 50 and 60 years of age in 1990. Those who were 60-years old were able to retire. Those who were not old enough to retire found themselves in a dilemma. They had worked their entire lives in certain fields that were now being reduced or modernized. The resulting unemployment grew to 25% in the former GDR by 1992 and compared by some economists to be equal to the Great Depression.⁵⁸⁸

The next step available to the interviewees was an educational opportunity known as the *ABM* (*Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen*) and other *Umschulung* or job retraining programs. The chaos of the post-Wende era was especially hard on many of the interviewees in that they were often seen as being too old to rehire. Several experienced unemployment and psychological depression throughout the 1990s.

Several interviewees who were not old enough to retire, but too old to retrain took advantage of the governmental program involving what was termed *Vorruhestand*. This “early retirement” was made available to former GDR citizens who found themselves in these circumstances. No less than 24% or 55:230 of the interviewees took advantage of this *Vorruhestand*. This decision to take a *Vorruhestand* was very difficult for many of the interviewees. Many enjoyed their work and did not want to be forced into retirement. Others were not happy with a *Vorruhestand* as the payments were much lower than their salaries had previously been.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

Several interviewees mentioned how the period after reunification in 1990 was similar to their experiences as refugees and expellees. Governmental changes bringing radical transformations to their lives to which they had become accustomed; unemployment; financial insecurity; and even discrimination once again. Frau W. born in 1921 in East Brandenburg was extremely bitter that she did not receive in 2008 the same retirement payments as “Wessis”.⁵⁸⁹ According to Frau W. and other interviewees those former GDR citizens who retired after 1990 in the newly unified Germany will not receive the same retirement payments as West German retirees until the year 2015.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁹ Interview on 31/07/2008 with Frau W., born in 1921, lived in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

⁵⁹⁰ Interview on 20/10/2008 with Frau T., born in 1925 in East Prussia, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HEIMAT and IDENTITY

As discussed previously, the term *Heimat* meant a great deal more during the 19th and 20th centuries in Germanic cultures than simply the place where one was born and raised. It gained the aura of protectedness, familiarity, order and community and more especially belonging to a group, community or people...“Heimat, in other words allowed Germans to maintain a sense of community in the face of constant territorial, political, economic and social ruptures.”⁵⁹¹

The SED used the concept of a “socialist Heimat” throughout the existence of the GDR in an attempt to create a sense of GDR nationhood separate from that of West Germany.⁵⁹² This effort at creating a “GDR citizen” identification was attempted through activities on a national and local level including the formation of hobby groups, creation of amateur choirs, the singing of GDR Heimat songs and tourist publications and television showing the beauty of the regions of the GDR.⁵⁹³ Resettlers were forbidden to publicly do the same regarding their old Heimat regions, cultural practices and original identities.

⁵⁹¹ Palmowski, p. 4.

⁵⁹² Ibid., p. 63

⁵⁹³ Ibid., p. 7.

The SED tried for several years to expunge the Resettlers as a separate group in the GDR population, but most Resettlers did not cooperate. As Heike Amos showed through her research in the Stasi archives, the SED worried about and watched Resettler activities throughout the existence of the GDR.⁵⁹⁴ While the Resettlers were publicly banned from discussing their pasts, their old Heimat regions and other experiences the question remained – did the Resettlers obey this ban regarding their identities, memories and cultures? And could these bans and repression of one’s identity change one’s identity? This chapter will explore several indicators of potential micro and macro-level integration including the use of informal sub-structures within the private and public transcripts of the GDR and the effects of these practices on interviewees’ self-identifications.

Repression

Soviet and SED authorities made Resettlers aware very early on what the public transcript entailed regarding their pasts and how they were to behave. SED officials used shame as a tool to force Resettler compliance with conventions of the public transcript by explaining to all GDR residents that the Resettlers were one of the main causes of the war. Soviet and SED officials said that in order to atone for this guilt the Resettlers had “justly” been cast out of their homelands⁵⁹⁵ and then threatened the Resettlers with imprisonment if they spoke about their identities, war traumas and other sensitive issues.⁵⁹⁶ In exchange for their silence and

⁵⁹⁴ Heike Amos, *Die Vertriebenenpolitik der SED 1949 bis 1990*, (Munchen: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), p. 66.

⁵⁹⁵ Kossert, p. 194.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

compliance within the construct of the public transcript the Soviets and SED offered the Resettlers help in rebuilding a new life in the Soviet Zone.

Attempts by some Resettlers to not follow the new public transcript in the GDR were met by violence and imprisonment. Soviet and SED authorities handled any negative comments about the USSR, any attempt at building Resettler organizations and people speaking publicly against the Oder-Neisse border with Poland as a crime against the state.⁵⁹⁷ Kossert reported an incident where two Resettlers in Neuruppin, Brandenburg were sentenced to 15 years in prison simply for organizing homeland meetings.⁵⁹⁸ Similar situations were reported throughout the interviews with GDR Resettlers. Herr S. an interviewee living near Radeberg, Saxony reported that after the war several Sudeten Germans gathered in a small village in Saxony to celebrate a “Sudeten German Christmas”. This celebration was investigated by authorities and led to the incarceration of the leaders of the Christmas party. The event never occurred again.⁵⁹⁹

Fear was used as a weapon in the SED arsenal to fight the Resettlers’ “otherness” and particularism during the anti-cosmopolitan purges. This fear and repression affected Resettlers in various ways. Some interviewees reported that they never spoke to anyone about being a Resettler. Herr P. living in Leipzig, Saxony did not share his native Sudeten German customs with his children due to fear of government surveillance and reprisals.⁶⁰⁰ Herr S. living in Parchim, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern also did not speak much about his evacuation from East Prussia to his children because he was afraid of possible reprisals should his children talk about it

⁵⁹⁷ Amos, p. 28-31.

⁵⁹⁸ Kossert, p. 217.

⁵⁹⁹ Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr S., born in 1933 in Sudetenland, living near Radeberg, Saxony.

⁶⁰⁰ Interview on 27/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1929 in Sudetenland, living in Leipzig, Saxony.

at school.⁶⁰¹ The fear of governmental retaliation forced some interviewees to hide or not emphasize their refugee and expellee pasts. These actions increased many interviewees' desires to turn inward and away from engaging in GDR society. The traumas already experienced were worsened for some by the silence that was forced upon them and this negatively affected many Resettlers' desire and abilities to integrate into GDR society.

Sub-structures utilized to circumvent SED bans

While some interviewees hid their refugee and expellee pasts, the majority used sub-structures in the private and public transcripts of the GDR to circumvent official SED bans on taboo subjects. This is especially true of those interviewees who brought resistance skill sets from their Heimat regions to the GDR.

One of the greatest venues open to the Resettlers to keep Heimat customs, language, stories and contacts with each other intact was the churches. This aspect of the interviewees' testimonies will be discussed in the chapter entitled "Religion Life". Another venue was the very large Resettler Heimattreffen or Heimat meetings that occurred in West Berlin and West Germany.

After spying on West Berlin Heimat meetings for several years the Stasi reported that the majority of participants attending these meetings were actually GDR Resettlers.⁶⁰² The Stasi reported that it was not only Resettlers from East Berlin, but from all over Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg and other regions who attended these meetings. Attending these

⁶⁰¹ Interview on 23/10/2008 with Herr S., born in 1931 in East Prussia, living in Parchim, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶⁰² Amos, p. 66.

large Heimat meetings in West Berlin was reported by several interviewees. Herr H. lived in East Berlin for most of his life in the GDR. He reported that he attended Heimat meetings in West Berlin until the Berlin Wall was built in 1961.⁶⁰³ Herr H. reported that the average meeting was arranged by members of his former county in East Brandenburg. They usually had a dance group perform; then a dance for all present; and then for those from the SBZ, “aid packets” were given out. He reported that they were never political in nature, but only a way to reconnect with those from one’s former homeland. West Berlin provided GDR Resettlers with numerous opportunities to circumvent SED bans regarding discussing or celebrating their Heimat memories and pasts.

An example of how Resettlers co-opted what was allowed in the public transcript of the GDR was their use of zoos and other large public areas. Attending zoos or parks were sanctioned activities in the GDR, so the Resettlers would arrange for several people from the same region to “coincidentally” arrive all at once and have an “impromptu” Heimat group meeting. On 6 August 1950 (the day that was declared by West German refugees and expellees to be “Tag der Heimat”) a large group of Resettlers were observed by police entering the Leipzig Zoo. Schwartz quoted and then commented on the police report:

500 ehemalige Umsiedler aus der CSR“, die weiträumig aus Dresden, Halle und Thuringia angereist waren. Gegen dieses öffentliche Massentreffen, das sich als zufällige Begegnung tarnte, vermöchten die Sicherheitsapparate nichts auszurichten: „Intensiv durchgeführte Ermittlungen durch das Referat VA 3 Leipzig“ ergaben lediglich, „daß es sich bei dieser Zusammenkunft um einen Besuch des Zoologischen Gartens handelte“, bei dem sich Hunderte von Vertriebenen zwanglos in dasselbe Gartenlokal begaben.

⁶⁰³ Interview on 08/08/2008 with Herr H., born in 1929 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

Anproben hatte man ebenso wenig feststellen können wie „organisatorische Anhaltspunkte“, obschon die Staatsmacht beobachtete, daß beim mutmaßlichen „Organisatoren des Treffens“, einem früheren Architekten, „sehr oft Umsiedler ein und aus gehen“. In diesem Falle wurde eine Personenüberwachung eingeleitet.⁶⁰⁴

Frau S. born in 1926 and living near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt spoke about attending these Heimat meetings in Leipzig Zoo with her mother. “In den ersten Zeiten haben die Leute aus unserem Ort von Brux...haben die Leute durch Mund-Propaganda, haben sich im Leipziger-Zoo getroffen. Und dann wurde das verboten.”⁶⁰⁵ Herr G. living in Meissen, Saxony reported that he had also attended a Resettler Heimat meeting in the Meissen Zoo.⁶⁰⁶

Additional Sub-Structures Utilized in the Private Transcript

Once Heimat meetings became more and more repressed by SED forces, the Resettlers turned to other informal opportunities to keep in contact with one another and continue Heimat customs and practices. Herr P. born in Sudetenland in 1932 reported that until approximately 1958 his father and other Resettlers would meet together every Sunday in a public park in Erfurt, Thuringia. His father and the others would listen from those who had visited “the West” as to what it was like there. They spoke with each other about political matters and also discussed ways how to help one another.⁶⁰⁷ The Resettlers in this informal “Heimat group” were not cowering fearful in their homes, waiting for the SED to strike at any moment as one might

⁶⁰⁴ Schwartz, *Umsiedlerpolitik*, p. 535-536.

⁶⁰⁵ Interview on 16/02/2009 with Frau S., born in 1926 in Sudetenland, living near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.

⁶⁰⁶ Interview on 10/02/2009 with Herr G., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living in Meissen, Saxony.

⁶⁰⁷ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1942 in Sudetenland, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

suspect according to a Totalitarian theory interpretation of the GDR. Just as Bessel and his colleagues showed in *Grenzen der Diktatur*, there are several ways, on small, private levels, where individual GDR citizens were able to control their own lives or circumvent SED regulations. The Resettler meetings in Erfurt showed how, in spite of official governmental declarations the Resettlers took matters into their own hands and met together, discussed taboo subjects and organized to provide assistance to one other. Rather than having an SED-imposed time limit, it was only with the passage of years and the fading necessity of their informal Heimat group that the members abandoned it.

Another example of a Heimat meeting is that of a Resettler get-together that continued until the end of the GDR, despite a governmental crack-down. A large contingent of Sudeten Germans from the same village in today's Czech Republic settled in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Herr H., a Resettler who had acquired a restaurant in the area, took it upon himself to organize a "Reichnerfest" (named after their Heimat village) every August to coincide with the religious celebration of St. Bartolommeo's Day. At this Heimat festival Sudeten Germans would gather every year to eat Heimat foods, sing Heimat songs, talk about the Heimat and play Heimat card games. After the first celebration was held in 1953 Herr H. was incarcerated. Herr H.'s son began to cry during the interview as he remembered the fear and panic that he and his family felt not knowing the whereabouts of his father for two days. After his father's release from prison, he continued to plan and organize the "Reichnerfest" every year, albeit more quietly and on a more private basis. Herr H.'s son credited his father with holding the Sudeten Germans from the village of Reichen together. Even after Herr H.'s death in 1961, his son and the rest of the Sudeten Germans from Reichen continued the tradition of celebrating in August together and

keeping alive their Sudeten German customs and Heimat life.⁶⁰⁸ After the Wende the group now returns every August to the Czech Republic to celebrate their “Reichnerfest”.

The significance of analyzing and discussing these Heimat meetings and the formation of informal Heimat groups is their effects on the integration of interviewees as individuals and on a macro-level. These meetings and groups helped or hampered the integration of the Resettlers based on the person as an individual, but also due to Heimat characteristics they possessed and the unique natures of their pre-war, war-time and post-war experiences. The meetings and informal groups provided some with the opportunity to reconnect, start to heal and to move on with their lives in the GDR, while the meetings and groups also provided for others, especially those extremely traumatized, the opportunity to remain in their psychological cocoons and not integrate into GDR society. Once again, the importance, that is often not analyzed in the secondary literature, of who the Resettlers were in their homeland regions and what they went through during the war and after their arrival in the SBZ is demonstrated.

SED-created Heimat Groups and Festivals

At times SED actions and policies created these informal groups and opportunities to circumvent governmental bans. Assigning large numbers of Resettlers from the same Heimat region was officially banned by Soviet authorities, however, the chaos of the post-war period made the concentration of Heimat origin groups possible. Just as the Sudeten Germans from Reichen all lived near Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, other groups were concentrated as well. Frau S.

⁶⁰⁸ Interview on 22/10/2008 with Herr H., born in 1940 in Sudetenland, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

from Silesia married a Resettler from East Prussia. Frau S. reported that Waldstrasse in Greiz, Thuringia where she and her husband lived was almost exclusively settled by families from East Prussia. Numerous parties and get-togethers occurred on Waldstrasse where East Prussian foods were made and East Prussian songs were sung.⁶⁰⁹

Herr J. from Silesia spoke about a similar situation that existed in Apolda, Thuringia. Most of the Silesians in Apolda, Thuringia also happened to be from the same village in Silesia. This lent itself to getting together often for birthday parties and other celebrations where talk about the Heimat and singing Heimat songs were abundant.⁶¹⁰

While some of these Heimat groups met for many decades, the majority declined in importance and occurrence as the interviewees became more and more integrated into GDR society. The Resettlers had used these sub-structures to help ameliorate the shock and trauma of their war-time and post-war experiences, but as interviewees established friendships with locals and created lives for themselves in the GDR the informal Heimat groups and meetings became less important.⁶¹¹

Heimat Traditions

Other informal sub-structures that Resettlers used in the private and public transcripts of the GDR included Heimat traditions. While some interviewees did not speak about or teach their Heimat culture or traditions to their children out of fear of reprisals, the majority did.

⁶⁰⁹ Interview on 11/03/2009 with Frau S., born in 1933 in Silesia, living in Greiz, Thuringia.

⁶¹⁰ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr J., born in 1942 in Silesia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁶¹¹ Interview on 31/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.

Interviewees were asked what kind of *Heimattraditionen* (Homeland traditions) they had passed on to their GDR-born children or kept alive in their homes during the era of the GDR. It was compelling to discover the ability of food to be a “piece of mobile Heimat” and how cultural identity and traditions could be perpetuated and passed on to interviewees’ GDR-born children despite SED bans.⁶¹²

When asked what Heimat traditions they had continued to practice in the GDR, the interviewees proceeded with a cavalcade of Heimat foods that their mothers or grandmothers had taught them and that they themselves had brought to the GDR. Herr T., a Silesian who experienced the flight as a 4-year old boy, spoke about feeding his children, who were all born in the 1960s, Silesian specialties such as *Mohnklöße* (a poppy seed dessert always served on Christmas Eve) and *Häckerle* (a ground Herring paste served with potatoes) for New Year’s.⁶¹³ Herr N. also from Silesia shared with his children *Mohnsemmeln* (poppy-seed rolls), *Schlesische Himmelreich* (a meat and dried fruit stew) and *Mohnsoße* (poppy seed sauce).⁶¹⁴ Frau S. from Sudetenland made *Pflaumenknudeln* (plum dumplings), *Semmelknudeln* (bread dumplings) and *Karpfen* (carp) for her GDR-born children.⁶¹⁵ Wherever they traveled and if the ingredients were present the Resettlers were able to create a Heimat moment at the dinner table.

Other informal sub-structures interviewees used in the private and public transcripts of the GDR to circumvent SED bans on the propagation of Resettler Heimat culture involved Easter and Christmas celebrations. Frau L. from Sudetenland reported how at Christmas an apple was cut at

⁶¹² Interview on 05/11/2008 with Frau J., born in 1936 in Sudetenland, living in Ribnitz-Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶¹³ Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr T., born in 1939 in Silesia, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶¹⁴ Interview on 16/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1932 in Silesia, living near Bitterfeld, Sachsen-Anhalt.

⁶¹⁵ Interview on 05/03/2009 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Sondershausen, Thuringia.

the dinner table and all present were given a piece for good luck.⁶¹⁶ This apple-cutting tradition was reported by several other Sudeten Germans, including when the apple was cut in half, if a ‘star’ shape in the core was seen then that was a good omen. Herr S. also from Sudetenland spoke about how he and his family would cut one boiled egg at Easter and everyone was given a piece to eat; that was also for good luck.⁶¹⁷ Frau S. from Sudetenland⁶¹⁸ and Frau G. from Pomerania spoke about an Easter custom that they believed the Resettlers had brought to Saxony-Anhalt. The young Resettler boys would run around to neighboring homes during the Easter season threatening the residents with sticks they carried. The people then would give the boys boiled eggs or sweets.⁶¹⁹

The singing of Heimat songs with the Resettlers’ GDR-born children was also another informal sub-structure used by interviewees to keep aspects of their cultural traditions alive. Herr D. from Pomerania who experienced the end of the war as a 17-year old soldier, remembered singing the Pommerlied, “Wenn in Stille Stunde” to his children who were all born in the GDR. This is surprising given that Mr. D. was an SED member and the mayor of his village for 27 years.⁶²⁰ Herr M. from East Prussia sang the “Ost-Preussenlied: Land der dunklen Wälder” to his children,⁶²¹ while Herr S., another East Prussian sang the very popular “Ännchen von Tharau” to his children.⁶²² The list of songs continued including the Sudeten German “Riesengebirgslied” as well as more common German children songs such as “Es klappert die Mühle am rauschenden

⁶¹⁶ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau L., born in 1927 in Sudetenland, living in Egel, Sachsen-Anhalt.

⁶¹⁷ Interview on 05/03/2009 with Herr S., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Sondershausen, Thuringia.

⁶¹⁸ Interview on 05/03/2009 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Sondershausen, Thuringia.

⁶¹⁹ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau G., born in 1930 in Pomerania, living in Harkerode, Sachsen-Anhalt.

⁶²⁰ Interview on 12/11/2008 with Herr D., born in 1928 in Pomerania, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶²¹ Interview on 26/11/2008 with Herr M., born in 1924 in East Prussia, living in Heiligendamm, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶²² Interview on 01/12/2008 with Herr S., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Bach”.⁶²³ It was song that acted much as food had to transmit ideas, feelings and experiences of the old Heimat to the GDR-born children of the Resettlers.

Some interviewees reported sharing Heimat stories with their children. Herr T. told his children about the *Rubezal* or ‘mountain spirit’ of the Riesengebirge region in Sudetenland and Silesia.⁶²⁴

Other Sudeten German Resettlers reported sharing the works of the *Erzgebirge* (Sudetenland/Sachsen border region) poet and author, Anton Gunter who often wrote in local dialect. A few interviewees reported that their parents or grandparents had even taught them the old Heimat dialect. Herr P. born in 1943 reported that his mother insisted that he and their family speak *Ost-Preussisch* or East Prussian dialect as they were going to return home soon and that if he could not speak it he would be embarrassed.⁶²⁵ There were others such as Herr M. from Silesia, who actually stopped speaking and teaching his children his Heimat dialect due to the fear he had that his children would talk about it at school.⁶²⁶

Sharing and Remembering with Children

An additional way in which interviewees kept elements of the Heimat alive, and probably one of the most personal and painful, was when Resettlers related memories and personal experiences related to the Heimat, flight and the expulsions to their GDR-born children. Frau and Herr K. were both *Wolfskinder*. These were children from East Prussia who had been orphaned due to

⁶²³ Interview on 09/10/2008 with Frau K., born in 1935 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

⁶²⁴ Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr T., born in 1939 in Silesia, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶²⁵ Interview on 10/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶²⁶ Interview on 21/10/2008 with Herr M., born in 1939 in Silesia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

the war, sickness or abandonment had “raised themselves” or went to Lithuania for help. Frau and Herr K.’s children would often ask about *früher* (earlier) and ask questions like why they did not have any grandparents. Frau and Herr K. would then explain to their children according to their age and maturity level about their experiences as starving, lonely orphans after the war.⁶²⁷ Frau L., the oldest of the interviewees at 97-years old (born 1912), came from East Prussia and had settled in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. She told her children about the Heimat,⁶²⁸ as did Herr H. from Pomerania,⁶²⁹ and several other Resettlers. While some interviewees did not speak much about the flight, expulsions or other displacement events to their children, many did. They did this regardless of the hostile environment and culture that was fostered by the SED towards those memories and experiences.

Another way in which the Resettlers were able to share their Heimat memories with their GDR-born children was to visit the homeland regions with their children. One of the advantages to being a Resettler in the GDR was that because many of the former Heimat areas after the war were located in fellow socialist countries, visiting the former Heimat was not as difficult as for those refugees and expellees who lived in West Germany. Herr S. reported that his mother did not want to return because she wanted to remember how it was.⁶³⁰ While some Resettlers did not want to return, many interviewees reported returning during the GDR era to their Heimat regions. Some interviewees because of their employment reported visiting their former homes in the early 1950s. Most GDR Resettlers had to wait until agreements were made later in the

⁶²⁷ Interview on 09/10/2008 with Frau and Herr K., born in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

⁶²⁸ Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau L., born in 1912 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶²⁹ Interview on 11/11/2008 with Herr H., born in 1934 in Pomerania, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶³⁰ Interview on 23/10/2008 with Herr S., born in 1941 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

1960s between the GDR and the respective countries. Most often the requirement for a visit was that the GDR Resettlers had to be invited by a resident of the country in question. Heimat trips also became part of other Resettler families' ways of life and, one could say, became a new tradition for GDR Resettlers. Herr F. living near Chemnitz, Saxony reported that after he and his family took part in May Day celebrations they drove immediately to the old Heimat in Czechoslovakia. They were able to do so due to relatives who were able to stay due to marriages with Czechs.⁶³¹

Practicing Heimat traditions, however, did in fact have repercussions on family members of the Resettlers. Herr K. from Sudetenland sang Heimat songs with his children, took them to Czechoslovakia and cooked Sudeten German foods for them. When Herr K.'s son read his own Stasi files after 1990, a report made particular mention of the "revanchist" Heimat practices in his home and how this made him (the son) unfit for jobs in the public sphere in the GDR.⁶³²

INFORMAL SUB-STRUCTURES and SELF-IDENTIFICATIONS

Jürgen Straub wrote the following regarding an individual's identity:

...because personal identity is made up of one's relationship to the world and to one's self...Accordingly, no (modern) subject is completely protected against identity diffusion.

The loss of identity is a threat against which no one can be completely sure.

⁶³¹ Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr F., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living near Chemnitz, Saxony.

⁶³² Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr K., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Furthermore, whoever does not suffer from this kind of insufficiency has to see to it that it stays that way. Identity is not something one can possess once and for all...⁶³³

Self-identification or which identity one claims for themselves is constantly changing and a process involving many factors. The reason the previous examples of Heimat traditions practiced by interviewees in the GDR were included was because of their ability to affect one's self-identification or identity. Ute Schmidt found in her study of Bessarabian German Resettlers that the use of informal sub-structures such as Heimat traditions, continued use of native languages and other practices sustained and encouraged the survival of cultural connections between Bessarabian Germans and their cultural backgrounds.⁶³⁴ The previous examples of the continued practice of cultural customs among this study's interviewees confirm Ute Schmidt's finding and show that there was also a relationship between informal sub-structures, such as continued practice of Heimat traditions, and a preservation on a personal and macro-level between interviewees and their homeland cultures. However, these conclusions in the secondary literature have always been observations or suppositions made by historians. No one has ever asked how the Resettlers saw themselves during the GDR and what self-identification they would claim.

One of the most substantial discoveries of this study is how the continued practice of informal sub-structures in the private and public transcripts and the lack of personal connection many GDR Resettlers felt with the SED regime affected interviewees' identities or self-identifications. Taking an interviewee's self-identification or claim of feeling part of GDR society as a possible

⁶³³ Jürgen Straub, "Personal and Collective Identity: a conceptual analysis", in Friese (ed.), p. 62.

⁶³⁴ Schmidt, in Hoffmann und Schwartz, p. 320.

indication of the depth and level of integration Resettlers achieved on a personal and macro-level, the following results were reported.

When asked about their identities during the GDR a few Resettlers responded that they saw themselves as an “Arbeiter” or an “Elternloses Kind” or as an “Europäer”. The great majority gave answers that involved the following categories: “GDR Bürger” (identity was that of being a citizen of the GDR); “German” (identity was that of being German); “New Heimat” (the individual had taken on the identity of the region where they lived, e.g. “Prignitzer”; or “Old Heimat” (the interviewee expressed that even during the GDR period they still felt that their identity was that of their old Heimat identity, e.g. East Prussian). The Resettlers used these categories in two ways which will be defined as “Singular Self-Identifications” and “Amalgamated Self-Identifications”.⁶³⁵ A “singular self-identification” was one in which the interviewee expressed an identity during the GDR era with only one component. An example of a singular self-identification was Frau B. living in Potsdam. When asked how she felt respecting her identity during the GDR Frau B. shouted “Ich bin Preusse!”⁶³⁶ This is an example of what would be formulated as an “Old Heimat singular self-identification”. The second category is that of an “amalgamated self-identification”. An amalgamated self-identification was when the interviewee answered giving a self-identification with multiple components, e.g. “Bukowiner-GDR citizen”. This amalgamated self-identification would be formulated as an “Old Heimat-GDR citizen amalgamated self-identification”.

⁶³⁵ Wolff, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 10.

⁶³⁶ Interview on 28/07/2008 with Frau B., born in 1937 in East Brandenburg, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.

What kind of singular self-identifications or amalgamated self-identification interviewees claimed is important in that potentially it shows the degree of acculturation, integration or assimilation experienced by Resettlers into the cultures and societies of the GDR.

Singular Self-Identifications

206:230 GDR Resettlers spoke about their identities during the interviews. The largest singular self-identification category reported by interviewees was the singular self-identification of “Old Heimat” with 23.3% or 48:206. This meant that 48:206 of the Resettlers who spoke about identity during the GDR era claimed that they still saw themselves as retaining their “Old Heimat” identity, e.g., Volhynian Germans, Silesians and others.

The second most commonly reported singular self-identification was “German”. 22.8% or 47:206 of the interviewees felt their identity during the GDR to be solely “German”. The Resettlers who gave this answer saw themselves as members of a larger, pan-German ethnic community including West Germans rather than as separate “GDR citizens”. Palmowski claimed that “East Germans never appropriated the GDR as ‘their’ nation....they acknowledged publicly the public transcript, but privately never identified with the GDR, thus when the wall fell the ideal of a socialist heimat disappeared and the older, regional identifications remained.”⁶³⁷ The combination of these two singular self-identifications both support and challenge Palmowski’s findings as approximately half of the interviewees who claimed singular self-identifications identified with their old regional identities.

⁶³⁷ Palmowski, p. 20.

It must be emphasized that a continued self-identification with older, regional identities did not mean that these Resettlers did not enjoy their lives in the GDR. The overwhelming majority of interviewees in this study expressed their love of various aspects of living in the GDR, but the continued “inner distance“ between Resettlers and the SED regime,⁶³⁸ usually based on past traumas and negative treatment, meant that many continued to see themselves as having their original identities. This being understood, the SED’s efforts did have some success among the interviewees. 17.4% or 36:206 of Resettlers claimed a singular self-identification of “GDR citizen”. The majority of interviewees who gave this answer were in favor of or supported the SED regime and its policies.

The singular self-identification least reported by interviewees was that of “New Heimat”. 6.3% or 13:206 of the Resettlers reported having felt a greater connection to region they settled in after the war. There are several possibilities for this result. This potentially shows the effect of age on identity construction and preservation. The average age of the Resettlers in this study was 12-years old. It is possible that most had acquired a great deal of their personality and cultural affiliations and affinities before the flight and expulsion. This result also shows the potential result of the widely reported abuse and ill treatment by SBZ natives towards the Resettlers individually and as a group. The divide created by the abuse and traumas remained for such a long time that potentially most Resettlers felt greater connections to the new GDR state or their original Heimat identities than with the local regions where they settled.

⁶³⁸ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schwartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

Additional Analyses

When analyzing the singular self-identifications' categories the following observations were made. When looking at the interviewees who reported that during the GDR their identity was that of "Old Heimat" gender was not a crucial factor. 23.4% of women claimed "Old Heimat" while 23% of men reported "Old Heimat".

Birth year or age of the Resettlers during the interview was anticipated to play an important role in claiming "Old Heimat" as a singular self-identification. When taking into account age, "Old Heimat" singular self-identifications were claimed by interviewees born throughout all birth years, even into the birth years of 1943, 1944 and 1945. This result demonstrates the potential relationship between continued practice of Heimat traditions and preservation of identities and affinities with original homeland regions. Frau B. living in Leipzig, Saxony claimed "Old Heimat" as a singular self-identification. While Frau B. was born in East Prussia in 1945, a *Frontkind* (product of rape by multiple Soviet soldiers), she lived and grew up in Leipzig, Saxony with her grandparents due to her mother's constant work. The food she ate, the songs she heard, the stories her mother and grandmother told her surrounded Frau B. in a wholly East Prussian environment in the large Saxon city of Leipzig. "Wir haben eigentlich nur in Zuhause (East Prussia) gelebt...ich kenne jede Blume. Ich kenne jedes Tier. Ich kenne jeden Weg. Es war so das ich eigentlich so hätte nach Hause gehen können."⁶³⁹

The next factor taken into consideration as to whether or not the interviewee would claim "Old Heimat" as their singular self-identifications during the GDR was the Heimat group to which

⁶³⁹ Interview on 02/27/2009 with Frau B., born in 1945 in East Prussia, living in Leipzig, Saxony.

they belonged. With 29.3% or 22:75 the Sudeten Germans had the largest number and percentage of Resettlers claiming “Old Heimat” as a singular self-identifications. Various factors could potentially be responsible for this result. Sudeten Germans as Catholic newcomers in the traditional Protestant lands of the GDR were seen immediately as religiously undesirable by locals. Their segregation and ill treatment by SBZ natives enforced Sudeten German desires to remain apart from local societies and worsened war-time traumas. While some Sudeten Germans reported positively about life in the GDR, the overwhelming majority intensely disliked the SED regime and its collaboration with Czech and Soviet authorities in their collective forced expulsions and loss of property. This tenacity of the Sudeten Germans interviewees to hold onto their old regional identities and customs was observed among BdV members in Thuringia and Saxony, as well as among non-BdV Sudeten Germans in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

While the Sudeten Germans had the highest percentage of participants claiming an “Old Heimat” singular self-identification the Pomeranians were the lowest in this category. Only 1:22 Pomeranians, this person being born in the year 1928, claimed an “Old Heimat” singular self-identification. The Silesians shared also in this lack of reporting an “Old Heimat” singular self-identification. It was observed throughout the interviews that the Pomeranians and Silesians had the best adaptation rate to local GDR cultures and societies and were the groups most often who reported a positive opinion about the SED regime, socialist policies and life in the GDR in general.

The next factor analyzed regarding the “Old Heimat” singular self-identification was that of the *Länder* or state/province in today’s Germany where the Resettlers lived when the interview took

place. It was expected that the region where an interviewee lived would have had an effect on the Resettlers' retaining their original Heimat identities. For example, if the Resettlers had been accepted and more welcome in a certain region or intermarried with the locals more quickly it was expected that the Resettlers' willingness to let go of their original identities and adopt newer self-identifications such as "GDR citizen" or identifying with their new local regions would have occurred. Interviewees living in Saxony reported the highest percentage of "Old Heimat" singular self-identifications with 37% or 10:27. Participants living in Thuringia with 34.6% or 9:26 were a close second. Several factors could explain these results. Compared to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony and Thuringia took in much lower numbers of Resettlers than other regions. This potentially allowed locals in these areas to discriminate against and ostracize Resettlers from local society for longer periods of time than in other places where Resettlers made up a majority of the population. It is possible that this outcome is due to the fact that so many Resettlers interviewed in Saxony and Thuringia tended to be Sudeten Germans and had held onto the belief that they could return to their Heimat longer than other Resettlers in other regions of the GDR. Another explanation could be that many interviewees living in Saxony and Thuringia were involved with the Bund der Vertriebenen or the Sudeten German Landsmannschaft and thus more likely than other groups to feel anger towards the SED regime. However, it must be stressed that not all Resettlers interviewed in Thuringia and Saxony were Sudeten Germans (for example, only 1:6 BdV members interviewed in Suhl, Thuringia came from Sudetenland) and not all Sudeten Germans interviewed were BdV members.

The next singular self-identifications most often reported was that of "German" with 22.7% or 47:206. In analyzing the factors that might affect an interviewee's claim to a singular self-

identification of “German”, just as the case with “Old Heimat” singular self-identifications, gender played almost no role. The outcome was that 23.4% or 22:94 of women claimed “German” as a singular self-identification while 22.1% or 25:113 of men claimed the same.

Concerning where the interviewees lived at the time they were interviewed, Saxony-Anhalt at 32.1% or 9:28 had the greatest percentage of Resettlers claiming “German” as a singular self-identification. A possible explanation for this might be that 17:26 Resettlers interviewed in Saxony-Anhalt were Sudeten Germans and more prone to anti-GDR attitudes and more vehemently active in preserving their cultural heritage.

This also seemed evident when considering Heimat origin and the tendency to choose a singular self-identification of “German” as 25% or 19:76 claimed this identity. East Prussians claimed the second highest percentage with 42% or 10:42.

When taking into account birth years for all Resettlers, it seems that age did not affect this outcome. The interviewees who claimed “German” as a singular self-identification during the GDR were born between 1921 and 1943.

The Silesians followed their tendency with this singular self-identification as they did with the “Old Heimat” category. The Silesians had only 9% or 2:22 who claimed “German” as a singular self-identification. This is the lowest percentage of any of the Heimat groups with larger numbers of interviewees.

The third most common singular self-identification reported was that of “GDR citizen”. With 17% or 16:94 of women and 17.7% or 20:113 of men claiming a singular self-identification of “GDR citizen” it would seem that there was not a relationship between gender and the interviewees’ identity in this category. This result could possibly show that in reality the GDR had appealed the same to Resettler men and Resettler women.

When taking into account where the interviewee lived at the time of the interview it was revealing to observe the different rates at which Resettlers claimed a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification. Berlin had the highest percentage with 50% or 4:8 who reported a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification. A possible explanation for this result is the fact that several who lived in Berlin worked in high government offices during the GDR era. To work in these offices a pro-GDR viewpoint would have been required to obtain and retain these jobs. It was often reported by interviewees from all over the former GDR that Berlin as the center and ‘face of GDR Socialism’ to the West was often better supplied with food stuffs, consumer and other goods than the rest of the GDR. It is possible that many of the interviewees who lived in Berlin reported a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification due to access to probably the highest quality of life the GDR had to offer.

Religion was also taken into consideration. Catholic Resettlers were more likely than Protestant and atheist Resettlers to claim a “German” or “Old Heimat” singular self-identification. Following this trend Catholic Resettlers were also much less likely with 9.2% or 7:76 to claim a “GDR citizen” singular self-identifications. While the large number of Sudeten Germans in this study potentially exaggerated this result, there were Catholics from a variety of areas including

Slovakia, Croatia and other regions who also self-identified as either “German” or “Old Heimat”.⁶⁴⁰ Protestant Resettlers with 30.4% or 17:56 were the religious group most likely to claim a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification. This result is quite revealing when taking into account that only 18.5% or 10:54 of those who claimed no (“keine”) Religion, i.e. most often atheists, identified themselves as having a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification. Personal belief, activity in one’s religion or not and many other factors could affect this outcome, but it was compelling to observe that the expected result of more atheist Resettlers claiming a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification than religious Resettlers did not occur. In the end, Protestant Resettlers almost doubled the “keine Religion” or atheist Resettlers in claiming a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification.

In taking into account Heimat origin and a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification claim, the Pomeranians, in following their rather pro-GDR’ or simply more adaptable behaviors, had 31.8% or 7:22 who reported this self-identification. This more adaptable behavior could also be simply that once settled in the GDR (many in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) that the differences between their Heimat informal sub-structures, i.e. Heimat traditions and practices, were so similar to the native cultures in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern that they were more willing to exchange their “Old Heimat” identities for “New Heimat” or “GDR citizen” self-identifications.⁶⁴¹

Regarding birth years and the tendency to identify with the GDR, there was a total of 25 interviewees born between 1912 and 1927 and only one person (born in 1922) reported a “GDR

⁶⁴⁰ Interview on 06/11/2008 with Frau S., born in 1936 in Slovakia, living near Stralsund, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶⁴¹ Interview on 12/11/2008 with Herr W., born in 1931 in Pomerania, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

citizen” singular self-identification. In other words, one can see the potential that the older an interviewee was the less likely they were to have claimed a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification. This result was also confirmed in that with each birth year cohort born between 1928 and 1945 there was at least one Resettler if not more that claimed a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification. The birth year cohorts of 1930, 1931 and then 1942 and 1943 were particularly high in the percentage of interviewees claiming a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification. This group, averaging 14 interviewees for each birth year, had an average of 43% of the birth year total claiming a “GDR citizen” singular self-identification.

Examining the last singular self-identification category of “New Heimat” one can see that at 6.3% or 13:206 it was the smallest of all the singular self-identification categories. This specification means that when asked how they saw themselves regarding identity during the GDR, the Resettlers answered that they had taken on the identity of the area where they were settled after the flight and expulsions. Some “New Heimat” singular self-identifications included “Prignitzer”, “Mecklenburger” or “Magdeburger”.

Taking into account birth years, interviewees who claimed a “New Heimat” singular self-identification during the GDR were born as early as 1924 and as late as 1944. The earlier birth years were surprising as it was expected that only those Resettlers who were babies at the time of the flight and expulsions would have claimed a “New Heimat” identity. This result showed that age did not play a specific role in whether or not “New Heimat” as a singular self-identification was chosen. The explanation for this result lies largely with the continued practice of Heimat traditions. Herr S. from East Prussia hid his Resettler identity from friends and family members

and when asked how he felt during the GDR, as far as identity was concerned, he claimed a “New Heimat” singular self-identification.⁶⁴²

When taking into account where the interviewees lived when interviewed, it is telling to note that 0% of 26 interviewees who lived in Saxony-Anhalt claimed a “New Heimat” singular self-identification. It is possible that the reason for this is due to the fact that 65.4% or 17:26 of those interviewed in Saxony-Anhalt were Sudeten Germans and many Resettlers who settled in Saxony-Anhalt spoke about discrimination from locals that lasted for years.⁶⁴³

Amalgamated Self-Identifications

The next category of responses given is called “amalgamated self-identifications”. This was when interviewees claimed multiple components regarding their identities during the GDR era. 26.6% or 55:206 of the interviewees reported an “amalgamated self-identification” such as “Resettler-Old Heimat-GDR citizen”(1:206) or “Old Heimat-GDR citizen-German” (2:206). The most commonly reported amalgamated self-identification was that of “German-Old Heimat” with 8.7% or 18:206. This is significant when one considers that the most common singular self-identifications were “Old Heimat” with 23.3% or 48:206 and “German” with 22.8% or 47:206. When one combines these results this shows that approximately 55% or 113:206 of Resettlers

⁶⁴² Interview on 23/10/2008 with Herr S., born in 1931 in East Prussia, living in Parchim, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶⁴³ Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

who spoke about identity during the interviews felt that they had maintained and preserved their original homeland self-identifications.

Wolfgang Bergem claimed among diaspora communities (the Resettlers being a unique example) there is a constant battle regarding their own identity construction and identity preservation and the forces of segregation and assimilation.⁶⁴⁴ The self-identifications given by the interviewees show that 55% managed through various means, most often through continued use of sub-structures in the private and public transcripts of the GDR to keep assimilative forces at bay and preserve their original identities. Even more telling is the reality that this leaves 45% of interviewees who potentially partially integrated into GDR cultures and societies.

Not wanting to give a false impression that the Pomeranians and Silesians felt no connection during the GDR with their old Heimat areas, it is necessary to report that Pomeranians had a large number of people who claimed an “Old Heimat” amalgamated self-identification. In fact, with 36.4% or 8:22, the Silesians had the highest number of any Heimat group claiming an “Old Heimat” amalgamated self-identification. This simply confirms the Pomeranians’ and Silesians’ abilities to adapt by holding onto old traditional habits and identities, but also adopting new ones as well.

Large numbers of interviewees who were born between 1928-1939 chose a “German-Old Heimat” amalgamated self-identification. A possible explanation for this is that several of these interviewees would have had experiences and memories from their old Heimat, but would have been young enough after their arrival in the SBZ to adapt and eventually adopt another second or

⁶⁴⁴ As quoted by Wolff, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 10.

even third identity such as “German-GDR citizen”. Another explanation could be that these interviewees grew up under the Nazi regime and hence would have been impregnated with a heightened awareness of their identities as Germans.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Due to the secondary literature's reliance on archival sources analysis of the Resettlers' religious lives in the GDR is limited largely to statistics. One can read how many Catholic Resettlers lived in a certain area and that they changed the religious equilibrium in the traditional lands of the Reformation, but that is the limit. What about other aspects of their religious lives? Did the Resettlers acquiesce or resist the SED's attacks on religion? What was it like for Resettlers who were in the religious majority in their homelands to arrive in the SBZ and suddenly be the religious minority? If the Resettlers left their religions was this a personal choice or was it based on atheistic pressure from the SED regime? This chapter will discuss the role that religion played in the lives of the Resettlers and its evolving importance over the years including the reasons for attrition. These results will then be used as indicators of the potential macro-level religious integration of Resettlers in the cultures and societies of the GDR.

Post-war Religious Landscape

After the war Resettlers wandered over large areas of the Soviet Zone seeking refuge, help and relief. Amidst these chaotic circumstances the churches stepped into the political vacuum⁶⁴⁵ and exercised a great deal of influence as they were the only institutions which still had retained their personnel, properties and organizational structures.⁶⁴⁶ Soviet administration structures were new and foreign; the churches were the only organizations that were recognizable by Resettlers. While Bukovina German interviewees reported not receiving help from their church, the Resettlers as a whole reported that their religious organizations provided a large amount of aid. This help for the Resettlers came in the form of clothing, food stuffs, sometimes employment and other immediate physical necessities. The church provided a type of safe-house where the Resettlers could speak about what they had experienced - one of the few places in the SBZ where they could do this. The churches also served as a part of the old Heimat in the newly settled areas, providing a balm helping to alleviate some of the bitter effects of leaving home and belongings.

It should also be remembered that many clerics and religious leaders were also refugees and expellees themselves. They had suffered a great deal as well and were the focus of Catholic aid efforts as there were approximately 200 in Saxony and Brandenburg alone who were without parishes or means to support themselves.⁶⁴⁷ This situation did not remain static for long as the need for Catholic priests to minister to the growing number of Catholic Resettlers increased weekly.

⁶⁴⁵ Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene*, p. 151.

⁶⁴⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 91.

⁶⁴⁷ Ulrike Winterstein, *Vertriebener Klerus in Sachsen, 1945-1955*, (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010), p. 65-66.

How the Resettlers affected Religious Life in the GDR

One of the greatest legacies of the Resettlers is how they changed the religious landscape of the GDR. In 1939 the areas of the future SBZ reported the following percentages of their population as Catholic: Brandenburg 7.8%; Mecklenburg 6.1%; Saxony-Anhalt 8.6%; Thuringia 3.5%; and Saxony with 3.5%.⁶⁴⁸ In total, these areas were 86.6% Protestant and only 6.2% Catholic and were described as a “ganz überwiegend evangelisches Gebiet.”⁶⁴⁹ The expulsions and the sudden relocation of millions of Resettlers shifted the religious balance where little religious diversity had existed for nearly 400 years. Different kinds of churches and religious communities were established.⁶⁵⁰ Frau E. born in Silesia settled with her family in Ribnitz-Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern with several other families from Silesia. She reported that this group of Resettlers was sent a Catholic priest from Berlin as there were none in the area. This Resettler group not only established a Catholic community in Damgarten, but also built a Catholic church with their own hands which today is the local library.⁶⁵¹ Herr G., a Resettler from Sudetenland who lived most of his post-expulsion life in Auerbach, Saxony was not exaggerating when he claimed that the Catholic Church in the GDR owed its very existence to the arrival of the Resettlers.⁶⁵² Due to this flood of new arrivals the Catholic population in the SBZ nearly trebled to 2.7 million by 1949.⁶⁵³ Many of these Catholic Resettlers did not remain,

⁶⁴⁸ Seraphim (1954), p. 55.

⁶⁴⁹ Meinike, in Meinicke and von Plato, p. 91.

⁶⁵⁰ Garold N. Davis and Norma S. Davis, *Behind the Iron Curtain: Recollections of Latter-day Saints in East Germany, 1945-1989*, (Provo: BYU Studies, 1996), p. 122.

⁶⁵¹ Interview on 01/10/2008 with Frau E., born in 1937 in Silesia., living in Berlin.

⁶⁵² Interview on 08/01/2009 with Herr G., born in 1938 in Sudetenland, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

⁶⁵³ Schwartz s.544.

but left for the West.⁶⁵⁴ These were soon replaced by new Catholic Resettlers arriving from new expulsions taking place in Eastern and Southeastern Europe.⁶⁵⁵

Interviewees' Religious Backgrounds

The following was reported by interviewees who discussed their religious backgrounds: 36.1% or 82:227 interviewees were Roman Catholic; 29.5% or 67:227 claimed a Protestant background; 24.2% or 55:227 reported having “keine” or no religion (most often atheists); 8.8% or 20:227 reported being “gläubig” or “believers” (these most often had formally left their religion (*austreten*), but had continued to have some kind of belief in God and prayed); and approximately 1.4% belonged to smaller Christian denominations. The large numbers of Roman Catholics in the Resettler interviewee pool have mainly two reasons. The first, that the largest Heimat group to be interviewed was the Sudeten Germans and consequently were almost all Catholic. The second reason was that so many of the Resettlers tended to be Catholic and come from historically “Catholic” lands, i.e. from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and Croatia.

Religious, Physical and Emotional Help through the Churches

The Resettlers reported in large numbers that it was the churches from which they received the most help after arriving in the SBZ. The lack of funding for Soviet and SED edicts combined

⁶⁵⁴ Donth, s. 185.

⁶⁵⁵ Niethammer, p. 59

with the lack of cooperation of local authorities intent on keeping the Resettlers away⁶⁵⁶ created even more chaos in interviewees' lives. The churches were found to be the only help of substance available to many of the Resettlers. The churches provided medical aid in hospitals. Frau W. was 8-months pregnant when she was expelled from her home in today's Poland. She travelled towards Berlin hoping to be able to stay with relatives. She claimed she was about to die from the effects of the journey when she was taken in by a Catholic hospital in Berlin. They cared for her and helped bring her only child into the world.⁶⁵⁷ Herr H. from East Brandenburg reported that it was through his local Protestant pastor on the island of Rügen that he and his family received clothing and even employment. Though this employment required a great deal of manual labor caring for the church's farm fields, Herr H. and his family were grateful for the work that kept them fed during their first years in the SBZ.⁶⁵⁸ Another example is that of Frau E. who reported that had it not been for the help of her local Catholic church that her family would not have had any clothing whatsoever.⁶⁵⁹

In addition to often providing for physical needs, the churches also provided a cathartic outlet for the Resettlers to express their feelings regarding their experiences during the flight, expulsions and other displacement events. From the beginning Soviet and SED officials made stringent efforts to make it known that the public and private transcript in the GDR required Resettlers silence about their war-time experiences.⁶⁶⁰ Frau B. from East Prussia reported that her mother was forced to sign a document in which she agreed to never speak about being raped by 18

⁶⁵⁶ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 60.

⁶⁵⁷ Interview on 31/07/2008 with Frau W., born in 1921, lived in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

⁶⁵⁸ Interview on 01/08/2008 with Herr H., born in 1935 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

⁶⁵⁹ Interview on 01/10/2008 with Frau E., born in 1937 in Silesia, living in Berlin.

⁶⁶⁰ Kossert, p. 193.

Soviet soldiers during her flight and expulsion experiences.⁶⁶¹ Even birth certificates were officially reissued to erase or at the very least ignore the Resettlers' pasts. Herr P.'s birth certificate during the entire existence of the GDR said that he was born in "Kaliningrad Oblast" rather than "East Prussia".⁶⁶² The refusal of the Soviet Military Administration to use the terms "Flüchtling" or "Vertriebene" reinforced to Resettlers that their pasts, experiences and identities were not welcome in the new socialist society. This being the case, the churches served as the only outlet outside of their own families available to the Resettlers to speak about the horrors they had experienced. The use of churches by the Resettlers as quasi-cultural centers had grown so prevalent that even the West German academic, Prof. Dr. Peter-Heinz Serpahim reported in 1946 how the GDR Resettlers held de facto refugee and expellee meetings after Mass and religious services.⁶⁶³ This occurred in larger and larger numbers to the point that the SED was forced to begin "polizeiliche Beobachtung des Kirchenlebens".⁶⁶⁴

Despite increased pressure by the SED⁶⁶⁵ the churches continued to serve as safe-houses where the Resettlers could unite with fellow Resettlers, often from the same homelands. In addition to expressing their feelings about the flight and expulsions the Resettlers could use the churches as a place to share their hopes of returning home (per Western radio broadcasts of Adenauer's speeches and his demands for the return of the "Eastern Territories" to the German people)⁶⁶⁶ and plans for the interim. At one's employment, in the market place and other public areas free

⁶⁶¹ Interview on 27/02/2009 with Frau B., born in 1945 in East Prussia, living in Leipzig, Saxony.

⁶⁶² Interview on 10/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶⁶³ Seraphim (1954), p. 163.

⁶⁶⁴ Schwartz, p. 516.

⁶⁶⁵ Ther, in Rock and Wolff (eds.), p. 70.

⁶⁶⁶ Interview on 04/10/2008 with Frau M., born in 1932 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

expression of these things was forbidden. Herr M. living in Radeberg, Sachsen claimed that the church was the only place that Resettlers could speak about the expulsions.⁶⁶⁷ .

The churches were not only a means of physical, mental and emotional help, but they also served as means to preserve connections with old friends and relatives from the same Heimat region.⁶⁶⁸

Frau J. living in Ribnitz-Damgarten reported that it was in the church where the *Zusammenhalt* or “staying together” of the Resettler community was maintained.⁶⁶⁹ The churches played an important role in allowing the Resettlers to rebuild old relationships but also to make new friends. Attending church provided Resettlers with opportunities to establish friendships and connections with locals, thereby beginning the process of integration, but also provided opportunities to establish relationships with other Resettlers from different Heimat regions. Herr K., a Sudeten German living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern reported that it was not extraordinary to find Sudeten Germans, Silesians, East Prussians and Resettlers from other Heimat regions at the local Catholic church.⁶⁷⁰ This also affected the micro and macro-level integration of interviewees as fellow Resettlers were potentially more open to establishing new friendships as their old relationship circles had been destroyed.

The churches also provided a place to attempt and begin to heal from the traumas of the war. Interviewees often reported that especially in the post-war period, local churches became quasi-cultural centers providing activities, games and celebrating holidays as one would in the old

⁶⁶⁷ Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr M., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.

⁶⁶⁸ Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶⁶⁹ Interview on 05/11/2008 with Frau J., born in 1936 in Sudetenland, living in Ribnitz-Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁶⁷⁰ Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr K., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Heimat. Frau E. from Silesia reported that her local Catholic priest in Ribnitz-Damgarten held a Christmas party every year specifically for the Resettlers in the area (almost all came from Silesia) until approximately 1955.⁶⁷¹ In other words, every year in Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern the Silesian Resettlers were able to celebrate a Silesian Christmas. This is an example as to how the churches helped alleviate part of the shock of entering an unknown and often religiously different land from the interviewees' old Heimat by providing familiarity, which consequently provided the courage and ability to engage with locals.

In some cases, religion became a bulwark or refuge from the GDR and the SED entirely. Herr Z.'s zealous religious activity in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Dresden left little time for anything else outside of work and church activities.⁶⁷² The same situation was reported by Frau P. a Carpathian German. She clearly stated that her activity in her local Catholic church in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern created a type of religious fortress where she had absolutely nothing to do with the SED or "outside" world of the GDR and was happy to have it that way.⁶⁷³

SED policies towards religiously-minded youth

For religiously-minded GDR citizens it was better to stay away from the SED due to the fact, as Raabe described it, that the SED's policies towards the churches between 1949 and 1961 were

⁶⁷¹ Interview on 01/10/2008 with Frau E., born in 1937 in Silesia, living in Berlin.

⁶⁷² Interview on 16/10/2008 with Herr Z., born in 1937 in Silesia, lived during GDR in Dresden, Saxony.

⁶⁷³ Interview on 16/10/2008 with Frau P., born in 1941 in Slovakia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

bordered on “Feindschaft“.⁶⁷⁴ The GDR’s constitution guaranteed all citizens freedom of religion,⁶⁷⁵ however persecution of the churches by SED officials before 1953 was quite intense.

The battle for influence over the youth of the GDR was important to the state, the political parties and the churches. Young people were important to these groups since most of the GDR’s youth had grown up in the Third Reich and held a strong potential for counter-revolution. All political parties advocated for an “Umerziehung” of the approximately two million former Hitler Jugend and BDM members living in the SBZ.⁶⁷⁶ While other political parties waivered about recreating youth groups within their movements, the SED set out immediately to increase their influence over the GDR’s young people. Soviet officials authorized the creation of *Jugendausschüsse* or political offices given charge over issues concerning young people at local levels. At the insistence of the SED these youth committees were then declared by SMAD to be the only legal youth organizations within the SBZ.⁶⁷⁷

Aggravating the SED’s paranoia, the GDR continued to lose its youth at an alarming rate. Between the years of 1950-1959 approximately 700,000 GDR young people fled to the West as “Republic refugees”.⁶⁷⁸ Additionally the SED took notice that with only 6% of SED membership considered to be young⁶⁷⁹ the SED was losing the battle for the hearts of the GDR’s young people.

⁶⁷⁴ Raabe, p. 255.

⁶⁷⁵ <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr/verfddr1949.html#41> (accessed: 07/09/2014)

⁶⁷⁶ Mählert, p. 34.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 154.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., p.128.

To help change these circumstances the SED first created the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth). The FDJ will be treated more fully in the chapter entitled “Politics”. The stated purposes of the organization were: “es vereine sie der heilige Wille...durch gemeinsame Anstrengungen die vom Nazismus verschuldete Not unseres Volkes überwinden zu helfen...und zum Neuaufbau ihrer Heimat auf antifaschistisch-demokratischer Grundlage beizutragen.”⁶⁸⁰

The FDJ was clearly created as a way of politically organizing and controlling the GDR’s young people and specifically challenged the growing participation of the youth in the churches’ youth groups.

After the founding of the FDJ the battle for the GDR’s youth with the churches continued with vigor. From the SED point of view all Christian youth groups and their activities were seen as an “Angriff gegen die Jugenderziehung des sozialistischen Staates” by the SED.⁶⁸¹ The SED then called upon all school principals, teachers, State security agents, police and other Mass organization officials to help defame and expose the Junge Gemeinde as “centers for West German and American agents”.⁶⁸²

Jugendweihe

Another difference between what is written in the secondary literature and archival sources and what was reported in the interviewees involvement with the *Jugendweihe*. The *Jugendweihe*’s history goes back to mid-1800’s⁶⁸³ when it was used as a non-religious alternative to

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., p.107.

⁶⁸² Ibid., p. 116.

⁶⁸³ Raabe, p. 185.

confirmation ceremonies among *Freidenker* communities. The Jugendweihe was also used as a rite of passage by the Socialist party during the Weimar Republic.⁶⁸⁴ SED officials noticed that the churches as "die letzte organisierte Kraft des Feindes in der Republik"⁶⁸⁵ continued to hold sway over GDR citizens simply because they were the places of ceremony, i.e. the places where people were married, the places where people were buried and the places where children were named.⁶⁸⁶

The SED decided that the GDR would have its very own secular alternative to the churches' confirmation ceremonies.⁶⁸⁷ In 1954 the call for a Jugendweihe went out and per SED decree was established in the summer of 1955. It would appear that many GDR citizens heeded their religious leaders' pleas due to the fact that out of approximately 280,000 students in the GDR who were about to leave school in 1955 only 18.9% actually attended their Jugendweihe ceremony.⁶⁸⁸ The SED was severely disappointed by this outcome and decided to battle this issue by intensifying its promotional efforts of the Jugendweihe. The SED began to require that young people wanting to engage in apprenticeships and other educational training had to participate in the Jugendweihe.⁶⁸⁹ These and other measures were taken and would seem to have been largely successful from an SED perspective. By 1959, only four years after the first Jugendweihe ceremonies, the governmental department responsible for Jugendweihe in the GDR reported that Jugendweihe participation rates had reached 80.4%.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁴ Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 95.

⁶⁸⁵ Raabe, p. 257.

⁶⁸⁶ Besier, p. 166.

⁶⁸⁷ Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 95

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 191.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., p.192.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 208.

Taking Jugendweihe participation as an indicator of Resettler religious integration, the majority of interviewees confirmed that the path that native GDR residents followed of combining religious ceremonies and the Jugendweihe was observed by Resettler parents as well. During the interviews the Jugendweihe never seemed to be that important of an event in the Resettlers' lives. Whether they were religious or not, the Jugendweihe was just something they participated in or had their children participate in and then they moved on.

Religious Activity or Lack thereof

Even though the SED had stopped its official persecution of the Junge Gemeinde that did not mean that the GDR became friendly to religion. Since the SED was so antagonistic towards religion at certain points in its history⁶⁹¹ it was expected that the religiously-active interviewees would report a great deal of problems or persecution. There were a few Resettlers who reported having suffered for their religious activity, for example Frau W. living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg. Frau W. reported that in her opinion she never received the *Prämie* (financial award) given out to fellow workers at the rail yards because of her involvement in her church.⁶⁹² This reality of people losing their jobs or having problems due to their religious activity was also confirmed through interviews with Herr D.⁶⁹³ and Herr G.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹¹ BLHA, Rep. 672/16 Nr. 105 Ministerium des Innern, Bl. 69.

⁶⁹² Interview on 27/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1941 in East Prussia, living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg.

⁶⁹³ Interview on 27/02/2009 with Herr D., born in 1926 in East Prussia, living in Leipzig, Saxony.

⁶⁹⁴ Interview on 18/03/2009 with Herr G., born in 1929 in East Prussia, living in Cottbus, Brandenburg.

While this was true for a few interviewees most Resettlers reported that their being active in their religion was not a matter for which they were persecuted at work or in society. The overwhelming majority of the interviewees reported that their being active or not in their religion or church was a matter of personal choice and not a matter where they felt forced to choose one way or another by the state or GDR society. This result is especially compelling given the anti-religious reputation of the SED and the very real pressure brought to bear on GDR citizens regarding religious activity regarding opportunities to study and in certain employment fields. For example, teachers who were either religious or did not have the correct political viewpoint or opinions in the GDR often lost their jobs.⁶⁹⁵ The great majority of Resettlers by far represented their religious lives following the general theme of the interviews: they were people exercising their agency within the private transcript of the GDR.

The persecution of the churches, taking religious instruction out of the schools and quasi-criminalizing religious activity all took their toll on people's desire to participate in religion.⁶⁹⁶ Those who hoped for a re-christianizing of post-war Germany were quickly disappointed.⁶⁹⁷ The 1964 census showed that the number of non-religious GDR citizens had increased to 31.5% from only 6% in 1950.⁶⁹⁸ This trend continued and it would seem that the SED's processes of secularization had brought about its desired results in that by the end of the GDR in 1990 approximately 12 million out of 16 million GDR citizens had not been baptized or considered themselves atheists.⁶⁹⁹ It is important to note that the results of the interviews with the Resettlers

⁶⁹⁵ Raabe, p. 147.

⁶⁹⁶ Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 109.

⁶⁹⁷ Schwartz, *Vertriebene und Umsiedlerpolitik*, p. 545.

⁶⁹⁸ Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, p. 103.

⁶⁹⁹ Raabe, p.157.

showed that not all those who claimed to have no religion were atheists and not all those on government records listed as Protestant or Catholic were religiously active.

Regarding religious activity and whether or not the Resettlers were a “religiously-active” people during the GDR is difficult to concretely report. Factors such as church attendance, leaving one’s religion, loss of faith, the interviewees’ own admitted activity rates and whether or not religion was important during the GDR era were all taken into consideration. Out of 217 Resettlers who discussed their religious lives, 63% or 136:217 reported that religion played no role in their lives during the GDR era. This result conversely means that 37% or 81:217 of interviewees reported that religion was important to them and that they had remained active in their religion during the GDR era. Analyzing these results as indicators of interviewees’ religious integration into GDR society reveals that Resettlers were much more religiously active when compared to the GDR populace as a whole.⁷⁰⁰

Reasons for Official Withdrawal from Religion

Whether or not the interviewees led religious or non-religious lives, the established principle of agency among the Resettlers was evident particularly when asked about religion in the GDR. A few Resettlers felt as though they were forced to *Austreten* (official withdrawal) from their respective churches for educational or employment purposes. Herr B. living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was told by SED officials that since the SED government had paid for his higher studies and that he owed the government sacrifices in return. Due to this pressure

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 272.

Herr B. officially withdrew from the Catholic Church.⁷⁰¹ This Mafia-like *quid pro quo* pressure was brought to bear on several interviewees with regards to religious or political choices. However, the overwhelming majority of those who left their religions reported doing so of their own volition.

Among the interviewees who spoke about their religious lives, 16% or 35:217 Resettlers reported officially withdrawing (austreten) from their religion. The most commonly reported reason for leaving their respective church was a loss of faith. This loss of faith came largely in two ways: experiencing the horrors of war and due to *politische Schulung* (political education) received in the GDR. The horrible events that accompanied the war, witnessing the rape of female relatives by Soviet soldiers, the destruction of their homes, having to leave their Heimat and the afflictions suffered upon arrival in the SBZ “proved” to many of the interviewees and their families that God did not exist.⁷⁰²

The second reason interviewees reported having lost their faith was due to political-educational training in the GDR. This training stressed Marxism-Leninism atheistic materialism. If one could not touch, see, taste or feel it then that thing was not real. As no one had seen God, God did not exist, thus a belief in God was silly superstition. This ideology was taught to GDR citizens as early as day care. Younger Resettlers learned throughout their educational experiences about the history of religion, Christianity in particular. With its history of witch burnings, the Crusades and often contradicting and persecuting science, many of the Resettlers came away with the idea that religion was proven to be a faulty system not worthy of their

⁷⁰¹ Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr B., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁰² Interview on 15/11/2008 with Frau T., born in 1930 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

attention or belief. The older Resettlers learned these teachings at the work place and in special political schools. Herr K. who was a *Wolfskind* epitomized this “loss of faith” mentality when he said “durch den Krieg Religion hat keine Bedeutung...ich folge Marxismus-Materialismus.”⁷⁰³ This conclusion was reached by several Resettlers and caused them to withdraw from their respective churches. Most often these people when asked in the interviews about what religion they belonged to answered “keine” (none).

Analyzing characteristics of this group who claimed to have “keine” religion the following patterns were observed. 65.5% or 36:55 of the interviewees who claimed to have no religion were men. Taking into account birth years, it was observed that the first interviewees claiming “keine” religion were born in 1922. From 1922 onwards a relatively steady rate of around 18% of the Resettlers born in a particular year claimed no religion until 1932. 33% or 5:15 of the Resettlers who were born in 1932 claimed to have no religion; 36.4% or 4:11 in 1933; and 50% or 4:8 in 1936. This trend peaks in 1942 with 41.7% or 5:12 of interviewees claiming to have no religion. These results are compelling when considering the overall integration of Resettlers into GDR society, as these birth cohorts represent those interviewees who experienced the horrors of war and the chaos of the post-war period as children and young teenagers, only to be caught up afterwards in the Denazification, Stalinization and secularization movements in the SBZ. These interviewees were influenced by these movements and accepted the SED’s secularist attitudes towards religion based on political ideological training and their own war-time experiences. This evidence shows that these birth year cohorts were integrated in several ways and on several levels in GDR employment, political and religious life.

⁷⁰³ Interview on 09/10/2008 with Herr K., born in 1934 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

When taking into account the different Heimat groups, stereotypes remained steady: the Bessarabians were Protestant; Sudeten Germans were Catholic; Pomeranians were Protestant; and Silesians were both. One of the few surprises in this area was that 40% or 17:43 of East Prussians reported having no religion. This was most often due to war-time experiences such as losing one's parents and living as a *Wolfskind*⁷⁰⁴ or experiencing pain and anguish at the hands of Soviet soldiers.⁷⁰⁵

The second most reported reason why Resettlers left their churches was the payment of *Kirchensteuer* (Church taxes). This answer is curious given that the SED decreed with the *Anordnung über die Ablehnung der Zwangseintreibung von Beiträgen für Parteien, Massenorganisationen und Religionsgemeinschaften* in February 1956⁷⁰⁶ that such payments to churches in the GDR were to be made on a voluntary basis.⁷⁰⁷ It is also puzzling to ponder how 25% of Protestants who were on the church roll books of the *Evangelische Kirche* in the GDR did not pay church taxes and did so without having to officially withdraw.⁷⁰⁸ It is significant that so many would report the payment of Church taxes as being the reason for their officially withdrawing from their religion, payments were voluntary and a great number of people remained members of their respective religion without having to make these payments. These Resettlers reported that at the time of their decision they simply did not have enough money to pay for food, clothing, their rent and other necessities and then additionally, pay their Church taxes.

⁷⁰⁴ Interview on 09/10/2008 with Herr K., born in 1934 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

⁷⁰⁵ Interinterview on 27/10/2008 with Herr W., born in 1922 in East Prussia, living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg.

⁷⁰⁶ Raabe, p. 48.

⁷⁰⁷ Paul Froese and Steven Pfaff, "Religious Oddities: Explaining the Divergent Religious Markets of Poland and East Germany", in Gert Pickel and Olaf Muller (eds.), *Church and Religion in Contemporary Europe: Results from Empirical and Comparative Research*, (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009, p. 137.

⁷⁰⁸ Detlef Pollack, "Von der Volkskirche zur Minderheitskirche. Zur Entwicklung von Religiosität und Kirchlichkeit in der DDR", in Kaelble, Kocka and Zwahr (eds.), p. 280.

A unique characteristic of this group is that when further questioned about their decision to leave their respective church they almost all claimed to have continued to believe in God and remained *gläubig* (believing). Some of these Resettlers even continued to pray. In other words, the second largest reason why the Resettlers left their respective churches was due to financial constraints not a lack of faith.

Most interviewees had left their religions during the GDR, but after unification with West Germany, the new legal ramifications of enforced church tax payments led some Resettlers to officially withdraw from their religions. The *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* in 1992 commissioned a study to ascertain why so many “East German” Protestants were leaving the EKD after 1990. The EKD asked 385 “GDR Protestants” and 550 former and non-church members to investigate the reasons behind declining religious involvement in the former GDR. The results were revealing in that only 3% of those surveyed said that they had left the Protestant Church due to finding another religious conviction. 46% of those surveyed reported that they had left the Protestant Church because they did not want to have to pay Church taxes. Due to the unification with the Federal Republic Church taxes became mandatory rather than remaining voluntary as they had been in the GDR.⁷⁰⁹

Religiously-active Reality

General opinions among the believing and church attending Resettlers regarding the ability of a “believer” in the GDR to live a full life where they were not limited or discriminated against

⁷⁰⁹ Froese and Pfaff, in Pickel and Muller (eds.), p. 138.

were plentiful. Frau S. from East Prussia gave the impression that, while it was difficult as a believer, one could accomplish goals in the GDR if one wished and persisted. Frau S.'s daughter was active in their family's church and wanted to study to become a trained *Kindergärtnerin*. This proved problematic, given how politically-sensitive the education of children was in the GDR, and her daughter was rejected as a student. Frau S. took the matter on to higher authorities and continued to do so until finally her daughter received a study position to become a *Kindergärtnerin*.⁷¹⁰ Herr G. from Bessarabia on the other hand, and more probably because he was a trained Protestant *Prediger*, had different words to say about people in the GDR who were active in their religion. He was extremely angry and offended that his daughter, due to her religious activity, was discriminated against.⁷¹¹ In the same moment that Herr G. expressed this opinion, a Resettler couple, Frau and Herr V., became quite angry at his describing the GDR in such a negative light. Frau and Herr V. were also active in their church during the GDR era and had even had the same kind of issue as Frau S. with their son not wanting to fulfill his military service (the impression was given that this was for pacifist reasons).⁷¹² In the opinion of some religiously-active interviewees, while difficult at times, it was possible to live a "full life" and achieve one's goals as a religiously-active person in the GDR given some determination to make it happen.⁷¹³

Another issue regarding the Resettlers' religious or non-religious lives in the GDR was that of the ability of the Resettlers to change religious affiliation. While the number of interviewees

⁷¹⁰ Interview on 09/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

⁷¹¹ Personal conversations at dinner for 'Bessarabien Resettler Group' on 26/08/2008 at Frau V's home in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷¹² Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷¹³ Personal conversations at dinner for 'Bessarabien Resettler Group' on 26/08/2008 at Frau V's home in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

who converted to another religion was small, this served as evidence for the use of personal agency within the private transcript of the GDR. Herr L. from Pomerania attended a meeting of the Christian movement *Brüder Gemeinde* and was so touched and influenced by their teachings that he converted in 1954.⁷¹⁴ Herr F. from Sudetenland also converted, in his case from Catholicism to Protestantism, also out of conviction.⁷¹⁵ Some Resettlers like Frau L. from Sudetenland converted to their spouse's religion in order to maintain familial harmony.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁴ Interview on 22/10/2008 with Herr L., born in 1936 in Pomerania, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷¹⁵ Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr F., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living near Chemnitz, Saxony.

⁷¹⁶ Interview on 03/11/2008 with Frau L., born in 1920 in Sudetenland, living in Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

CHAPTER NINE

POLITICAL LIFE

There was no matter or subject that the SED leadership did not concern itself with or try to micro-manage.⁷¹⁷ During the interviews for this project the consequences of the hyper-politicized environment the SED created were apparent in a “GDR mentality” where few things were perceived by Resettlers to be political in nature. Interviewees were confused as to why during the political part of the interviews they were being asked about their activity in the FDGB, Junge Pionere or other SED-controlled entities. This chapter will examine Resettlers’ attitudes, opinions and activity in organizations such as the Freie Deutsche Jugend, DSF and political parties and use these as indicators of the level of interviewees’ political integration into GDR society.

Childhood and Youth Organizations

For those Resettlers young enough to have experienced the flight and expulsions as a child, the political part of the interview began by asking the interviewees concerning their participation in the *Junge Pionere* (Young Pioneers). The Junge Pionere was an organization created in 1948 for school children in the GDR and based on the Soviet model. The Junge Pionere organized

⁷¹⁷ Lindenberger, in Bessel and Jessen (Hrsg.), *Grenzen der Diktatur*, p.318.

activities for children outside of school time and in 1950, when most interviewees who participated would have been at the appropriate age to take part, had reached a membership of 1,600,000 members.⁷¹⁸

The majority of interviewees did not consider participation in this organization something of a political nature. Most considered their membership in the Junge Pionere as simply a part of life in the GDR or as the majority said, membership “gehört dazu”. This answer is significant as this was the answer most interviewees gave when asked about their participation in mass organizations. Their belonging to the Junge Pionere or any SED-sponsored entity was remembered and experienced as something along the lines of a normal rite of passage rather than an exercise of any personal political belief.

37 interviewees mentioned or spoke about their membership in the Junge Pionere and the majority remembered it as a positive, enjoyable time full of activities with their peers. Although Frau H., born in 1943, has no memory of the flight and expulsion itself, she does have memories of life as a Resettler in the post-war *Hungerzeit* in a village outside of Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Frau H. reported:

Die Pionere hat mir gefallen, weil das für Frieden und Völkerfreundschaft war und ich wollte das eigentlich als Kriegskind...ich war gern Pionier, weil es viel los war. Die Pionere-Zeit war wie eine Therapie...wir haben gewandert und gesungen. Wir hatten Freude noch Mal. Man hatte den Gefühl das man könnte irgendwie helfen...mithelfen zu können...wir haben Alt-Papier gesammelt..auch Schrott, Gläser...die Pionere hat die Schwere von der Seele genommen...und plötzlich...dürfte man wieder Kind sein...und ich

⁷¹⁸ Weber, p. 35.

fand das persönlich sehr gut...wir haben auch die Pionere-Zeitung Zuhause bekommen und gab's Aufgaben...und ich fand das gut, das Leben bekam wieder ein Sinn dadurch.⁷¹⁹

This positive opinion reported by Frau H. was universally held by the interviewees who were involved in the Junge Pionere. Many of the interviewees who were young enough to be involved with the Junge Pionere movement went onto become heavily socially and politically integrated into GDR society, even when old Heimat traditions were practiced in their homes. Frau H. and others who had become integrated into aspects of GDR society through their participation in the Junge Pionere and other mass organizations spoke highly of life in the GDR, had accepted SED indoctrination regarding the futility of religious belief and lamented the loss after 1990 of certain aspects of living in the GDR. The beginning of differing levels of social and ideological integration was assured through interviewees' experiences and participation in the Junge Pionere. This process, depending on the desires and volition of the individual Resettler, continued through membership in the next mass organization for people their age.

Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ)

As discussed previously, the FDJ was founded in 1936 by German communists in exile and was officially organized in the GDR in March 1946. Erich Honecker was put in charge of the SED's organization for the GDR's youth and by 1950 the FDJ had a total membership of 1.5 million.⁷²⁰

The battle for influence over the youth of the GDR was especially important to the SED and the

⁷¹⁹ Interview on 22/10/2008 with Frau H., born in 1943 to an East Prussian family, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷²⁰ Weber, p. 35.

party soon pronounced the FDJ to be the only legal youth organization in the GDR. Interestingly enough Honecker saw the FDJ as a tool in the integration of the Resettler youths who he admitted still felt like outsiders in society,⁷²¹ as the Resettlers were perceived after their arrival.

Paul Verner, one of the co-founders of the FDJ and later SED Politburo member, revealed the SED's true purposes for the FDJ when he said:

Natürlich soll die FDJ – ich möchte es etwas zugespitzt sagen – eine Schule des Sozialismus sein....Deshalb erziehen wir die Jugendlichen in der FDJ zu einer solchen kämpferischen Demokratie, und dann ist diese Arbeit gleichzeitig eine sozialistische Arbeit, gleichzeitig damit aber auch eine Schule des Sozialismus....Wir sind – um ein konkretes Beispiel zu nehmen – alle daran interessiert, daß die SED in dieser Wahl siegt, und....die Methoden finden, damit die SED trotzdem als Sieger aus diesen Wahlen hervorgeht und wie wir als FDJ sie am stärksten unterstützen. Dieses Problem wird Erich Honecker morgen lösen....⁷²²

The plans as the SED claimed for this non-political youth organization were from the beginning to serve as a “school of Socialism”. This school of Socialism and its participants could and should be used in helping fight for democracy i.e., by helping the SED win the elections of 1946.

The majority of interviewees were deeply surprised and confused that they were asked about their involvement in the FDJ during the political part of the interviews. Given the very political character of the FDJ, complete with oaths, uniforms and political indoctrination, the

⁷²¹ Ibid., p. 169.

⁷²² Ibid., p. 133.

interviewees' confusion serves as additional evidence for the existence of this GDR mentality; that is, where the SED had made everything of political importance few things were perceived as political by the interviewees.

110 interviewees mentioned being involved in the FDJ on a willing or semi-willing basis – approximately ten Resettlers mentioned that they were forced to join the youth organization. One reason why some felt they were forced into joining was the reality of the situation in the GDR for those who wanted to study, especially at university. In the GDR the lack of a *politische Tätigkeit* (political activity or undertaking) lowered if not obliterated one's chances of studying at university.⁷²³ Frau F. born in Sudetenland claimed that while she felt forced to join the FDJ in order to study at university in this way to become a member, she also wanted to join because of her gratitude for the chance the GDR gave her to study.⁷²⁴

While this was the case for a small minority, the majority of interviewees involved with the FDJ reported that the reason for their joining the FDJ was that it simply was part of life in the GDR or “gehört dazu”. The overwhelming majority of Resettlers interviewed did not consider their participation in the FDJ as something of a political nature, but rather spoke about the enjoyable boating, sailing, camping and other activities in which the FDJ members were able to participate during their teenage years. For those who had just endured the horrors of the flight and expulsions the FDJ offered the younger Resettlers respite and recuperation. This consequently encouraged the processes of social and ideological integration of several younger Resettlers. The

⁷²³ Interview on 01/10/2008 with Frau E., born in 1937 in Silesia, living in Berlin.

⁷²⁴ Interview on 19/02/2009 with Frau F., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt.

FDJ provided opportunities for greater interactions with locals and this in turn helped ameliorate the discrimination and ill treatment many had experienced after their arrival in the SBZ.

State-Run Organizations

The majority of interviewees were once again very confused as to why during the political part of their interview they were being asked about their participation in mass organizations such as the Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaft Bund (FDGB), Deutsche-Sowjetische Freundschaft (DSF) and the Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands (DFD). The majority of the interviewees did not consider membership in these organizations to be an active choice of their political beliefs, but rather something that belonged or “gehört dazu” to the average GDR citizen’s life.

The FDGB or Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaft Bund was the first mass organization given permission by Soviet authorities to be created in June 1945. The concept was to create a central and sole union for all workers in the Soviet Zone. The FDGB was quickly taken over by KPD members⁷²⁵ and in 1950 reached a membership of 4.7 million.⁷²⁶ Hermann Weber explained that the main purpose of the FDGB was:

FDGB sollten die Gewerkschaften Schulen der sozialistischen Erziehung zur Erfüllung der Wirtschaftspläne werden....Wie alle Massenorganisationen der DDR erfüllte der

⁷²⁵ Weber, p. 8.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

FDGB damit seine spezielle Aufgabe, die Politik der SED in seine Zielgruppe, das heißt die Arbeitnehmerschaft, zu tragen.⁷²⁷

Once again, given the very political nature of the lone, SED-controlled union in the GDR, the confusion of the Resettlers at being asked about their membership in the FDGB demonstrates evidence of this “GDR mentality” where few things were perceived as being truly political.

Joining the mass organization, Gesellschaft für Deutsche-Sowjetische Freundschaft, was a bit more complicated for many interviewees. The DSF was created in July 1949 and had as its focus to initiate and develop cultural exchanges and positive relationships between the people of the GDR and the Soviet Union.⁷²⁸ Due to the numerous horrific experiences many of the Resettlers had at the hands of Soviet soldiers during the flight and expulsions joining the DSF was fraught with difficulty for many.

Approximately ten Resettlers felt they were forced to join the FDGB and DSF respectively. These interviewees expressed that they were often forced to join one or both of these organizations in order to keep their jobs, especially those who were employed as teachers.⁷²⁹ A smaller group of interviewees were boldly honest and admitted to joining these mass organizations for specific benefits. The goal in the GDR workplace was always to have a *sozialistisches Kollektiv* or a unified group of workers all belonging to the mass organizations in

⁷²⁷ Ibid., p. 53.

⁷²⁸ Ibid., p. 53. “Zur Förderung der engen Bindungen an die Sowjetunion hatte die SED bereits 1947 eine eigene Organisation gegründet; die „Gesellschaft für deutsch-sowjetische Freundschaft“ (DSF) zählte 1958 3,3 Millionen Mitglieder, ihr damaliger 6. Kongreß verlangte vor allem die Durchsetzung der „sowjetischen Neuerermethoden“ in der DDR und den weiteren Ausbau der Freundschaft zur UdSSR. Nun war nach den Nun war nach den schrecklichen Erfahrungen des Zweiten Weltkrieges in der Bevölkerung die Bereitschaft vorhanden, auch mit der Sowjetunion gute Beziehungen zu pflegen.“

⁷²⁹ Interview on 10/02/2009 with Herr K., born in 1930 in Sudetenland and living in Meissen, Saxony.

their place of employment. When all members of the Kollektiv belonged to these mass organizations then all workers received a financial award. Herr M. living in Suhl, Thuringia reported that in order to receive a Prämie (financial reward) at work he joined the DSF.⁷³⁰ Frau M. reported that while she felt forced to join the Junge Pionere and the FDJ, she freely joined the FDGB later in her working life in order to take advantage of the FDGB's inexpensive *Ferienlager* (holiday camp) system.⁷³¹ The FDGB's Ferienlager system was nothing to ignore in a country where travel to other lands was often limited. Additionally, with hundreds of holiday sites and a stay for a family costing relatively little, being a member of the FDGB had definite benefits. One interviewee reported that in his opinion, the FDGB Ferienlager system, offering a 14-day vacation for a family of four at a cost of 250 Marks was better than anything he has encountered currently.⁷³²

Membership in mass organizations were powerful tools that enabled and encouraged the social and political integration of Resettlers into GDR society. Structured leisure activities and other pastimes were provided by Kollektiv and Work Brigade leaders during free time and on weekends. It must be emphasized that the interviewees perceived themselves always as agents of their own volition and largely in control regarding their integration in these matters. The level of participation often mirrored the level of social and political integration of the interviewees in GDR culture and society.

⁷³⁰ Interview on 13/03/2009 with Herr M., born in 1935 in Sudetenland, living in near Suhl, Thuringia.

⁷³¹ Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau M., born in 1941 in Sudetenland, living in Egelin, Sachsen-Anhalt.

⁷³² Interview on 10/11/2008 with Herr Z., born in 1941 in Pomerania, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Resettler Activity in Political Parties – or lack thereof

The interview arrived at the point that the Resettlers had been waiting for, what they considered to be their true political life – political parties and their activity in them. 220 interviewees mentioned whether or not they were ever involved with a political party in the GDR. To use a GDR term, 38% or 84:220 of the interviews were “politically organized” or a member of a political party at some time during the existence of the GDR. At first, this result seems to demonstrate a high level of political integration among the Resettlers who participated in this study as this percentage shows that interviewees were much more likely to belong to a political party than the GDR population at large.⁷³³ Why did this trend of political involvement exist among the Resettlers? After experiencing the horrors of the flight and expulsions had the interviewees seen the GDR and what it provided them in a positive light? Or did the interviewees join the Block parties in opposition to the SED regime? With 73% or 61:84 politically organized interviewees being members of the SED it would seem that a definite socialist trend existed among politically-active Resettlers.

Why interviewees joined the SED

The number of interviewees who joined a political party also shows the potential success of SED policies in influencing Resettler actions and beliefs. 61:84 interviewees were members of the SED and these Resettlers were asked why they had joined. More than 50% claimed that they had joined due to their *Überzeugung* (being convinced that the SED and socialism were the correct

⁷³³ <http://www.ddr-wissen.de> (accessed: 27/08/2014)

paths for the GDR to follow). Included in this category are not only the answers of “Überzeugung”, but also they wanted to help to build the GDR. The majority of the Resettlers who joined the SED did so out of some positive feeling, or at least the lack of a negative feeling regarding the SED and GDR. Herr S. expressed that he saw remnants of “old” attitudes in his West German relatives, i.e., workers were there to serve the upper classes. He also noticed that the living standard in the GDR was similar to that of West Germany and that the SED “baute eine bessere Gesellschaft-Ordnung”.⁷³⁴ Herr S. believed the SED was changing German society for the better and this is why he joined the SED.

The second most reported reason why the interviewees joined the SED was that of career and or job-related issues. Several interviewees reported that belonging to the SED was important for career advancement and a requirement for having the job they had or the job they desired to have. This was confirmed by Engler in his book, *Die Ostdeutschen* when he discussed why there were so many members of the *Arbeiterpartei* i.e. the SED, who did not come from an Arbeiter background:

...Warum? Der Grund dafür ist einfach genug: Die Vorteile der Mitgliedschaft waren weit ungewisser als die Nachteile, und daher hielt man sich fern. Die SED winkte mit Aufstiegschancen, Machtgewinn und Wissensvorteilen.⁷³⁵

Perceiving SED membership as being advantageous or helpful to one’s career was quite common among the interviewees. Herr P., born in 1937, reported that his mother had told him that if he wanted to “weiter kommen” (progress in his employment field) that he needed to and should join

⁷³⁴ Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr S., born in 1939 in Sudetenland, living near Chemnitz, Saxony.

⁷³⁵ Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen: Kunde von einem verlorenen Land*. (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), p. 191.

the SED. Herr P. after completing his studies as a *Diplom Lehrer* in 1959 joined the SED and found a teaching position. He later served for 14 years as *Schuldirektor* (head master/principal) in two schools in the GDR. His decision to join the SED was a double-edged sword, especially after German unification in 1990. He was immediately demoted from his *Schuldirektor* position and made a teacher. Herr P. believed that this occurred due to his SED membership.⁷³⁶

The third reason why the Resettlers joined the SED was that of *Druck* (forced to join). Certain interviewees reported a great deal of pressure at work to join the SED and in the end many succumbed to this pressure in order to “meine Ruhe zu haben” (in order to have my peace and be left alone). It must be stressed that while these people did technically join the SED, most of these interviewees reported it being in name only. They did not actively participate in SED meetings nor did they privately believe party ideology. This ability to believe one thing, but do another was best described by Herr M. living in Erfurt, Thuringia when speaking about life in the GDR: “man kann das mit Schizophrenie vergleichen...man lebte ein ‘doppeltes Leben’ in einer Person, zweierlei Gedanken...” In other words, one might belong to the SED, but that did not necessarily mean that person believed in its principles.⁷³⁷

Dagmar Semmelmann’s interviews with Resettlers who worked in the iron works in Eisenhüttenstadt confirmed a few commonalities with this research project’s findings. 9:15 interviewees in Semmelmann’s research claimed that they were or had been members of the SED. The motives for their joining also included “Überzeugung” or being convinced that the SED and socialism were the ways forward for the GDR. The second reason why the

⁷³⁶ Interview on 14/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1937 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷³⁷ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Silesia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

interviewees joined the SED was that of being *Mitläufer* or conformists. These people joined the SED so as not to cause problems for themselves, especially in the work place.⁷³⁸

Why interviewees joined other political parties

27% or 23:84 of the politically organized interviewees joined other political parties other than the SED. Why did they join the so-called Blockparteien, i.e. Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (LDPD), National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (NDPD), Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Ost-CDU) and the Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands (Bauernpartei)? The overwhelming majority of the 23:84 of the Resettlers who had joined political parties other than the SED did so as an escape from SED membership. Interviewees reported joining the Block parties as a way to “hide” from being forced into SED membership by their work supervisors. Herr G. living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt reported that a colleague at work told him that the SED wanted him in the party, because Herr G. intensely disliked the SED he decided that the best way to cope with the situation was to join the Bauernpartei instead.⁷³⁹ Frau K. born in Pomerania joined the NDPD in order to escape SED membership⁷⁴⁰ and Herr G. living in Auerbach, Saxony joined the CDU in order to avoid SED membership.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁸ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schwartz (Hrsg.), p. 229-332.

⁷³⁹ Interview on 30/01/2009 with Herr G., born in 1920 in Silesia, living in Harkerode, Sachsen-Anhalt.

⁷⁴⁰ Interview on 01/12/2008 with Frau K., born in 1929 in Pomerania, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁴¹ Interview on 08/01/2009 with Herr G., born in 1938 in Sudetenland, living in Auerbach, Sachsen.

There was a minority of politically active interviewees who reported that they had joined one of the Block parties for altruistic reasons. Frau V. born in East Prussia worked as a quality control inspector in a dairy plant. She reported joining the Bauernpartei because of her desire to help farmers and agriculture in the GDR.⁷⁴²

After first seeing the percentages of those interviewees who belonged to a political party in the GDR one might think that the SED had politically integrated a larger portion of the Resettlers when compared to the general populace,⁷⁴³ but after further analysis this is not the case. When one removes those who joined Block parties in order to avoid SED membership; those who joined the SED for benefits such as cheap vacations; and those who felt they were forced to join the SED, one is left with a minority of those who belonged to a political party who did so for altruistic reasons or based on personal political belief.

Why the majority of interviewees did not join a political party

62% or 136:220 of the Resettlers who spoke about political party membership in the interviews never belonged to a political party in the GDR. When asked why they had not joined a political party the majority expressed anti-SED sentiments. They cited their disagreement with the SED and its policies. The second most given reason was due to religious reasons. Given the SED's anti-religious nature it seems natural that those active in their religious communities would find an aversion to joining the SED. Other reasons were given such as having no interest in politics;

⁷⁴² Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau V., born in 1938 in East Prussia, living near Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁴³ <http://www.ddr-wissen.de> (accessed: 27/08/2014)

they saw political parties in a negative light; and due to earlier negative political experiences under the Nazi regime.

Resettlers not joining a political party due to their aversion to the SED and for religious reasons have been discussed throughout this study. The reason of “keine Interest” or having no interest in politics given by many interviewees is revealing about how past experiences previous to, during and after the war affected Resettlers’ political integration into GDR society. This “keine Interest” attitude towards politics was widespread among post-war GDR and West German youth.⁷⁴⁴

In reality there probably were some Resettlers who truly did not have any interest in politics. It is possible that their curiosity was piqued by other areas of life. During the interview the answer of “keine Interest” was not accepted at face-value and perceiving that there were other motivations behind this answer the further question of “Haben Sie wirklich keine Interest in Politik gehabt?” was asked. The interviewees then began to reveal several reasons behind their attitude towards politics in the GDR. Resettlers spoke about negative experiences, often in the Hitler Jugend and that they had learned through their experiences under the Nazi regime, and even under the SED regime, that political parties always resorted to *Zwang* (being forced to do things against your will) to accomplish their goals. This reality was seen as extremely negative and often present in politics. These negative experiences combined later in the SBZ with the fear that was caused in some interviewees’ lives due to Denazification programs⁷⁴⁵ to create the perception that involvement in political parties was a precarious undertaking as whichever

⁷⁴⁴ Mählert, p. 73 and 76.

⁷⁴⁵ Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr S., born in 1933 in Sudetenland, living near Radeberg, Saxony.

political party one belonged to in the present, could potentially be supplanted and persecuted in the future. For these interviewees this “keine Interest” attitude towards politics was cemented when they heard their parents say “nie wieder in einer Partei” (never again in a party).⁷⁴⁶

This information is included as it shows how the interviewees were very much integrated into the political ethos of their generation, both in the GDR and in West Germany. Dagmar Semmelmann’s research in Eisenhüttenstadt confirmed this overall ideological and political distance between the Resettlers and the SED regime. It is significant that 9:15 of Semmelmann’s Resettler interviewees were members of the SED and even with their party membership they exhibited attitudes that Semmelmann claimed demonstrated the lack of success SED political indoctrination efforts had in Resettlers’ lives.⁷⁴⁷

Silence

It is significant what Resettlers did not mention during the political part of their interviews. One area that was glaringly absent by the majority of the interviewees was the Stasi or State Secret Police in the GDR. Founded in 1950⁷⁴⁸ the “Schild und Schwert der Partei” (Shield and Sword of the Party) or *Ritter der Revolution* (Knights of the Revolution)⁷⁴⁹ as they were called by the SED regime, the Stasi grew to be one of the largest and most extensive of all government surveillance networks in the world. In 1952 the Stasi had recruited 30,000 unofficial

⁷⁴⁶ Interview on 19/02/2009 with Frau R., born in 1926 in Sudetenland, living in Magdeburg, Sachsen-Anhalt.

⁷⁴⁷ Semmelmann, in Hoffmann und Schawartz (Hrsg.), p. 333.

⁷⁴⁸ Jens Gieseke, *Mielke-Konzern: die Geschichte der Stasi 1945-1990*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001), p. 21.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78 and p. 94.

collaborators or IM's (*Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*) as they were commonly called (the official Stasi name for these informers was *Geheimer Mitarbeiter*) who secretly worked for the Stasi, denouncing any they deemed to be enemies of the state.⁷⁵⁰ By 1975 the number of the Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter had grown to its maximum number of 180,000 with the total slowly diminishing somewhat to 173,000 in 1989.⁷⁵¹ In other words, the Stasi with the combination of its regular work force and the Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter had one surveillant for every 80-160 GDR citizens, depending on the region and population.⁷⁵²

With such an extensive system of informers, spies and prisons it is compelling that the majority of the interviewees made no mention of the Stasi or its activities. There were a few who did speak about the Stasi. Herr M. and his wife mentioned how they were convinced that their neighbors who lived below them were Stasi informers and that they had placed listening devices in Herr M.'s apartment. The reasons for these actions included Herr M.'s activity in the Ost-CDU political party, as well that their son had committed *Republikflucht* as he remained in West Berlin after participating in a football match.⁷⁵³ A few other interviewees commented about Stasi experiences or beliefs of being put under surveillance.

Why such an overwhelming silence regarding this subject among the interviewees? It could be simply a desire to leave negative things in the past. Evidence of this was the commentary by some interviewees regarding having read their own Stasi files. A few interviewees mentioned

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., p. 113.

⁷⁵² Ibid., p. 114.

⁷⁵³ Interview on 27/02/2008 with Herr M., born in 1934, lived in East Brandenburg, living in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg.

having read their Stasi files, others mentioned that they did not want to. This is significant as it shows the use of agency in remembering and representing their own pasts. The interviewees were willing to talk about the horrors of the flight and expulsion; the discrimination at the hands of locals in the SBZ; and their continued Heimat practices in the GDR. But they did not seem to want to share or explore the possibility that their co-workers or neighbors had spied on them. They wanted to leave those negative possibilities in the past.

It is also significant that interviewees did not mention specific events in the political history of the GDR that historians, politicians or others might think would be memorable or had huge impacts in the lives of interviewees. It is possible that during an interview average of 45 minutes there was not sufficient time to mention these occurrences, but it is still curious that not one interviewee mentioned events such as Willy Brandt's visit to the GDR in 1970 or Ulbricht being replaced by Honecker. The signing of the Helsinki accords in 1975 and the consequent changes in the GDR were never mentioned. It is significant to note that in 2008-09 these paradigm-changing events for the GDR and GDR citizens in general were not mentioned nor, apparently, important in the interviewees' lives.⁷⁵⁴

It is possible that the interviewees' lack of interest or lack of reporting on these and other important events in GDR history could serve as further evidence for the "inner distance" between the majority of Resettlers and the SED regime and consequently they concerned themselves with other life issues.

⁷⁵⁴ Miroslav Vanek, "Those Who Prevailed and Those Who were Replaced: Interviewing on Both Sides of a Conflict", in Ritchie (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History 2011*, p. 115. "Our interviews (Czechoslovakian communist leaders and worker activists) have repeatedly confronted us with the fact that the great events of history do not form the main axis of individual life for the majority of our population. Historical periodization that derives from important, mostly political events seems to be absolutely unimportant to the man on the street."

CHAPTER TEN

WHY THEY STAYED

The Eastern Bloc and the GDR are often described in Western media and those who subscribe to the Totalitarian theory as a collection of prison-states.⁷⁵⁵ Mary Fulbrook countered this when she claimed that “the history of the GDR itself has been written with an eye largely to its beginnings and endings, with a widespread tendency to skim rapidly the middle decades.”⁷⁵⁶ In other words, a great deal of living and life experiences occurred between the creation and spectacular demise of the GDR. While there was a minority of interviewees who were not happy living in the GDR due to religious persecution, lack of travel opportunities and paternalistic SED policies,⁷⁵⁷ they were by far the minority. The overwhelming majority spoke highly of their lives in the GDR and opined that their lives were worth living. Unfortunately, most attempts by former GDR citizens to claim that life in the GDR had positive aspects are tritely dismissed as “Ostalgie“. Critics claim that this irrational belief or false memory ignores the awful reality of life in the GDR.

While the GDR had the Stasi, Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter, limits on travel to Western countries and shortages of many consumer goods, life in the GDR included much more than just these

⁷⁵⁵ Schroeder, p. 83; 634-637.

⁷⁵⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: the 'Normalisation of Rule'?*, (New York: Bergahn Books, 2009), p. 12.

⁷⁵⁷ Interview on 20/10/2008 with Frau T., born in 1925 in East Prussia, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.

disadvantages. A journalist who did not take part in this study summarized this viewpoint when he said:

Weihnachten in der DDR war schön, meine erste Liebe wunderbar, ich hatte viel Spaß und war oft glücklich. Solche persönlichen Erfahrungen stellt niemand in Frage. Und dennoch war die DDR eine Diktatur.⁷⁵⁸

In other words, life was still life. There were still happy and joyful occasions and experiences that occurred between 1949 and 1990 in addition to the difficulties of living under a Stalinist dictatorship. Herr T. living in Cottbus, Brandenburg reported that “Alles war viel, viel besser in der DDR...so gut haben wir nie wieder gelebt!”⁷⁵⁹ Herr F. living in Mühl Rosin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern said “Ich habe besser in der DDR gelebt als jetzt!”⁷⁶⁰ Frau D. living in Dresden reported, “Die DDR hat alles für die Menschen getan.”⁷⁶¹ And Frau K. living in Oranienburg claimed “Ich habe gern in der DDR gelebt.”⁷⁶² These positive feelings about the GDR were expressed by interviewees representing all Heimat groups, all educational levels, all levels of political and religious activity and in every type of locality throughout the former GDR. To dismiss these statements as mere Ostalgie is not only incorrect, but also an ignorant simplistic conclusion.

For these interviewees the GDR included positive life experiences as well as the SED dictatorship; not one without the other. This chapter will be the most revealing in this study

⁷⁵⁸ Ahbe, p. 59: Tobias Hollitzer’s statement to the Leipziger Volkszeitung, 01.08.2003.

⁷⁵⁹ Interview on 18/03/2009 with Herr T., born in 1936, lived in East Brandenburg, living near Cottbus, Brandenburg.

⁷⁶⁰ Interview on 13/11/2008 with Herr F., born in 1933 in East Prussia, living near Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁶¹ Interview on 16/12/2008 with Frau D., born in 1936, lived in East Prussia, living in Dresden, Saxony.

⁷⁶² Interview on 09/10/2008 with Frau K., born in 1935 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

regarding Resettlers' social, political, economic and religious integration. The information garnered through the interviews demonstrate that the majority of Resettlers had the opportunity to leave the GDR for West Germany, but chose to stay well before the Berlin Wall was built. This chapter will explore the reasons as to why the interviewees chose to remain in the GDR and use these as indicators of the differing levels of micro and macro integration most Resettlers had achieved by 1961.

Situation Worsens for GDR Residents

After Stalinization, the SED's repression of political plurality and collectivization program the frustration of millions of GDR residents reached breaking point by the early 1950s. Between 1949 and 1961 there were approximately 2.75 million Republikflüchtlinge or Republic refugees who chose to flee to West Germany rather than stay in the GDR. "Republic flight" appeared to be a popular way of coping among Resettlers as approximately 838,300 of the 2.75 million Republic refugees were GDR Resettlers.⁷⁶³ While a large number of Resettlers left for the FRG the same statistic also reveals that the majority of the Resettlers remained in the GDR. What could a Stalinist dictatorship offer the Resettlers in order for an overwhelming majority to remain, especially when the SED had tried so hard to expunge Resettlers' "particularism" from GDR society? It was what Resettlers had achieved socially, economically and politically between their arrival in the SBZ and 1961 that convinced them to stay.

⁷⁶³ Heidemeyer, p. 41-44.

Reasons why the interviewees stayed

Family was the most widely reported reason for remaining in the GDR. Several interviewees reported sick grandparents or parents after the flight and expulsions and the Resettler children or grandchildren did not want to leave these loved ones in the SBZ.⁷⁶⁴ While this might seem inconceivable, these Resettlers actually reported and perceived this part of their pasts as an exercise of agency rather than one where they felt trapped. For many the loss of their homes, their homeland and living through the horrors of the flight and expulsions convinced them that family was of the greatest value and importance. This desire to remain close to family convinced many interviewees to stay in the GDR.

The fear of negative consequences that Republikflucht (illegally leaving the GDR) would have on their relatives in the GDR kept several interviewees from going westwards. A few expressed how during the period before 1961 their siblings were starting their secondary education. “Republic flight” did bring reprisals against family members in the GDR such as opportunities to gain an *Abitur* (secondary education diploma needed for university studies) being taken away or the loss of the privilege of having West German relatives visit. Herr S. living in Dresden, Saxony felt that due to his brother’s Republic flight that he was not allowed to finish his secondary education and his chance to study at university was destroyed.⁷⁶⁵ Another example of the reality of this fear is that of Frau K. born in Pomerania. Frau K. related that she had her suitcase packed and was about to flee to West Germany in 1956, but her siblings begged her not

⁷⁶⁴ Interview on 01/11/2008 with Frau S., born in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.

⁷⁶⁵ Interview on 16/12/2008 with Herr S., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living in Dresden, Saxony.

go to as their chances to study at university would be ruined.⁷⁶⁶ After this appraisal of the situation, Frau K decided it was in her family's best interest that she remain in the GDR. Herr P. living in Ribnitz-Damgarten reported that he stayed in the GDR and did not go to West Germany out of fear that his son would have lost his job.⁷⁶⁷ This potential for reprisals against family members kept several interviewees in the GDR.

It must be emphasized that those who lived through these situations viewed themselves as agents exercising their will as opposed to being trapped in the GDR. They felt that they had made the choice to stay in order to allow their siblings to study, in order to allow their sick relatives to heal or to be near their families. From their perspectives these interviewees were in control of their own destinies as opposed to being forced in one direction or another.

Another reason why the Resettlers chose to stay, and a revealing indication of the level of social integration many interviewees had achieved before 1961, was that the dynamics between them and GDR locals had dramatically improved. Native GDR residents were often struggling for their own survival in the post-war period and consequently saw Resettlers as competitors for jobs, housing, food and other scarce resources. During the interviews the Resettlers were asked if they ever felt *fremd* (like a stranger) or as an *Aussenseiter* (outsider) in GDR society. Some felt that they were never truly accepted. Frau H. living near Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern reported that as recently as 2006 a person called her a "Rucksack Zingster".⁷⁶⁸ This was true for a minority interviewees, but the great majority reported that while at first they felt like outsiders,

⁷⁶⁶ Interview on 01/12/2008 with Frau K., born in 1929 in Pomerania, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁶⁷ Interview on 05/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1927 in Sudetenland, living in Ribnitz-Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁶⁸ Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau H., born in 1933 in East Prussia, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

that by approximately 1955 these feelings had stopped. What had changed for these Resettlers? The answer is the plethora of integrative experiences the interviewees had experienced since their arrival in the SBZ. Younger interviewees were finishing their education by 1955 and in the process had built relationships and connections with locals; even adopting some local customs. Older Resettlers had found jobs, had the ability to provide for their families and had created friendships with co-workers and neighbors. Herr M. living in Radeberg, Saxony confirmed this change in the GDR native-Resettler dynamic when he said, “durch die Arbeit haben wir Anerkennung von den Einheimischen bekommen.”⁷⁶⁹ In other words, the relationship between the locals and the Resettlers had improved so much by the mid-1950s that one less reason existed to leave the GDR. The interviewees had achieved a level of acceptance and integration into their local communities.

Education and the varied educational opportunities provided by the SED regime were reported as being the next reason why interviewees chose to stay. Herr P. born in 1937 in East Prussia expressed that one of the advantages to living in the GDR was that the “Bauern und Arbeiter wurden aufgefördert!”⁷⁷⁰ If one came from a “worker” or “farmer” background the SED regime made a great deal of educational and training opportunities available. The Arbeiter-und Bauern Fakultäten were created with the specific purpose of creating a “neue Intelligenz” from the worker and farmer classes.⁷⁷¹ This system was so successful that by 1949 36% of the participants in the Arbeiter-Bauern Fakultäten program were from farmer and worker

⁷⁶⁹ Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr M., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.

⁷⁷⁰ Interview on 14/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1937 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁷¹ Dolores L. Augustine, “Frustrierte Technokraten: zur Sozialgeschichte des Ingenieurberufs in der Ulbricht-Ära“, in Bessel und Jessen (eds.), p. 51.

backgrounds⁷⁷² and by 1954 53% of all university students in the GDR came from farmer-worker families.⁷⁷³

Herr W. from Sudetenland also claimed that one of the reasons he remained in the GDR was due to this help that the SED regime gave children from worker and farmer backgrounds. Herr W. had missed out on educational opportunities due to the war and expulsions. He completed one year of school in the SBZ and then completed a three-year apprenticeship as a locksmith in 1950. Due to his family's background and his employment at the time, the GDR covered his costs to attend an Arbeiter-Bauern Fakultät (ABF) at Martin Luther University in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt. Herr W. reported that approximately 30% of his schoolmates were Resettlers as well. After three years of studying Herr W. received his secondary leaving certificate. He was then able to study medicine at universities in Halle and Greifswald, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In 1958 he passed his exams and began work in Merseburg, Saxony-Anhalt as a medical doctor.⁷⁷⁴ Given Herr W.'s desires to become a doctor and the SED regime's willingness to cover the expenses, it seems understandable that he would not want to leave the GDR.

Herr W. and other Resettlers emphasized the great educational opportunities in the GDR by juxtaposing situations they knew of in West Germany. Herr W. reported that out of his five

⁷⁷² Weber, p. 26.

⁷⁷³ Ibid., p. 40. "Die Hochschulen wurden einheitlich von einem Staatssekretariat verwaltet, ein Zehnmonate-Studienjahr mit genauen Studien- und Stoffplänen beschlossen. Vorrang erhielt nun die Vermittlung der Sowjetwissenschaft, russischer Sprachen- unterricht und Studium der Ideologie des Marxismus-Leninismus wurden obligatorisch. Zugleich baute der Staat das Hochschulwesen aus, zu den bestehenden sechs Universitäten und 15 Hochschulen kamen 25 neue Lehrstätten, darunter drei medizinische Akademien. Die Zahl der Studenten verdoppelte sich von 1951 bis 1954 auf 57.000, der Anteil der Arbeiter- und Bauernkinder stieg auf 53 Prozent, womit die DDR das Bildungsprivileg überwinden wollte."

⁷⁷⁴ Interview on 05/01/2009 with Herr W., born in 1932 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.

younger cousins in West Germany, not one studied at a university.⁷⁷⁵ Frau S. also from Sudetenland received scholarships and support to study medicine in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt and worked in the GDR as a doctor. She said “ich bin kein Gegner der DDR. Sie haben uns geholfen!“ Frau S. went on to explain that among her primary schoolmates from Sudetenland, not one who went to West Germany completed university studies.⁷⁷⁶ Frau E. from Pomerania attended the only religious secondary school in the GDR located in East Berlin. Almost all of her classmates fled to the FRG after finishing their Abitur; she remained. Frau E. emphasized that she was able to go on and study medicine and become a doctor, while none of her schoolmates who fled to the West studied at a university.⁷⁷⁷ Of course, there are various factors involved with attending a university. A person’s desire to study; ability to study; their life path and interests all affect whether or not someone would complete further education. However, in the interviewees’ opinions it was the cost and lack of government support as to why the people they knew in West Germany had not studied, not due to their lack of abilities.

Another aspect of educational training that played a major role in some interviewees’ decision to remain in the GDR was the fact that many reported that they knew or were afraid that their educational qualifications would not be *anerkannt* (recognized/accepted) in West Germany. A few interviewees expressed that they had stayed in the GDR because all the work of completing their Abitur in the GDR would have been for nothing had they left as West Germany had a different educational system. Frau E. from Pomerania studied medicine in the GDR and reached the position of *Oberarzt* at a hospital in East Berlin. She reported specifically that had she gone

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁶ Interview on 31/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.

⁷⁷⁷ Interview on 01/10/2008 with Frau E., born in 1937 in Silesia, living in Berlin.

to the FRG her medical qualifications and education would not have been recognized.⁷⁷⁸ In the GDR she was a head doctor, in West Germany, in her opinion, she would not have been a doctor at all. It is true that the GDR in this and several other aspects was a unique, closed system and those who trained or received their education there largely had to participate in it or retrain. It would seem that this was once again a situation where one was trapped and forced into staying in a place or system, but these interviewees reported that they had made the choice to stay in order to fulfill personal educational and employment goals.

Herr P. from Sudetenland related how letters from family friends in the FRG revealed that refugees and expellees faced great problems in West Germany as well. This information was one of the reasons that Herr P. and his parents decided to remain in the SBZ.⁷⁷⁹ Some interviewees received further confirmation about how good life was in the GDR when their West German relatives visited and claimed that the food and other aspects of living were so much better in the GDR than in West Germany.⁷⁸⁰ Herr S. born in East Brandenburg reported that relatives in West Germany had actually told Herr S.'s family that if they came to West Germany they would have to "von unten anfangen".⁷⁸¹ Why leave what you had attained socially, economically and regarding employment in the GDR for the possibility of having nothing in the FRG? Many interviewees claimed that they stayed in the GDR because they did not want to have to "von Null noch mal anfangen" (to start from zero all over again).⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁸ Interview on 01/10/2008 with Frau E., born in 1937 in Silesia, living in Berlin.

⁷⁷⁹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1942 in Sudetenland, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁷⁸⁰ Interview on 04/10/2008 with Frau M., born in 1932 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

⁷⁸¹ Interview on 12/11/2008 with Herr S., born in 1937 in East Brandenburg, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁸² Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.

Why interviewees who “escaped” the GDR later returned

It is one thing to take the word of family and friends in West Germany that life was better in the GDR in the 1950s, but it was a surprise to discover that several interviewees had learned for themselves if the GDR was better for them or not. Many Resettlers actually left the GDR and lived in West Germany and then later returned of their own volition. These people did not report a great desire to be in their socialist homeland, but rather that life in the FRG was less satisfactory when compared to their lives in the GDR.

Herr T. living near Cottbus, Brandenburg left the GDR in 1956 for the West and found work near Hannover. Herr T. reported how he felt *ausgenutzt* (worked to the point where there was no energy left) by the job he had and decided to gain an education. He received a study post in West Germany, but did not have the money for it. Herr T. compared his life in the GDR and the FRG and decided to return. What is even more compelling about his decision to come back to the GDR, is that he returned in 1966 when the Wall was already built.⁷⁸³ The example of Herr T. is also corroborated in government documents regarding those who had fled to the West, only to return later. For example, the Volkspolizei-Kreisamt in Eisenhüttenstadt reported in April 1960 that a woman had returned from West Germany due to “Arbeitslosigkeit und schlechte Wohnverhältnisse in WD (West Deutschland).”⁷⁸⁴ An earlier report showed that while

⁷⁸³ Interview on 18/03/2009 with Herr T., born in 1936, lived in East Brandenburg, living near Cottbus, Brandenburg.

⁷⁸⁴ BLHA, Rep. 672/16 Nr. 105 Ministerium des Innern, „Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei, Frankfurt (Oder), 1955, 1960’: Abteilung Volkspolizei-Kreisamt-Furstenberg/Oder (jetzt Eisenhüttenstadt), Bl. 42.

Eisenhüttenstadt was losing a great many people to Republic flight, it was also getting them back:

“Volkspolizeikreisamt Fürstenberg, dem 29.1.1960

Fürstenberg (Oder)

Einschätzung der Lage im Dienstbereich des VPKA Fürstenberg (Oder) unter Beachtung des Standes des Einwirkens der Volkspolizei auf die sozialistische Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft.

1958	390 Republikfluchten	
1959	188 Republikfluchten	Rückgang um 53%
1958	33 Zuzüge	
1959	79 Zuzüge	Anstieg um 139%
1958	57 Rückkehrer	
1959	78 Rückkehrer	Anstieg um 37% ⁷⁸⁵

Further negative experiences were reported by interviewees who had been in the West but had decided to return. Frau K. living in Leipzig, Saxony reported that one day she decided to leave the GDR, drove to West Berlin and spent a few hours in a Republic flight refugee camp. She decided to return to the GDR that very same day because American agents had interrogated her so roughly and pestered her wanting to know the names of SED officials and the locations of air

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., Bl. 82.

bases.⁷⁸⁶ In other words, the personal experiences of several Resettlers in the FRG had actually convinced them that life was better in the GDR and so they returned.

All of these examples serve as further evidence of the high degree of employment integration that Resettlers had achieved during the 1950s. Leaving these jobs and training opportunities was either something that these interviewees never considered or had decided not to do.

Positive memories of life in GDR = Ostalgie?

Lest one be tempted to judge these positive opinions about the GDR as simple-minded Ostalgie (remembering and longing for an idealized and untrue vision of life in the GDR) secret polls conducted by the SED's Institut für Meinungsforschung from the mid-1960s to 1979 seem to confirm the interviewees' opinions. The SED declared the following to be the purposes of the newly created institute in 1963:

Die Einschätzung von Massenstimmungen in der DDR, der Arbeit und Wirksamkeit unserer propagandistischen und agitatorischen Arbeit wie der Wirkung der gegnerischen Propaganda erfolgt überwiegend auf Grund subjektiver Erfahrungen, Auffassungen und Meinungen, die zumeist keine Allgemeingültigkeit beanspruchen und kein wissenschaftlich-exaktes Bild ergeben können ... Um den Charakter dieses zentralen Systems sozialistischer Meinungsforschung als Hilfsmittel der Parteiführung von vornherein sicherzustellen und jeden gegen die Interessen der Partei gerichteten

⁷⁸⁶ Interview on 27/02/2009 with Frau K., born in 1936 in Sudetenland, living in Leipzig, Saxony.

Mißbrauch auszuschließen, ist dieses wichtige politische Instrument unmittelbar dem Politbüro zu unterstellen.⁷⁸⁷

While these polls were conducted during the time of a dictatorship and various factors could have skewed the results, these polls were for government officials' eyes only. In their words, by the SED's own admission, desire and purpose these polls were supposed to reflect the true opinion of GDR citizens, not what SED officials wanted to hear.⁷⁸⁸

These opinion polls were often conducted in the place of employment by *Kaderleiter* at work or mailed to the person's place of residence. An example of these positive feelings towards the GDR by its citizens can be seen in the results of one of the Institute's studies completed in the summer of 1970:

vier Volkseigenen Betrieben (VEB) und vier Landwirtschaftlichen Produktionsgenossenschaften (LPG) des Kreises Angermünde auf der Grundlage von 1104 auswertbaren Fragebogen; in Görlitz in einer Erweiterten Oberschule (EOS), in drei VEB, zwei LPG, zwei Privatbetrieben und zwei Produktionsgenossenschaften des Handwerks (PHG) auf der Grundlage von 1218 auswertbaren Fragebogen sowie in Gera in einer EOS, drei VFB, zwei LPG und vier Privatbetrieben auf der Grundlage von 1 123 auswertbaren Fragebogen durchgeführt.

Frage 1: Wenn Sie die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse in beiden deutschen Staaten vergleichen, welchen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen würden Sie den Vorzug geben?

⁷⁸⁷ IGA,ZPA NL 182/897, as recorded in Heinz Niemann, *Meinungsforschung in der DDR : Die geheimen Berichte des Instituts für Meinungsforschung an das Politbüro der SED*, (Köln: Bund-Verlag GmbH, 1993), p. 17.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

DDR	BRD	kann ich nicht	ohne Angaben
67,7 %	6,9%	21,6%	3,8%

Frage 2: Wie schätzen Sie den Entwicklungsstand beim sozialistischen Aufbau in der DDR auf folgenden Gebieten ein?

	Gut	zufrieden	unbefriedigend	ohne
- Soziale Sicherheit	65,8	25,5	3,5	5,2
- Bildungswesen	77,2	11,2	1,0	10,6
- Ökonomische Entwicklung	33,5	38,4	10,6	7,5

...Frage 12: Wie Sie wissen, sind das Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl, die gegenseitige Achtung und Hilfe unter den Bürgern von großer Bedeutung, um sich am Wohnort oder auf der Arbeitsstelle wohl zu fühlen. Wie schätzen Sie in dieser Hinsicht die Situation in Ihrer Umgebung ein?

Gut	zufrieden	unbefriedigend	ohne	
21,3	55,6	16,2	6,9	⁷⁸⁹

In the summer of 1970 thousands of workers and students of various ages and in many locations gave indications that they were generally satisfied with the quality of their lives in the GDR. This study's interviewees' positive memories about aspects of their lives in the GDR are not simplistic Ostalgie, but rather are confirmed through these secret polls and serve as further evidence of the social and economic integration the Resettlers had achieved in the GDR.

⁷⁸⁹ IGA, ZPA IVA 2/902/33, as recorded in Niemann, p. 42-43.

Additional reasons why interviewees remained in the GDR

The next reason that the Resettler interviewees reported as to why they stayed in the GDR rather than leave for the West was the fatigue they felt after the flight and expulsion period. As Frau L., the oldest interviewee born in 1912, succinctly said “die erste Flucht war genug...”⁷⁹⁰ Fear and a lack of knowledge of “the West” also kept some Resettlers in the GDR. The interviewees reported in significant numbers that they had nowhere in West Germany to go. Consider how it would have been for Frau S. from Slovakia to leave for “the West”. Frau S. was a young girl living in her small ethnic German village in the Carpathian Mountains. Her German ancestors had settled there over 700 years prior and her family had remained there ever since. She and her family were evacuated by Himmler in November 1944 to Sudetenland only to be brought back to her village at the end of the war. She and her family were then expelled from Slovakia and arrived in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.⁷⁹¹ For Frau S. what and where is “the West”? What lay ahead for Frau S. and other Resettlers like her in West Germany was an abstract concept. It was this lack of knowledge that played a major part in several interviewees’ decision to remain in the GDR. Once again, this serves as evidence of the level of various kinds of integration. Only people who have something to lose, would fear to lose it all by going to the “unknown West”.

As shown in the chapter about Resettlers’ political lives, there was a strong minority who actually believed in socialism and these interviewees decided to remain in the GDR due to this

⁷⁹⁰ Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau L., born in 1912 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁹¹ Interview on 12/11/2008 with Frau G., born in 1938 in Slovakia, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

conviction. These interviewees claimed that they saw the GDR as the “peace-loving” Germany trying to rid itself of all vestiges of Nazism while the West seemed to be harboring and supporting Nazi war criminals. A few interviewees specifically mentioned the “fact” that West Germany was full of Nazis, especially in its leadership, as one of the reasons why they stayed in the GDR.⁷⁹² The GDR was remembered and perceived by these Resettlers as trying to distance Germany from its militaristic past and that is why they chose to stay.⁷⁹³

Several interviewees who believed in socialism also claimed that they stayed because they felt gratitude for the opportunities to study and train that they had received and wanted to help build the GDR.⁷⁹⁴ These Resettlers also believed they saw the results of their efforts in the 1950s as “die DDR ging vorwärts”.⁷⁹⁵ This memory of life being good in the 1950s is not erroneous Ostalgie, as historian Hermann Weber confirmed:

Der Lebensstandard in der DDR blieb zwar erheblich hinter dem in der Bundesrepublik zurück, dennoch waren Verbesserungen zu erkennen. In den Jahren 1958 und 1959 sah es so aus, als könne es der SED gelingen, breite Kreise der Bevölkerung politisch zu neutralisieren. Nicht nur die Flüchtlingszahlen sanken 1958, viele Menschen schienen sich nun mit den Verhältnissen in der DDR abzufinden. Sie begannen sich einzurichten.⁷⁹⁶

Why leave for West Germany when the state in which you believe is progressing so well?

Several interviews did admit that afterwards they were greatly disillusioned with how the GDR

⁷⁹² Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

⁷⁹³ Interview on 09/10/2008 with Herr K., born in 1934 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.

⁷⁹⁴ Interview on 31/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.

⁷⁹⁵ Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.

⁷⁹⁶ Weber, p. 50.

later evolved. But at that time, the mid to late 1950s, they felt that the GDR was the place to be and that is why they stayed.

Contrary to what one would have expected, some Resettlers claimed they remained in the GDR due to religious reasons. Herr K. from Sudetenland said that he stayed in the GDR because when God sends a person to a specific place one should “bewahre Dich und zeig was du kannst.” Herr K. felt that if it was God’s will to send him to the Soviet Zone and it was his obligation to make sure he gave his best effort – not run away from it.⁷⁹⁷ Frau S., living in Radeberg, Sachsen explained that it was the duty of a true Christian to remain in the GDR and fight the atheist communist take-over of the GDR.⁷⁹⁸ And still other religiously-minded interviewees felt it was their religious calling from God to stay and remain in the GDR to help build or rebuild their religious communities. Herr J. living near Erfurt, Thuringia had escaped to the West to receive his particular Baptist seminary training in Hamburg. When asked why he had returned he said that he knew that it was his calling from God to serve in the GDR.⁷⁹⁹ Herr Z. from Silesia had been specifically told by his religious leaders to remain in the GDR and help build up his local congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.⁸⁰⁰ These religiously-minded interviewees felt they needed to stay in order to counter the SED’s push for an absolute secular society.

An important issue in the early post-war period that kept many Resettlers in the GDR was that of the proximity of the GDR to their old Heimat regions. Many refugees and expellees remained

⁷⁹⁷ Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr K., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁷⁹⁸ Interview on 07/01/2009 with Frau S., born in 1939 in Poland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.

⁷⁹⁹ Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr J., born in 1928 in East Prussia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.

⁸⁰⁰ Interview on 16/10/2008 with Herr Z., born in 1937 in Silesia, lived during GDR in Dresden, Saxony.

near the borders of Poland and Czechoslovakia in the belief and understanding that the status quo would not persist. It was seen as “unjust” in this time period by most Resettlers that as civilians they were expelled from their homelands. Their families and ancestors had lived in these areas for centuries and this injustice would end in their return to their Heimat regions. One interviewee reported how this belief even affected her education. Frau E. from Silesia claimed that her mother did not send her to school until she was ordered to as she saw it as pointless because all the Silesians would soon be able to return home.⁸⁰¹ This belief was continued and perpetuated due to simple hope, but also due to West German rhetoric. Chancellor Adenauer could be heard over Western radio saying how the “Eastern Territories” would eventually be returned to Germany.⁸⁰² In the mindset of the Resettlers it made no sense to go further west when “soon” they would be able to return to their true Heimat.

The final reason a minority of interviewees gave for remaining in the GDR was that they never thought to leave as they liked their “new Heimat” in the GDR.⁸⁰³ This was especially true for those where the topography, language and customs were not so different from the original Heimat region, such as Pomeranians who settled in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. For these interviewees adapting and integrating into the cultures and societies of the GDR was not as difficult due to similarities with their old Heimat.⁸⁰⁴ Moving to “the West” was not deemed necessary.

⁸⁰¹ Interview on 01/10/2008 with Frau E., born in 1937 in Silesia, living in Berlin.

⁸⁰² Interview on 04/10/2008 with Frau M., born in 1932 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.

⁸⁰³ Interview on 27/02/2009 with Frau K., born in 1936 in Sudetenland, living in Leipzig, Saxony.

⁸⁰⁴ Interview on 23/10/2008 with Frau F., born in 1937 in West Prussia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

CONCLUSION

The expulsions of ethnic Germans following WWII were the largest in human history. For centuries ethnic Germans settled throughout Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe creating their own particular dialects, customs, dress, foods, traditional music and stories. Approximately 4.3 million of these very culturally and socially diverse ethnic Germans experienced the flight of 1944-45, the expulsions of 1945-1950 and other displacement episodes and settled in the GDR. In addition to being the largest expulsions in human history and hence, an enormously important part of world, European, German and GDR history, the expulsions are also relevant today due to how they continue to affect actions of people, societies and governments currently.

Study's Relevance Today

It is quite difficult to find a modern German citizen who does not have a refugee or expellee as a relative or who does not know a refugee or expellee personally. For example, as of 2008, 40% of Schleswig-Holstein's population consisted of refugees and expellees and their descendants.⁸⁰⁵ In 1989 approximately 25% or 3.7 million of the total population of the GDR consisted of Resettlers or their descendants.⁸⁰⁶ The expulsions and other displacement experiences touch the

⁸⁰⁵ Kossert, p.342

⁸⁰⁶ Amos, p. 11 and 250.

lives of millions of German citizens today, especially regarding the traumas and horrors experienced. Through the interview with Mr. D., a British psychologist practicing in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, it was shown that psychological problems compounded over years during the GDR era when Resettlers were not able to cope publicly with what they had been through. The consequences of this psychological repression included violent mood swings, alcohol abuse, dysfunctional families, physical and sexual abuse of children and grandchildren. Mr. D. opined that these problems and issues compounded and were transmitted to succeeding generations.⁸⁰⁷ The expulsions and flight still potentially affect the mental health and familial relationships of millions of German citizens to this day.

German media and popular culture have also made the experiences of the refugees and expellees a focus of their projects and activities. In recent years with historical exhibitions about the flight and expulsions (Berlin 2006) and German media filming the television movies like *Die Flucht* in 2007 or *Die Gustloff* in 2008 the refugees and expellees' lives are of popular interest. Throughout the 1990s and especially during the expansion of the European Union the expulsions became a politically explosive topic with the EU membership bids of Poland and the Czech Republic.⁸⁰⁸ The anger of refugees and expellees at being expelled from Poland and the Czech Republic and often pillaged of their belongings by Poles and Czechs created great difficulties in their admission. The growing popularity of the concept of German victimhood in politics and society brought about public apologies to the Resettlers. One example occurred in 2006 when

⁸⁰⁷ Interview on 15/11/2008 with Mr. D., born in the UK, received his *Diplom* in Psychology from the University of Hamburg.

⁸⁰⁸ Ther, in Ther and Siljak (eds.), p. 24-26.

the President of Hungary made a public and official apology to the *Ungarndeutsche* or ethnic Germans who had been forced from Hungary during the last days of WWII.⁸⁰⁹

Why was this study necessary?

A study equal to this project regarding GDR Resettlers has never been accomplished. Resettler historians' reliance on archival sources meant that there were and are gaps in our understanding of Resettler everyday life and integration into GDR society. Because GDR Resettlers' own opinions are often not included in the secondary literature, and due to oral history's ability to go beyond the limits of empirical data regarding the use of agency and subjectivity,⁸¹⁰ it was decided to interview Resettlers to discover their perceptions about their lives in the GDR. These interviewees represented both sexes; a variety of religious and political beliefs; several Heimat origin groups; differing levels of educational qualifications; and lived in all the former Bezirke of the GDR.

Integration of Resettlers in GDR society

The main purpose of this study was to discover through the oral history interviews with GDR Resettlers the level and depth of their economic, social, educational, religious and political integration into the cultures and societies of the GDR.

⁸⁰⁹ Kossert, p. 352.

⁸¹⁰ James, in Perks and Thomson (eds.), p. 85-86.

One concept that is rarely focused on in the secondary literature was the differentiation between experiences that Resettlers had and how these events affected them later in their lives in the GDR. This study found that the traumas experienced during the Heim-ins-Reich evacuations; life in Nazi regime resettler camps; upheaval during their stay on Polish appropriated farms; the flight; expulsions; and the negative treatment by SBZ locals, affected interviewees' willingness and abilities to integrate into GDR society. Bukovina Germans who married SBZ locals, but who lacked pre-war resistance skills had less energy to resist the assimilative pressures of the SED. POWs who were in Western Allied custody tended to be able to function and cooperate better in a Stalinized GDR when compared to POWs who had been in Soviet post-war custody. All of the different experiences and characteristics, often due to Heimat origins, made significant differences in an individual Resettler's integration into GDR society.

Schwartz spoke about how SMAD and SED officials attempted to bring about an assimilation of the Resettlers through a "kombinierte materielle Integrationshilfen (Sozialpolitik) mit der Förderung nach endgültigem Heimat- und Rückkehrverzicht (Grenzanerkennung) und polizeistaatlicher Kontrolle (Repression)."⁸¹¹ All Heimat groups used informal sub-structures in the individual's private transcript to differing degrees in order to maintain at least a partial connection to their old Heimat and identity. Examples of these sub-structures include traditional foods, Heimat songs and family events. It was especially true in the case of the Bessarabian Germans, the Danube Swabians and the Carpathian Germans that their pre-war resistance skill sets made it possible for them to avoid assimilation by the cultures and societies of the GDR.

⁸¹¹ Schwartz, p. 1138.

Alexander von Plato claimed that “Es scheint mir daher sinnvoller, von einer ‚Verschmelzung‘ von Einheimischen und Flüchtlingen zu sprechen als von einer ‚Integration‘ der Vertriebenen.”⁸¹² The results of interviews with GDR natives in this study, as well as Resettlers themselves, partially support von Plato’s conclusion. GDR natives took on some characteristics and Heimat traditions from the Resettlers and the Resettlers adopted varying levels of local characteristics and customs. However, a complete “melting together“ or amalgam was never formed between the majority of the interviewees and GDR natives.

This study found that what often occurred regarding the personal and macro-level integration of the Resettlers was not an assimilation, but a partial integration depending on the interviewee’s use of agency within the confines of the public and private transcripts in the GDR. While no Resettlers were immune to the effects of who they were, where they came from or what they had experienced this study demonstrated that the interviewee’s desires and choices made in the private transcript of the GDR made the most significant differences in the level of integration achieved. There were some interviewees who arrived in the SBZ with resistance skills and chose to use them; there were others who possessed the same skills, but who chose not to employ them. There were Resettlers who experienced the same horrors and chose not to believe in God, while others chose to remain active in their religion. There were interviewees who experienced similar levels of pressure to join the SED; some did, others did not. The use of agency, while not solely responsible, made the greatest difference in the levels of economic, social, political and religious integration that Resettlers achieved in the societies and cultures of the GDR.

⁸¹² von Plato, in Meinicke und von Plato, p. 263.

Evidence of the levels of Resettler integration can be found in the interviewees' responses to the question "Why did you stay in the GDR?" The lack of desire to give up what the Resettlers had attained was ultimately why most interviewees chose before 1961 to remain in the GDR. Resettlers had experienced the loss of loved ones; loss of Heimat; thirst; hunger; rape; and many other horrible and exhausting hardships. Through successes in their employment and study fields, several Resettlers became *anerkannt* and accepted in their communities. The Resettlers who had lost everything possessed by the mid-1950s apartments or homes; several owned cars; many had married locals or had local friends; those who had nothing to eat and had lost loved ones to starvation now had the basic food stuffs they needed.

Given these circumstances it seems logical that one of the general reactions from interviewees when asked "Warum sind Sie in der DDR geblieben?" was a look of surprise and was followed by their own question: "Warum wollten wir von Null noch mal anfangen?"⁸¹³ The reasons the majority of interviewees gave as to why they chose to stay indicate that they had achieved a high degree of personal and group integration regarding education, employment and relationships with locals. To leave all of this behind and go through a "second expulsion" was considered by the majority of interviewees to be ridiculous.⁸¹⁴

⁸¹³ Interview on 21/10/2008 with Herr R., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

⁸¹⁴ Interview on 03/11/2008 with Frau S., born in 1924 in Sudetenland, living near Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

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Appendix I

LIST OF 230 INTERVIEWEES

(categorized according to the former GDR Bezirk where the Resettlers lived when interviewed)

'East' Berlin

1. Interview on 29/07/2008 with Herr S., born in 1940 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.
2. Interview on 31/07/2008 with Frau W., born in 1921, lived in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.
3. Interview on 01/08/2008 with Herr H., born in 1935 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.
4. Interview on 08/08/2008 with Herr K., born in 1929 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.
5. Interview on 13/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1928 in East Brandenburg, living outside of Berlin.
6. Interview on 29/08/2008 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.
7. Interview on 30/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1930 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.
8. Interview on 03/09/2008 with Frau S., born in 1940 in Poland, living in Berlin.
9. Interview on 12/09/2008 with Frau H., born in 1936 in Silesia, living near Berlin.
10. Interview on 12/09/2008 with Herr H., born in 1925 in Bukovina, living near Berlin.
11. Interview on 17/09/2008 with Herr W., born in 1930 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.
12. Interview on 17/09/2008 with Frau W., born in 1941 in Pomerania, living in Berlin.
13. Interview on 01/10/2008 with Frau E., born in 1937 in Silesia, living in Berlin.
14. Interview on 03/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.
15. Interview on 04/10/2008 with Frau M., born in 1932 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.
16. Interview on 10/10/2008 with Herr M., born in 1938 in Pomerania, living in Berlin.
17. Interview on 14/10/2008 with Herr B., born in 1934 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.
18. Interview on 14/10/2008 with Herr W., born in 1921 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.
19. Interview on 14/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Berlin.
20. Interview on 31/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.

21. Interview on 05/01/2009 with Herr H., born in 1930 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.
22. Interview on 05/01/2009 with Herr K., born in 1930 in East Brandenburg, living in Berlin.
23. Interview on 05/01/2009 with Herr W., born in 1932 in Sudetenland, living in Berlin.
24. Interview on 05/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1933 in Slovakia, living in Berlin.

Bezirk Cottbus

1. Interview on 18/03/2009 with Herr T., born in 1937 in Silesia, living in Cottbus, Brandenburg.
2. Interview on 18/03/2009 with Herr G., born in 1929 in East Prussia, living in Cottbus, Brandenburg.
3. Interview on 18/03/2009 with Herr T., born in 1936, lived in East Brandenburg, living near Cottbus, Brandenburg.

Bezirk Dresden

1. Interview on 16/10/2008 with Herr Z., born in 1937 in Silesia, lived during GDR in Dresden, Saxony.
2. Interview on 16/12/2008 with Frau D., born in 1936, lived in East Prussia, living in Dresden, Saxony.
3. Interview on 16/12/2008 with Herr S., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living in Dresden, Saxony.
4. Interview on 16/12/2008 with Frau L., born in 1937 in Pomerania, living in Dresden, Saxony.
5. Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr P., born in 1926 in Sudetenland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.
6. Interview on 07/01/2009 with Frau H., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.
7. Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr S., born in 1933 in Sudetenland, living near Radeberg, Saxony.
8. Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr W., born in 1922 in Sudetenland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.
9. Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr M., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.

10. Interview on 07/01/2009 with Frau S., born in 1939 in Poland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.
11. Interview on 07/01/2009 with Herr S., born in 1939 in Sudetenland, living in Radeberg, Saxony.
12. Interview on 10/02/2009 with Frau M., born in 1943 in Sudetenland, living in Meissen, Saxony..
13. Interview on 10/02/2009 with Frau S., born in 1936 in Sudetenland, living in Meissen, Saxony.
14. Interview on 10/02/2009 with Herr G., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living in Meissen, Saxony.
15. Interview on 10/02/2009 with Herr W., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Meissen, Saxony.
16. Interview on 10/02/2009 with Herr K., born in 1930 in Sudetenland, living in Meissen, Saxony.

Bezirk Erfurt

1. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau G., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.
2. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.
3. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.
4. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr A., born in 1932 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.
5. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Frau F., born in 1938 in today's Croatia, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.
6. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1933 in today's Croatia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.
7. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1933 in Pomerania, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.
8. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr J., born in 1928 in East Prussia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.
9. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Silesia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.
10. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1942 in Sudetenland, living near Erfurt, Thuringia.

11. Interview on 23/02/2009 with Herr J., born in 1942 in Silesia, living in Erfurt, Thuringia.
12. Interview on 24/02/2009 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Sudetenland, living in Weimar, Thuringia.
13. Interview on 24/02/2009 with Herr V., born in 1913 in Sudetenland, living in Weimar, Thuringia.
14. Interview on 24/02/2009 with Frau B., born in 1932 in Sudetenland, living in Weimar, Thuringia.
15. Interview on 05/03/2009 with Herr S., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Sondershausen, Thuringia.
16. Interview on 05/03/2009 with Herr H., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Sondershausen, Thuringia.
17. Interview on 05/03/2009 with Herr S., born in 1929 in Silesia, living in Sondershausen, Thuringia.
18. Interview on 05/03/2009 with Frau S., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Sondershausen, Thuringia.
19. Interview on 05/03/2009 with Herr S., born in 1930 in Sudetenland, living near Sondershausen, Thuringia.

Bezirk Frankfurt/Oder

1. Interview on 27/02/2008 with Frau H., born in 1922 in Silesia, living in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg.
2. Interview on 27/02/2008 with Frau F., born in 1928 in East Brandenburg, living in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg.
3. Interview on 27/02/2008 with Frau S., born in 1921 in East Brandenburg, living in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg.
4. Interview on 27/02/2008 with Herr L., born in 1939 in Silesia, living in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg.
5. Interview on 27/02/2008 with Herr M., born in 1934, lived in East Brandenburg, living in Eisenhüttenstadt, Brandenburg.

Bezirk Gera

1. Interview on 11/03/2009 with Herr B., born in 1945 in Sudetenland, living in Greiz, Thuringia.
2. Interview on 11/03/2009 with Frau H., born in 1944 in Silesia, living in Greiz, Thuringia.
3. Interview on 11/03/2009 with Frau D., born in 1944 in East Prussia, living near Greiz, Thuringia.
4. Interview on 11/03/2009 with Frau T., born in 1925 in Silesia, living in Greiz, Thuringia.
5. Interview on 11/03/2009 with Frau S., born in 1933 in Silesia, living in Greiz, Thuringia.

Bezirk Halle

1. Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.
2. Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau G., born in 1930 in Pomerania, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.
3. Interview on 30/01/2009 with Herr G., born in 1920 in Silesia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.
4. Interview on 30/01/2009 with Herr S., born in 1926 in Poland, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.
5. Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau L., born in 1928 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.
6. Interview on 30/01/2009 with Herr B., born in 1942 in Heim-ins-Reich settlement in Poland, parents from Galicia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.
7. Interview on 30/01/2009 with Frau A., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.
8. Interview on 31/01/2009 with Frau W., born in 1931 in Bessarabia, living near Harkerode, Saxony-Anhalt.
9. Interview on 16/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1932 in Silesia, living near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.
10. Interview on 16/02/2009 with Frau N., born in 1938 in Sudetenland, living near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.
11. Interview on 16/02/2009 with Frau F., born in 1922 in Sudetenland, living near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.
12. Interview on 16/02/2009 with Frau R., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.
13. Interview on 16/02/2009 with Frau S., born in 1926 in Sudetenland, living near Bitterfeld, Saxony-Anhalt.

14. Interview on 17/02/2009 with Herr R., born in 1939 in Sudetenland, living in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt.
15. Interview on 17/02/2009 with Herr M., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt.
16. Interview on 17/02/2009 with Frau I., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt.
17. Interview on 17/02/2009 with Frau H., born in 1926 in Sudetenland, living in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt.
18. Interview on 17/02/2009 with Herr K., born in 1943 in Sudetenland, living in Halle, Saxony-Anhalt.

Bezirk Karl-Marx-Stadt

1. Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau H., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Auerbach, Saxony.
2. Interview on 08/01/2009 with Herr K., born in 1931 in Silesia, living in Auerbach, Saxony.
3. Interview on 08/01/2009 with Herr G., born in 1938 in Sudetenland, living in Auerbach, Saxony.
4. Interview on 08/01/2009 with Herr H., born in 1933 in East Prussia, living in Auerbach, Saxony.
5. Interview on 08/01/2009 with Frau R., born in 1937 in Hungary, living in Auerbach, Saxony.
6. Interview on 08/01/2009 with Herr H., born in 1931 in Silesia, living in Auerbach, Saxony.
7. Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr L., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Chemnitz, Saxony.
8. Interview on 06/03/2009 with Frau C., born in 1926 in Sudetenland, living in Chemnitz, Saxony.
9. Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr S., born in 1939 in Sudetenland, living in Chemnitz, Saxony.
10. Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr M., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Chemnitz, Saxony.
11. Interview on 06/03/2008 with Herr S., born in 1939 in Sudetenland, living near Chemnitz, Saxony.
12. Interview on 06/03/2008 with Herr L., born in 1923 in Sudetenland, living near Chemnitz, Saxony.

13. Interview on 06/03/2009 with Herr F., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living near Chemnitz, Saxony.

Bezirk Leipzig

1. Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr S., born in 1932 in East Prussia, living in Altenburg, Thuringia.
2. Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr N., born in 1929 in Bessarabia, living in Altenburg, Thuringia.
3. Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr H., born in 1937 in Sudetenland, living near Altenburg, Thuringia.
4. Interview on 25/02/2009 with Herr R., born in 1940 in Sudetenland, living in Altenburg, Thuringia.
5. Interview on 27/02/2009 with Herr D., born in 1926 in East Prussia, living in Leipzig, Saxony.
6. Interview on 27/02/2009 with Frau B., born in 1945 in East Prussia, living in Leipzig, Saxony.
7. Interview on 27/02/2009 with Frau K., born in 1936 in Sudetenland, living in Leipzig, Saxony.
8. Interview on 27/02/2009 with Frau Z., born in 1938 in Sudetenland, living in Leipzig, Saxony.
9. Interview on 27/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1929 in Sudetenland, living in Leipzig, Saxony.

Bezirk Magdeburg

1. Interview on 31/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1945 in Sudetenland, living in Strassfurt, Saxony-Anhalt.
2. Interview on 29/01/2009 with Herr L., born in 1921 in Sudetenland, living in Egel, Saxony-Anhalt.
3. Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau L., born in 1927 in Sudetenland, living in Egel, Saxony-Anhalt.
4. Interview on 29/01/2009 with Frau M., born in 1941 in Sudetenland, living in Egel, Saxony-Anhalt.

5. Interview on 29/01/2009 with Herr M., born in 1942 in Sudetenland, living near Egel, Saxony-Anhalt.
6. Interview on 19/02/2009 with Herr P., born in 1937 in Poland, parents Silesians, living in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt.
7. Interview on 19/02/2009 with Herr B., born in 1935 in Sudetenland, living in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt.
8. Interview on 19/02/2009 with Frau R., born in 1926 in Sudetenland, living in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt.
9. Interview on 19/02/2009 with Frau F., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt.
10. Interview on 19/02/2009 with Herr F., born in 1942 in East Prussia, living in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt.
11. Interview on 02/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1924 in Bukovina, living in Wernigerode, Saxony-Anhalt.

Bezirk Neubrandenburg

1. Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in Bessarabia, living in Güstrow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
2. Interview on 10/11/2008 with Frau W., born in 1924 in Sudetenland, living in Burg Stargard, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
3. Interview on 10/11/2008 with Frau V., born in 1929 in Pomerania, living in Burg Stargard, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
4. Interview on 10/11/2008 with Herr O., born in 1932 in Sudetenland, living in Burg Stargard, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
5. Interview on 10/11/2008 with Frau O., born in 1935 in Pomerania, living in Burg Stargard, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
6. Interview on 10/11/2008 with Frau S., born in 1941 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
7. Interview on 10/11/2008 with Herr Z., born in 1942 in Pomerania, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
8. Interview on 10/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
9. Interview on 11/11/2008 with Herr H., born in 1934 in Pomerania, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
10. Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau F., born in 1937 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

11. Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau L., born in 1912 in East Prussia, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
12. Interview on 11/11/2008 with Herr S., born in 1942 in Pomerania, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
13. Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau S., born in 1943 in Pomerania, living in Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
14. Interview on 11/11/2008 with Herr R., born in 1929 in Saxony (now Poland), living in Friedland, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
15. Interview on 11/11/2008 with Frau R., born in 1932 in Silesia, living in Friedland, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
16. Interview on 12/11/2008 with Herr W., born in 1931 in Pomerania, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
17. Interview on 12/11/2008 with Herr D., born in 1928 in Pomerania, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
18. Interview on 12/11/2008 with Frau G., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
19. Interview on 12/11/2008 with Frau G., born in 1926 in Silesia, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
20. Interview on 12/11/2008 with Herr S., born in 1937 in East Brandenburg, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
21. Interview on 12/11/2008 with Frau G., born in 1938 in Slovakia, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
22. Interview on 12/11/2008 with Frau A., born in 1931 in Slovakia, living in Basedow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
23. Interview on 01/12/2008 with Herr S., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
24. Interview on 01/12/2008 with Frau H., born in 1933 in East Prussia, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
25. Interview on 01/12/2008 with Herr J., born in 1924 in Pomerania, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
26. Interview on 01/12/2008 with Frau K., born in 1929 in Pomerania, living in Anklam, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Bezirk Potsdam

1. Interview on 28/07/2008 with Frau B., born in 1937 in East Brandenburg, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.

2. Interview on 30/07/2008 with Frau S., born in 1923 in East Brandenburg, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.
3. Interview on 15/09/2008 with Herr K., born in 1932 in Bukovina, living in Schönwald, Brandenburg.
4. Interview on 09/10/2008 with Frau S., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.
5. Interview on 09/10/2008 with Herr K., born in 1934 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.
6. Interview on 09/10/2008 with Frau K., born in 1935 in East Prussia, living in Oranienburg, Brandenburg.
7. Interview on 20/10/2008 with Frau T., born in 1925 in East Prussia, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.
8. Interview on 20/10/2008 with Herr Z., born in 1930 in East Brandenburg, living in Potsdam, Brandenburg.

Bezirk Rostock

1. Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr G., born in 1934 in Bessarabia, living in Bad Doberan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
2. Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1923 in Bessarabia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
3. Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau S., born in 1932 in Bessarabia, living in Schwaan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
4. Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr S., born in 1930 in Pomerania, living in Schwaan, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
5. Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau K., born in 1941 in Heim-ins-Reich Lager in Saxony, living in Saatow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
6. Interview on 23/08/2008 with Frau V., born in 1942 to Bessarabian family in Poland, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
7. Interview on 23/08/2008 with Herr V., born in 1942 in Pomerania, living in Kröpelin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
8. Interview on 03/11/2008 with Frau C., born in 1929 in Sudetenland, living in Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
9. Interview on 03/11/2008 with Frau S., born in 1930 in Sudetenland, living near Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
10. Interview on 03/11/2008 with Frau S., born in 1924 in Sudetenland, living in Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

11. Interview on 03/11/2008 with Herr R., born in 1926 in Silesia, living in Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
12. Interview on 03/11/2008 with Frau L., born in 1920 in Sudetenland, living in Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
13. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau H., born in 1933 in Pomerania, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
14. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau G., born in 1922 in West Prussia, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
15. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau P., born in 1930 in Silesia, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
16. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau H., born in 1933 in East Prussia, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
17. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr B., born in 1944 in Sudetenland, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
18. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau G., born in 1936 in Pomerania, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
19. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr T., born in 1939 in Silesia, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
20. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr K., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
21. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau V., born in 1938 in East Prussia, living near Zingst, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
22. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Frau H., born in 1938 in Sudetenland, living in Prerow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
23. Interview on 04/11/2008 with Herr H., born in 1922 in Sudetenland, living in Prerow, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
24. Interview on 05/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1927 in Sudetenland, living in Ribnitz-Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
25. Interview on 05/11/2008 with Frau J., born in 1936 in Sudetenland, living in Ribnitz-Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
26. Interview on 05/11/2008 with Herr H., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living in Ribnitz-Damgarten, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
27. Interview on 05/11/2008 with Herr B., born in 1933 in Sudetenland, living in Dierhagen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
28. Interview on 05/11/2008 with Frau B., born in 1934 in Sudetenland, living in Dierhagen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
29. Interview on 05/11/2008 with Herr B., born in 1937 in Sudetenland, living in Barth, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
30. Interview on 06/11/2008 with Herr R., born in 1924 in Sudetenland, living in Stralsund, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

31. Interview on 06/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1930 in Sudetenland, living in Stralsund, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
32. Interview on 06/11/2008 with Frau P., born in 1930 in Sudetenland, living in Stralsund, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
33. Interview on 06/11/2008 with Herr S., born in 1929 in East Prussia, living near Stralsund, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
34. Interview on 06/11/2008 with Frau S., born in 1936 in Slovakia, living near Stralsund, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
35. Interview on 25/11/2008 with Frau F., born in 1930 in East Prussia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
36. Interview on 25/11/2008 with Herr M., born in 1939 in East Prussia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
37. Interview on 25/11/2008 with Frau P., born in 1941 in Slovakia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
38. Interview on 25/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1939 in Silesia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
39. Interview on 25/11/2008 with Herr G., born in 1932 in East Prussia, living in Rostock, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
40. Interview on 26/11/2008 with Herr M., born in 1924 in East Prussia, living in Heiligendamm, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
41. Interview on 26/11/2008 with Frau M., born in 1928 in East Prussia, living in Heiligendamm, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Bezirk Schwerin

1. Interview on 21/10/2008 with Herr R., born in 1931 in Sudetenland, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
2. Interview on 21/10/2008 with Frau M., born in 1941 in East Prussia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
3. Interview on 21/10/2008 with Herr M., born in 1939 in Silesia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
4. Interview on 22/10/2008 with Herr I., born in 1928 in Sudetenland, living near Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
5. Interview on 22/10/2008 with Herr H., born in 1940 in Sudetenland, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
6. Interview on 22/10/2008 with Frau H., born in 1943 to an East Prussian family, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

7. Interview on 22/10/2008 with Herr L., born in 1936 in Pomerania, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
8. Interview on 23/10/2008 with Herr S., born in 1941 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
9. Interview on 23/10/2008 with Herr S., born in 1931 in East Prussia, living in Parchim, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
10. Interview on 23/10/2008 with Frau H., born in 1930 in Silesia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
11. Interview on 23/10/2008 with Frau K., born in 1943 in East Prussia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
12. Interview on 23/10/2008 with Frau F., born in 1937 in West Prussia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
13. Interview on 24/10/2008 with Herr K., born in 1944 in East Prussia, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
14. Interview on 27/10/2008 with Herr W., born in 1935 in East Prussia, living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg.
15. Interview on 27/10/2008 with Frau W., born in 1941 in East Prussia, living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg.
16. Interview on 27/10/2008 with Herr W., born in 1922 in East Prussia, living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg.
17. Interview on 27/10/2008 with Frau H., born in 1927 in Volhynia, living in Wittenberge, Brandenburg.
18. Interview on 13/11/2008 with Herr F., born in 1933 in East Prussia, living near *Güstrow*, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
19. Interview on 13/11/2008 with Frau F., born in 1932 in East Prussia, living near *Güstrow*, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
20. Interview on 13/11/2008 with Herr J., born in 1944 in East Prussia, living near *Güstrow*, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
21. Interview on 14/11/2008 with Frau L., born in 1932 in East Brandenburg, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
22. Interview on 14/11/2008 with Frau M., born in 1931 in Pomerania, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
23. Interview on 14/11/2008 with Herr P., born in 1937 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
24. Interview on 15/11/2008 with Frau T., born in 1930 in East Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
25. Interview on 15/11/2008 with Frau K., born in 1936 in West Prussia, living in Crivitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.
26. Interview on 15/11/2008 with Herr S., born in 1942 in Pomerania, living in Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

Bezirk Suhl

1. Interview on 13/03/2009 with Frau K., born in 1937 in Pomerania, living in Suhl, Thuringia.
2. Interview on 13/03/2009 with Herr B., born in 1937 in East Prussia, living in Suhl, Thuringia.
3. Interview on 13/03/2009 with Herr H., born in 1941 in East Prussia, living near Suhl, Thuringia.
4. Interview on 13/03/2009 with Frau W., born in 1935 in Pomerania, living in Suhl, Thuringia.
5. Interview on 13/03/2009 with Herr M., born in 1935 in Sudetenland, living near Suhl, Thuringia.
6. Interview on 13/03/2009 with Frau R., born in 1941 in Pomerania, living in Suhl, Thuringia.