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EDITORIAL

Dear colleagues,

We are pleased to present you with the first issue of the journal *Studia Territorialia* for 2024.

This issue is the result of the calls for papers that we have issued over the past year. Among other things, you will find here three full-length articles that shed light upon and offer novel perspectives of some politically significant, yet rather understudied aspects of the national histories and transnational relationships of Europe and North America, the regions we cover.

The first article in this issue contributes to the social historiography of Poland and the Holocaust in the period of the Second World War. The paper examines the devastating impact that the Nazi German invasion of Poland in September 1939 had on the inhabitants of Warsaw as the city was besieged for 21 days. Drawing on oral testimony and other archival sources, Eyal Ginsberg provides an in-depth examination of the lives of the city's Jewish children and their experiences of facing the brutal siege and war. He unveils the diverse coping mechanisms and strategies that Jewish children employed in order to survive. These skills would prove essential when the city's defenses eventually collapsed.

The second article deals with the struggle to come to terms with the past in post-unification Germany. In particular, it tells the story of Eisenhüttenstadt, an industrial town built from scratch in the former German Democratic Republic, which was all but devoid of any pre-socialist history. In his account, Stanislav Serhiienko traces the shifting public perceptions and representations of the town's troubled past after the fall of East Germany's socialist dictatorship. He demonstrates how the reframing of the city's past has shaped its post-communist identity.

Finally, the third article is an ecofeminist critique of traditional outdoor sports activities such as mountaineering and rock climbing. Drawing attention to the writings of adventurous athletes from among Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities in North America, Denisa Krásná seeks to present a decolonialized narrative that promotes a more inclusive and environmentally conscious attitude to outdoor sports.

We wish you a pleasant read, and will look forward to seeing you when we present the next issue of our journal.

On behalf of the editors,

Lucie Filipová and Jan Šír
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ARTICLES

“IN A SEA OF FIRE, IN A RAIN OF BOMBS.” JEWISH CHILDREN IN WARSAW DURING SEPTEMBER 1939 SIEGE

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Abstract

The German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, led to the rapid evacuation of the Polish government from Warsaw, with the city eventually surrendering to the Nazis on September 28. The devastating aftermath saw a quarter of Warsaw's houses destroyed and approximately 50,000 people killed or wounded. This article focuses on the experiences of Jewish children during this tumultuous period, a subject often overlooked in historical literature. While extensive research exists on children in Warsaw, particularly during the Ghettoization period, little attention has been given to the crucial initial month marked by both land and air assaults. Drawing from diverse sources such as diaries, archival materials, and oral testimonies, this article provides a comprehensive understanding of how Jewish children navigated the challenges of the siege and their survival strategies. By synthesizing these perspectives, it offers a nuanced analysis of their experiences, shedding light on an important aspect of this historical event.

Keywords: Second World War; siege of Warsaw; Jewish children; survival strategies

DOI: 10.14712/23363231.2024.2

The title of this article is a reference to Wojdyński, *Wspomnienia, szkice i refleksje (8.01.1942) Sceny z życia ludności żydowskiej w okresie wojny i okupacji (1939–1942)*, Yad Vashem Archive, AR.I/489.

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Introduction

“We had the taste of an air raid the likes of which have never taken place till now. The enemy dropped bombs, each of which deafened us, and sometimes it seemed to us that they were exploding over our heads. Women fainted, towards hid, and little children cried.”¹ These words, penned by Hebrew teacher and diarist Chaim Aron Kaplan² on September 4, 1939, reflect the disruption in the lives of many inhabitants in Warsaw, the capital city of Poland, caused by the outbreak of war and the German occupation of the city. The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Within a few days, the Polish government fled Warsaw, and on September 28, the capital surrendered to the Nazis. A quarter of the houses in Warsaw had been destroyed, and an estimated 50,000 people were killed or wounded.³ This article delves into the experiences of Jewish children during those days, exploring their survival strategies through their own eyes. While extensive literature exists on Jewish children in Warsaw during the German occupation, scant attention has been devoted to the pivotal initial month marked by both land and air assaults. Therefore, the experiences of children and youth during this critical period remain underexplored.⁴ By examining children as a specific group of victims of the Nazi assault on the Jews, this article aims to

¹ Chaim A. Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 24.

² Chaim Aron Kaplan (1880–1942 or 1943), a teacher, publicist, founder of a Hebrew elementary school in Warsaw, author of Hebrew school textbooks and works on pedagogy, murdered at Treblinka death camp. Kaplan’s diary survived outside the ghetto. See Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 824.

³ Israel Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939–1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 8.

⁴ The research literature written about non-Jewish Polish children during this period is limited, especially in comparison to the attention given to their experiences in later stages of the occupation. See, for example, Roman Hrabar, Zofia Tokarz and Jacek E. Wilczur, *The Fate of Polish Children During the Last War* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1981); and Janina Kostkiewicz, ed., *Crime without Punishment: The Extermination and Suffering of Polish Children during the German Occupation 1939–1945* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2020). For further literature on children during the Holocaust, see Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children’s Lives under the Nazis* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2006); and Lynn H. Nicholas, *Cruel World: The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2005). For further literature on children in Warsaw ghetto see, for example, Debórah Dwork, *Children with a Star. Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 155–206; Susan M. Kardos, “‘Not Bread Alone’: Clandestine Schooling and Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Holocaust,” *Harvard Educational Review* 72, no. 1 (2002): 33–66, doi: 10.17763/haer.72.1.375234307212611j; and Katarzyna Person, “‘The children ceased to be children’: Day-Care Centres at Refugee Shelters in the Warsaw Ghetto,” *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 30 (2018): 341–352, muse.jhu.edu/article/700125.

shed light on their unique experiences, which have hitherto been mostly analyzed through the lens of adults. This approach is significant because children, like any other group, encountered the war differently from other Varsovians. The Jews of Warsaw “comprised not one but several worlds,” with a plethora of different lifestyles, corresponding to varying degrees of “assimilation and acculturation” and differences in language, dress, religious practice, and social customs.⁵ By focusing on the distinct experiences of Jewish children, we gain a deeper understanding of the varied impacts of the war on different segments of the Jewish community in Warsaw.

What were the personal, family, and social strategies adopted by children in order to survive during the siege? How did the familial dynamics evolve among Jewish children amidst the wartime upheaval? What roles did Jewish children assume within their communities as they faced the siege? What coping mechanisms did Jewish children employ to maintain a sense of normalcy amidst the chaos of the siege? In the following pages I will try to provide a comprehensive understanding of how young individuals navigated this tumultuous period, examining the nuances of their daily lives and probing into their reactions to the radical changes thrust upon them. I will argue that children adopted a multitude of survival strategies to overcome the challenges of siege. To achieve this, the article draws upon a diverse array of sources, including contemporary diaries, archival materials, oral testimonies, and later recollections. By synthesizing these multifaceted perspectives, I seek to offer a nuanced and historically grounded analysis of the unique challenges faced by Jewish children.

I will use writings authored by contemporaries following the events, especially documents collected from the underground archive *Oneg Shabbat*,⁶ founded by Emanuel Ringelblum⁷ to document the experiences of Jews in the

⁵ Philip Boehm, Introduction to *Words to Outlive Us: Eyewitness Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto*, by Michał Grynberg (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 4.

⁶ The *Oneg Shabbat* Archive, led by Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, aimed to document life under Nazi occupation. Recruiting from diverse Jewish society, they captured the German influence on private and communal life in Warsaw and throughout Poland. With the escalating plight of Polish Jewry, efforts intensified to document deportations and extermination. Even after mass deportations to Treblinka in 1942, documentation continued. However, only the initial parts survived the war, now housed in the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. These records offer insight into Jewish life amidst suffering, highlighting resilience and spiritual vitality in the face of oppression. For a detailed description of the archive, see Samuel Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

⁷ Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944), a historian and social activist, documented the plight of Jews in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Born in Galicia, he dedicated himself to social justice and scholarly pursuits, advocating for the oppressed. In the Warsaw Ghetto, he founded the *Oneg Shabbat*

Warsaw Ghetto. The testimonies I will be using, which focus on the daily lives and struggles of Jewish residents, are taken from various archives and were mostly collected in the 1990s. While survivor testimonies offer invaluable insights into historical events, it is crucial to acknowledge that some were collected decades after the events they describe, providing a retrospective perspective. Nonetheless, the past few decades have seen a heightened focus on Holocaust research in Eastern Europe and the social history of local communities, underscoring the importance of personal testimonies in reconstructing history.⁸ Of particular significance are children's testimonies, which offer rich insights into neglected aspects of the Holocaust and provide valuable material for analyzing socio-historical identities among young people affected by war.

The article is divided into two parts. The first part explores what children knew or understood about the war before it began, and how they reacted in its initial moments, including their experiences as witnesses to death, particularly the deaths of their loved ones. The second part focuses on the active initiatives taken by children to survive, both within their family circles and in the broader society.

Unrecognizable Life Change

On September 1, 1939, in the early hours of the morning, the German army launched a well-planned attack on Poland codenamed Fall Weiss [Operation White]. Within a few days, the German forces managed to break the backbone of the Polish army, and by the end of the first week, they were at the gates of Warsaw, the capital of Poland. Individual parts of the country were occupied within days. Other areas, including Warsaw, held out for a few weeks before falling into the hands of the occupier.⁹ The siege of the city began on September 8 and concluded on September 28. The Polish capital faced an onslaught from the technologically superior German forces, employing a combination of air raids, artillery

organization, meticulously recording daily life and Nazi atrocities. His efforts culminated in the Oneg Shabbat Archive, a vital repository of firsthand Holocaust testimonies. Despite his bravery, Ringelblum tragically perished in the Holocaust, alongside countless others he sought to honor through his work. See Engelking and Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 839.

⁸ Christopher R. Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Havi Dreifuss, 'Anu Yehude Polin?' ["We Polish Jews?" The Relations between Jews and Poles during the Holocaust – the Jewish Perspective"] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), 26–27.

⁹ Jadwiga Biskupska, *Survivors: Warsaw under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 22–47.

bombardment, and ground assaults. The city's defenders, largely comprised of Polish soldiers and civilians, exhibited remarkable resilience. Warsaw's extensive fortifications and the determination of its inhabitants initially thwarted the German advance. However, the relentless and systematic attacks, coupled with strategic encirclement, gradually eroded the Polish defenses. The Luftwaffe executed intense aerial bombardments, targeting key infrastructure and civilian areas alike. The Poles, lacking air support and overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the assault, struggled to hold their ground. As the siege intensified, shortages of food, ammunition, and medical supplies further strained the besieged city. On September 17, under the terms of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the Red Army crossed into the eastern Polish territories. Ultimately, facing the grim reality of impending defeat and with the Soviet invasion from the east, Poland surrendered. The fall of Warsaw symbolized the broader tragedy of Poland's defeat and the ruthless efficiency of the Blitzkrieg tactics employed by the German military.¹⁰ Despite the difficulty in verifying the exact death toll in Warsaw during September, it is estimated that about 50,000 people were killed or injured in the bombings and that a quarter of the city's houses were destroyed.

On the eve of the war, some 350,000 Jews resided in Warsaw, tens of thousands of whom were children.¹¹ Against the backdrop of political and military tensions in Europe during the late 1930s, these children faced exposure to the possibility of war between Poland and Germany through various means. Some of

¹⁰ Piotr Rozwadowski and Aneta Ignatowicz, *Boje o Warszawę; Warszawskie Termopile 1939–1945* (Warszawa: Fundacja "Warszawa Walczy 1939–1945," 2007), 10–33; Lucjan Dobroszycki, Marian Drozdowski, Marek Getter and Adam Słomczyński, *Cywilna obrona Warszawy we wrześniu 1939 r.: dokumenty, materiały prasowe, wspomnienia i relacje* (Warszawa: Polska Akademia Nauk. Instytut Historii, 1964), XI–XXVII; Marian Marek Drozdowski, *Alarm dla Warszawy: ludność cywilna w obronie we wrześniu 1939 r.* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1975); Joanna Urbanek, *Lęk i strach: warszawiacy wobec zagrożeń Września 1939 r.* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra-JR, 2009); Wojdysławski, *Wspomnienia, szkice i refleksje (8.01.1942) Sceny z życia ludności żydowskiej w okresie wojny i okupacji (1939–1942)*, Yad Vashem Archive (hereafter YVA), AR.I/489. See also photographs and film made by Julien Hequembourg Bryan (1899–1974) who was a prominent American photographer and filmmaker, known for founding the International Film Foundation in 1945. In September 1939, during the Blitzkrieg invasion of Poland, Bryan was the only photojournalist from a neutral country in Warsaw. He captured the German army's attacks and the resilience of the Polish people, evacuating with other neutrals on September 21. His footage of the assault earned him an Academy Award nomination in 1940. See Roger Moorhouse, *Poland 1939: The Outbreak of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 187–189; Julien Bryan Film Collection, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM), Accession Number: 2003.214, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn1000016>.

¹¹ These numbers are estimates. In August 1939, according to estimates by the Municipal Board, 380,567 Jews were living in Warsaw, constituting 29.1 percent of the capital's inhabitants. See Engelking and Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 47.

the child survivors testified that none in their families believed war would break out, as France and England had declared their intention to come to Poland's aid if attacked. Additionally, there was a sense of security that even in the event of war, the Polish army and citizens could stand firm. This sentiment was reinforced by military plane maneuvers, patriotic propaganda, and fundraising efforts in schools for the Air Force.¹²

Others harbored fears regarding the consequences of war and the specific fate of Jews under a potential German occupation. These concerns were fueled by harsh news regarding the Jews of Germany and the anti-Jewish policies of the Nazi regime. Seventeen-year-old Moshe Meler recounted how signs of danger for Polish Jews, such as the deportation of Jews of Polish origin from Germany,¹³ manifested in his surroundings. While acknowledging the threat of war, Meler highlighted a collective tendency to avoid confronting the harsh realities, with many choosing to remain unaware of the unfolding catastrophe.¹⁴

Children could sense the adults' anxiety about the possibility of war. In her testimony, an anonymous woman who was ten years old at the time recounts the atmosphere in the city's streets where groups of anxious people were talking nervously about political events, along with the radio news. She was listening to the conversations of the adults, and realized there is a risk of war. She also felt her mother's restlessness and sadness. "I constantly pestered my mother with questions. Were the rumors about the war really true? My mother convinced me that they were not true, and asked me not to listen to the rumors."¹⁵

Traditional habits continued as usual in July and August of 1939. Many Jewish children spent those months on family vacations in the countryside. In the last days of summer, before the start of the school year in early September,

¹² Testimony of Peretz Hochman, USC Shoah Foundation (hereafter USC), interview code 7343.

¹³ In 1938, the Polish government revoked Polish citizenship from Polish Jews who had lived outside the country for an extended period of time. It was feared that many Polish Jews living in Germany and Austria would want to return en masse to Poland to escape anti-Jewish measures. In response, during the last weekend of October 1938, the German government forced approximately 17,000 Jews with Polish citizenship onto trains and transported them to the German-Polish border. Out of the 17,000 deportees, more than half (over 9,000) were taken to the town of Zbąszyń near the Polish-German border, where an internment camp was created. See Katharina Friedla, "From Nazi Inferno to Soviet Hell": Polish-Jewish children and youth and their trajectories of survival during and after World War II, *Journal of Modern European History* 19, no. 3 (2021): 277-278, doi: 10.1177/161189442110177; and Uta Larkey, "Fear and Terror: The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Saxony/Germany in October 1938," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 31, no. 3 (2017): 243-260, doi: 10.1080/23256249.2017.1385844.

¹⁴ Testimony of Moshe Meler, USC, interview code 31945.

¹⁵ The Story of an Unknown Woman in the Warsaw Ghetto, Moreshet Archive, 9-1-3/023/000949. See also Testimony of Reva Kibort, USC, interview code 10862.

families planned to return to Warsaw. The end of the last vacation in the summer of 1939 had a different character than previous years because at that time, those Jews learned of the real possibility of war between Germany and Poland. Shimon Frost, a 15-year-old boy who spent the vacation with relatives in a town near Warsaw, told in his testimony that one morning they learned of a secret recruitment of reservists from the Polish army held during the night. “Of course, there was a bit of panic. People started hoarding food. We wanted to go home, but we called father, who was in Warsaw, and he said, ‘It’s all a war of nerves; there won’t be a war.’ So, we didn’t return until a few days later.”¹⁶

In the city of Warsaw, the recruitment of reserves also commenced in those days. On August 30, large advertisements appeared throughout the city announcing a general recruitment for reservists.¹⁷ Yohai Rametz, a 16-year-old boy, was ordered by his parents to prepare a small room as a shelter from toxic gases because they feared that they would be used similarly to the First World War. Within a few hours, they sealed windows, prepared the door for sealing, and taped paper strips on the windows to prevent them from breaking due to bomb blasts.¹⁸ On September 1, in the early morning, Warsaw resonated with loud explosions, and later, the radio officially declared the outbreak of war. These events took many children by surprise. Abrasha, a student of the educator Janusz Korczak, remarked,

A loud conversation woke me up. “What happened?” I asked and immediately felt uneasy. “War, mobilization.” My mother replied with a trembling voice. Suddenly, my aunt burst into the room and said that at that moment she said goodbye to her neighbor who was drafted into the army. I noticed that his eyes were red. Father walked around the room and calmed everyone down. But I saw that he was nervous. I dressed quickly and went down to the street. There was movement and confusion. Mothers took their sons to the railway and wives took their husbands. There

¹⁶ Testimony of Shimon Forrest, YVA, O.3/6493.

¹⁷ During the September defense, over 120,000 Jews fought in the ranks of the Polish Army against the German invader. 32,216 of them died and 61,000 were taken prisoner. In 1938, Jewish soldiers made up 6.08 percent of the Polish Army. In 1939, almost 100,000 Jewish citizens were drafted, making up roughly 10 percent of the total number of deployed soldiers (approximately 7,000 were killed). This was about equal to the percentage of Jewish people to the general population in Poland in 1939. See Tomasz Gąsowski, “Żydzi w siłach zbrojnych II Rzeczypospolitej: czas pokoju i wojny,” in *Udział mniejszości narodowych w różnych formacjach wojskowych w kampanii wrześniowej 1939 r.* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sejmowe, 2009), 16; Marian Fuks, *Z dziejów wielkiej katastrofy narodu żydowskiego* (Poznań: Sorus, 1999), 313.

¹⁸ Yohai Remetz, *Remetz* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2006), 30–31.

were people standing everywhere talking about politics. I moved on. Suddenly, a car stopped at the corner and two Polish officers got out. They stopped all traffic and started taking horses and bicycles. There was the roar of sirens and the distant roar of a motorbike. "Raid, raid"!!! ... I started running home as fast as I could. I heard the sound of an exploding bomb and the response of machine guns and anti-aircraft guns. It was the first enemy raid. The next morning there was a second raid.¹⁹

During this period, the radio broadcasted warnings such as "Pay attention, pay attention, N-6, BD-23 is approaching" countless times. The townspeople were initially unfamiliar with these codes, but they quickly grasped that the Germans were advancing, seemingly without facing any resistance. Despite anticipating a response from the Allies, it was delayed. On September 3, the radio announced the imminent declarations of war by England and France, urging the public to demonstrate near the embassies of the Allies, a call heeded by many.²⁰ Frequent bombings confined them mostly to their homes, with communication limited to telephone conversations with family and friends. Obtaining information from the radio became impossible, and a few days later, newspapers ceased publication, leaving only short one or two-page leaflets. Simultaneously, stores quickly depleted their merchandise and shuttered.²¹

In the ensuing days, families hastily departed Warsaw. Some Jewish refugees fell victim to German plane attacks targeting masses of evacuees in the woods surrounding the city, while others managed to hide in ditches along the roads. Tragically, many families lost members, including children orphaned in the chaos.²² Additionally, waves of refugees arrived in Warsaw from cities and towns on the left side of the Vistula River, surviving machine gun fire from low-flying planes. Seeking safety away from the battlefield, refugees and their children embarked on journeys to find refuge. While some sought solace with family relatives, others believed a large city offered greater safety compared to smaller towns.²³ A committee report from 23 Nalewki Street recounted refugees witnessing horrific scenes, where bullets struck children before their eyes, forcing women to abandon wounded and deceased children in fields and seek refuge in

¹⁹ Abrasza, a pupil of Janusz Korczak's Orphan Home (January 1941, Warsaw Ghetto), essay entitled "My Experiences from the War." September 1939, YVA, AR.I/1066.

²⁰ Moorhouse, *Poland 1939*, 98–99.

²¹ Remetz, *Remetz*, 31–32.

²² Testimony of Nomi Kapel, USC, interview code 13162.

²³ Testimony of Bracha Kraverser, YVA, O.3/7691; Ada Rakots, USC, interview code 46055.

roadside ditches. Many children arrived without parents, having become separated on the journey, uncertain of their parents' fate.²⁴

On September 6, Colonel Roman Umiasztowski, the chief officer in the Staff of the Commander-in-Chief, called all men able to carry arms to head east to organize resistance. Rumors of German brutality prompted even youths to depart.²⁵ It was not an easy decision for fathers, husbands and sons to leave their family beyond, but many were encouraged by their families to flee.²⁶ The father of 12-year-old Lili Binstock initially left but returned in the evening, asserting that whatever happened to his family would happen to him as well.²⁷ Some children experienced prolonged separation from fathers recruited for reserve service in the Polish army. Yehuda Glass, whose father was drafted weeks before the war, recalls the unsettling time when he was separated from his father. Only in the third week of the war did his father manage to return to Warsaw, summoned by a hospital.²⁸ Lidiyah Stamler, who was four at the time, recalls how even as a little girl she could feel the tension as her father, drafted into the Polish army, returned after the Germans had occupied Warsaw: "The paradise of the previous era ceased. My lively father became unhappy and tired. The atmosphere at home changed from joy to worry and fear. The pre-war happiness vanished, replaced by a confused, unsympathetic, and painful time."²⁹

The departure of fathers who either fled or were conscripted disrupted the childhoods of many children, bidding them farewell amidst the turmoil of war. Seven-year-old Ruth Levin's father fled due to rumors that men would be taken

²⁴ [Celina Lewin?], a memoir "W obleżonej Warszawie. Komitet Lokatorów przy ul. Nalewki 23" [In Warsaw besieged. The House Committee at Nalewki Street 23] (Warsaw ghetto, 1942), YVA, AR.I/209; Lea Preiss, *Displaced Persons at Home: Refugees in the Fabric of Jewish Life in Warsaw September 1939 – July 1942* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2015), 54–64.

²⁵ The mass flight from Warsaw to the east began on September 7. It was a spontaneous, panicked escape of civilians with no clear destination in mind. Most of the refugees in this flood of hundreds of thousands were young men, who left parents, wives, and young children behind in the city. A strong urge to flee also gripped the helpless Polish government. Rumor spread that under cover of darkness, and without giving a hint of their intentions, the government and senior officials had abandoned the capital. There were also special motives to escape the city. Some of the refugees, especially the young people, among them Jews who were active in the youth movements, moved eastward on the assumption that the Polish retreat would be halted in the eastern provinces and the front would stabilize there. In addition, most of the Jews who fled assumed even then that they would be particularly vulnerable to harm under the Nazi occupation and must therefore escape. See Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, 4.

²⁶ Binem Molył, "To My Eventual Readers," memories, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny (hereafter AŻIH) 302/206.

²⁷ Testimony of Lili Binstock, USC, interview code 59230.

²⁸ Testimony of Yehuda Glass, YVA, O.3/9112.

²⁹ Testimony of Lidiyah Stamler, USC, interview code 41787.

for forced labor upon the Germans' arrival. The sudden separation hurt her a lot: "Since then, I remember myself as grown up. My memory as a child end at the time of my father's departure. Actually, this is my short childhood – of a seven-year-old girl who had a good but very short childhood."³⁰ There were also children whose separation from their father was, in fact, a final farewell, and they never saw them again.³¹

Some of the children felt great pride in their father's enlistment and participation in the defense of Poland. Hanah Shori, who was five years old, recalls that one day her father came home and said that they had decided to recruit him. "We were happy, very proud. He wore a uniform and looked important and very handsome. Father was young and looked powerful and authoritative, with a belt and strap on his chest and a hat. He had shiny shoes."³² But there were children who were concerned, such as children of fathers who lacked military training. Roma Ben Atar, who was 13 years old, says that her father was drafted even though "he didn't know which side the gun was shooting from." Concerned for their loved ones' safety and facing limited communication, Ben Atar and her mother received a message about the father's whereabouts a few days after his enlistment. They walked a long distance together to bring him soap and food. Later, the mother went alone to deliver groceries to her partner but was unable to find him. When she retraced her steps, the bombings started again, and she lost her shoes while running away. "When she entered the house, she looked like a child who had never cut her nails or combed her hair. Her hair stood up and was black. We were all already sitting and crying because we thought she had been killed. Grandma and I started washing her hair, and she calmed down."³³

Other children had different experiences those days. Hana Avrutzki, who was eight years old, wrote in her memoirs that upon the arrival of the first news about the possibility of war, she wondered, "What is 'war'? Why should a war in Warsaw worry father and mother so much?" Later, she asked her family, "Why is Warsaw being attacked? What do the pilots flying over the city want from us? Why are they dropping bombs on us?"³⁴ Rachel Rotem, who was ten years old, encountered the war for the first time when she did not eat lunch at home, but

³⁰ Testimony of Ruth Levin, USC, interview code 46304.

³¹ Giora Bar Nir, *Hanura Hayeruka* [The Green Bulb], memories, Ghetto Fighters House Archive, 43502, 16–17.

³² Testimony of Hanah Shori, USC, interview code 47353.

³³ Testimony of Roma Ben Atar, YVA, O.3/7762.

³⁴ Hana Avrutzki and Gideon Greif, *Kochav Bin Tzlavim* [A Star Between Crosses] (Tel Aviv: Kineret, 1995), 16.

somewhere else, and when she returned home, she discovered that windows had been covered. According to her, “There was great excitement, great fear, which I did not understand.”³⁵

At 12, Vera Winnick experienced her first encounter with bombs and airplanes, vividly describing the unsettling event. Reflecting on the moment, she remarked, “I had never seen airplanes before, and when three of them came together, I thought at first: how nice. They made a terrible noise and threw bombs around our house.”³⁶ Six-year-old Halinah Saban, confused by the bombing, shared, “I didn’t understand what was happening. When the first bomb fell near our house, creating a large crater in the road, we all ran afterward to see it. That’s all I knew and felt about the change that had taken place.”³⁷

The children’s initial lack of understanding quickly turned into fear and anxiety as they were exposed to the noise of the bombs, the sirens of the alarms, and the whistles of the missiles. Florah Marder, who was eight years old, remembers the whistle, expressing the fear of the sounds: “When we heard the whistle, the heart also made a whistling sound.”³⁸ The children’s realization that reality had changed brought diverse reactions. Some viewed the beginning of the siege as an adventure. Arthur Ney, aged nine, recalls seeing German planes on the first day, finding it more thrilling than anything else. The subsequent stay in the basement and stairwell was seen as an exciting experience for him.³⁹ Others, like Yoram Mor, age nine, understood the war through a world of rich images drawn from books and movies: “I understood that it was a war like we saw in the movies, a lot of fire and shooting. My hobby was reading books, and that’s how I knew what war was.”⁴⁰

Christine Ranes, aged ten, noted that while adults screamed and were scared when bombs fell, for kids, it was kind of fun with gas masks and exciting games.⁴¹ The adults, finding themselves tasked with mediating the new reality to the children, also observed the younger generation’s enthusiasm for the war, highlighting a generational gap in understanding and internalizing the events. For instance, in his diary, the engineer Henryk Bryskier wrote:

³⁵ Testimony of Rachel Rotem, USC, interview code 39463.

³⁶ Testimony of Vera Winnick, USC, interview code 33075.

³⁷ Testimony of Halinah Saban, USC, interview code 25483.

³⁸ Testimony of Florah Marder, USC, interview code 37780.

³⁹ Testimony of Arthur Ney, USC, interview code 54493.

⁴⁰ Testimony of Yoram Mor, USC, interview code 33005.

⁴¹ Testimony of Christine Ranes, USC, interview code 31495.

The youth, as usual agitated and full of enthusiasm, did not sufficiently understand the danger, tragedy, sacrifices, and destruction that war brings... But the older ones, who had already been through one war, and even without being knowledgeable, could appreciate the enemy's power – continuously increasing its armament for years – showed no enthusiasm.⁴²

Many days after the shelling began, some children played games, sometimes encouraged by their parents. These games convey how children's play mirrored the reality of their surroundings. Shmuel Szajnkinder mentioned that on September 18, a few quiet hours from the bombings lifted everyone's mood in the building. "Even women went out into the sun with their children. People became refreshed, fed and gained courage. This is especially noticeable among children, they play and make noise as if they were at home."⁴³

The children were intrigued by the physical destruction, their attention captured by the scenes of devastation. Avraham Gopher, aged 12, was impressed by the intensity of the war's impact on buildings: "Houses of five or six stories were cut as if by a razor. I saw half a house spread out, all the bricks on the ground, and the rest of the house exposed. There were even pictures inside still hanging and not moving. These are amazing things, especially for a child."⁴⁴ Also, the postponement of the school year, which was a disappointment for some pupils, was good news for others.⁴⁵ Masha Putermilch, 15 years old at the time, recounted her early reaction: "My mother said, 'Why are you so happy? You don't know what war is.' I replied, 'So what, the war will continue for a while, and it will be over.' ... As a child, I couldn't describe what war is, but slowly I understood. That was my first encounter with the war."⁴⁶

The scope of the bombings and their devastating results quickly changed children's perception. Children in the siege devised various methods to handle the horrors and challenges they faced. They were compelled to grow up rapidly in the harsh conditions, leading them to adopt practical and sensible approaches. Despite their inability to alter their circumstances, children exhibited impressive resourcefulness in dealing with the difficulties and fears they confronted.

⁴² Henryk Bryskier, *Yehudey Varsha tachat tzalav ha'keres* [Jews Under the Swastika: The Warsaw Ghetto in the 20th century] (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2018), 41–42.

⁴³ Sz. Szajnkinder, Warsaw Ghetto (June 1942), *Zapiski dzienne z kampanii wrześniowej* (18–21.09.1939 r.), YVA, AR.I/252.

⁴⁴ Testimony of Avraham Gopher, YVA, O.3/9149.

⁴⁵ Testimony of Anna Mierzejewska, YVA, O.3/1257.

⁴⁶ Testimony of Masha Putermilch, YVA, O.3/7635.

Children reacted to the new conditions based on changed family circumstances and their interpretation of reality. This strategy for survival during the siege, both physically and psychologically, was to maintain a sense of inner rationality and normalcy. However, adhering to prewar standards of normality instead of the principles of rational behavior mandated by wartime conditions did not necessarily facilitate survival.

Jewish children found themselves cut off from their schooling frameworks, friends, and the rooms where they spent their childhood. The impact of war, for some, extended beyond mere physical displacement, ushering in an unexpected interruption to their carefree years and imposing new, weighty responsibilities. Reflecting on the stark transition, ten-year-old Estelle Laughlin recalled the moment of the first bombing: “In one second, I stopped being a child and took on myself the burden, the sad burden, of life. Inside, I remained a child. I am happy to report that, in my experience, children remain children at heart. That is the wonderful and magical thing about children.”⁴⁷

Many families, no longer feeling safe in their homes amidst the bombardment, sought refuge in various makeshift locations such as neighbors’ apartments, stairwells, building gates, and basements. Despite frequent relocations between these spaces, the ill-equipped basements, originally used for storing coal and wood, struggled to accommodate the influx of people.⁴⁸ The unfamiliarity of faces and the pervasive stench in these crowded areas troubled children. Some families, like Janina Bauman’s, initially resisted leaving their apartments. However, after enduring ten days of continuous bombings that disrupted utilities and shattered windows, they were compelled to abandon their homes. Describing the conditions in the prepared basement, Bauman highlighted the crowded, dirty, and cold environment where families from upper floors and homeless strangers were forced to share space on mattresses or sheets. The subterranean life began in musty air, lacking water and hot meals, with the constant awareness of the looming threat of fire or burial alive under an avalanche. The diverse group of people, both Jews and non-Jews, with varying means and circumstances, shared a common horror.⁴⁹

The new conditions and chaos forced parents not only to protect the physical well-being of their children but also to provide emotional and mental support. Bauman recounted an incident during a bombing where the stairwell was

⁴⁷ Testimony of Estelle Laughlin, USHMM, RG-50.999.0448.

⁴⁸ Testimony of Renata Skotnicka-Zajdman, USC, interview code 55228; Testimony of Arthur Ney, USC, interview code 54493.

⁴⁹ Janina Bauman, *Choref Baboker* [Winter in the Morning] (Tel Aviv: Zmura-Bitan, 1990), 36.

filled with homeless people seeking shelter. She vividly recalled the moans of women, the cries of children, and a mother standing nearby, embracing her three-year-old daughter while repeating almost mechanically, “Don’t cry, honey, you’re protected. Mother is with you.”⁵⁰ Other parents calmed their crying children, believing the pilots might hear them.⁵¹

Hana Avrutzki described the tension and anxiety that filled her heart following the sound of alarms. To feel safe during bombings, she held her mother’s hand.⁵² Children, in turn, tried to provide emotional support to their siblings. Thirteen-year-old Adam Mintz shared an experience in which his 17-year-old brother, not known for displays of concern, hugged and kissed him during heavy shelling. Facing the possibility of not surviving, his brother uttered a farewell statement: “We might die here.”⁵³ These instances highlight the limited options children had to protect themselves and their families, mirroring the challenges faced by their parents. Despite the dire circumstances, the support of the family circle proved significant for those grappling with helplessness and the inability to control the chaotic reality.

The search for protection extended beyond verbal and physical closeness to various attempts to stay in safe compounds. Some children believed that being near Polish soldiers stationed in yards and buildings would provide protection.⁵⁴ Others, however, thought being near Polish forces posed a risk and pleaded with their parents to seek shelter elsewhere.⁵⁵ The search for a safe place likely stemmed not only from fear but also from exposure to death, dead bodies, and mass graves. The children’s first encounter with death, in such a tangible and graphic way, became one of their most complex experiences during the siege.

Adam Mintz witnessed a gruesome incident where a Jewish man on the street was killed by a piece of iron from a shell. He also saw horse-drawn carts laden with the corpses of those killed by bombs or extracted from beneath the ruins of houses.⁵⁶ Ten-year-old Kalman Ofir similarly recalled the horror of seeing dead and martyred Poles gathered in the streets and transported away on

⁵⁰ Ibid., 35.

⁵¹ Testimony of Vera Winnick, USC, interview code 33075; Testimony of Anna Mierzejewska, YVA, O.3/1257.

⁵² Avrutzki and Greif, *Kochav Bin Tzlavim*, 17.

⁵³ Testimony of Adam Mintz, YVA, O.3/7278.

⁵⁴ Testimony of Jerzy Czyżewski, USHMM, RG-50.488.0139.

⁵⁵ See the interview of Pani K.R.: Cecylia Ślapakowa, Study: “The Jewish Woman in Warsaw from September 1939 to the Present [1942]” (Warsaw Ghetto, 1942), YVA, AR.I/49.

⁵⁶ Testimony of Adam Mintz, YVA, O.3/7278.

carts, an experience that deeply affected him as a child.⁵⁷ Basements, meant to provide refuge, housed children who survived bombings, while those in close proximity were not as fortunate, including strangers. Witnessing a dead person for the first time shocked and surprised the children. Hanah Shori, five years old, recounted an incident during a bombing when she sought shelter under a gate with strangers. It wasn't until later that she realized the woman next to her was already dead.⁵⁸ The encounter with death was an unfamiliar and unsettling experience for a child. Arthur Ney also shared his first encounter with death, recalling a wounded man bleeding, screaming, and crying. Although a bed was prepared for him near a wall, he passed away the morning the siege ended. Ney expressed the profound impact of seeing a dead body for the first time, highlighting the contrast with childhood games where pretend violence never resulted in actual death.⁵⁹

The experiences of war forced children not only to witness the tragic deaths of their relatives but also, in some instances, actively participate in their mass burials. Renata Zajdman, at age 13, helped burying her brother's fiancée in a courtyard because access to the Jewish cemetery was blocked.⁶⁰ Nine-year-old Mark Mandel participated in his father's body identification process and burial in a mass grave. "It was a traumatic experience for me; I was only nine years old, hearing shouts, cries, and screams, unable to comprehend living without a father. At that age, I suddenly grew up."⁶¹

Peretz Opoczyński⁶² referred in his records to children who lost both their parents. According to him, the bombs that fell on the streets where Jews lived "killed thousands of Jewish fathers and mothers... Only the children remained, confused, scared, torn, thrown into some kind of musty shelters; their eyes were wide open, large; they watched and did not understand, frantically searching for their validation..."⁶³ The children had not yet had time to digest the terrible loss and the first encounter with death and were already required to provide

⁵⁷ Testimony of Kalman Ofir, YVA, O.3/7493.

⁵⁸ Testimony of Hanah Shori, USC, interview code 47353.

⁵⁹ Testimony of Arthur Ney, USC, interview code 54493.

⁶⁰ Testimony of Renata Skotnicka-Zajdman, USC, interview code 55228.

⁶¹ Testimony of Mark Mandel, USHMM, RG-50.156.0035.

⁶² Peretz Opoczyński (1892–1943), a poet, writer, born in Lutomiensk near Łódź; in 1935 moved to Warsaw. In the interwar period he published in Yiddish and Hebrew. In the Warsaw ghetto he kept a diary, and wrote reports and stories about ghetto life. See the Introduction in Samuel D. Kassow, *In Those Nightmarish Days: The Ghetto Reportage of Peretz Opoczyński and Josef Zelkowitz* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2015), vii–li.

⁶³ Peretz Opoczyński, *Reshimot Migetto Varsha* [Sketches from the Warsaw ghetto] (Tel Aviv: Lochamei Hagetaot and Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 1970), 160.

themselves with security and protection. The siege not only robbed them of the protections they needed, but also introduced them to a world where death became present at all times.

This also reflected in taking care of pets. Since animals disappeared, ran away, or hid, the children had to deal with the forced separation and were prevented from looking for the animal due to the danger of the bombings. Tova Peeri recalls that her nine-year-old sister had a cat. “She sat there the whole time with the cat in her arms, and every time a bomb fell, she said the Jewish prayer ‘Shema Israel’ without stopping. Suddenly the cat ran away from her, and she started crying, but she found him.”⁶⁴ Miriam Wexler, who was seven years old, recalls that during the bombings, she hid in the basement of her house along with many people. She remembers the crowding, the stench, and how she slept on a blanket spread on the floor. Along with all of this, she emphasized that “what saddened me the most was that my cat stayed upstairs. They didn’t agree to bring it down to the basement.”⁶⁵

Separation of children from their pet also occurred when the latter died in the bombings. Casimir Biebers, who was eight years old, says that on the last day of the bombings, he returned with his family to their home. “When we got home, I looked for my dog and I couldn’t find it. I cried. Someone left a note that the dog was buried in the yard.”⁶⁶ Nina Dinar, who was 13 years old, said that they had to kill her dog, because he howled non-stop, like a wolf. Her mother asked Polish soldiers who were in the yard to shoot the dog because it was impossible to keep it at home. For Dinar, this caused feelings of sadness and resentment. With the help of the gatekeeper’s son, she buried the dog on the corner of the street in a hole created by a bomb. According to her, “This is the first time I felt the war in my flesh. I loved him very much; I got him for my birthday at the age of eight. What do you mean my dog had to be killed? It hurt me.”⁶⁷

Amid these challenges, children endured days and hours in hiding, utterly defenseless against the threat of bombings. They coped with scarcity, hunger, and the fear of impending attacks. Whether alone, with one parent, or within a wider family circle, these resourceful children took initiatives that not only saved their own lives but sometimes the lives of surviving relatives. Even within their own community, children sought ways to support one another during this wartime period.

⁶⁴ Testimony of Tova Peeri, USC, interview code 16905.

⁶⁵ Testimony of Miriam Wexler, USC, interview code 43888.

⁶⁶ Testimony of Casimir Biebers, USC, interview code 12311.

⁶⁷ Testimony of Nina Dinar, USC, interview code 21898.

Various Struggles under the Siege

Many children who lost their families or couldn't return home had to seek temporary shelter. Some children escaped from burning and demolished houses, seeking refuge in buildings that were still intact, only to flee further afield within a few hours. Alone or with family, they moved from one hideout to another, sometimes for days. Some found refuge in basements, while others sought shelter with complete strangers.⁶⁸

Additionally, children took on active roles in their communities, often providing first-aid. Sometimes, children themselves took part in evacuating the wounded.⁶⁹ Thaddeus Gubala, who was 10 years old, tried together with others to rescue a man who was trapped behind locked doors. The attempt to pick the lock failed, and they were unable to save his life. He also participated in an attempt to save the life of a wounded man using improvised means. He located the rubber tubes from the gas stoves and used them as tourniquets to stop the bleeding. "We tried to save lives. People, wounded... we carried some of the wounded to the hospital... but every time we took them to the hospital, most of them bled to death. We couldn't save them."⁷⁰

There were also children who saved the life of one of the family members or relatives. Hana Avrutzki described how on the day of Warsaw's surrender, at the end of the bombings, she went to her cousin's house to locate her. She found that only half of the house was left intact and decided to go inside. She climbed the wreckage, wires, as bricks, planks, and building parts crumbled beneath her. After great efforts, she reached the second floor and entered what was left of the apartment. There, under an iron sink in the kitchen, she found her infant relative, who was left alone in the ruins and survived the siege. "I don't know where I had the strength to rescue one-year-old Tonka from that place and put her in my arms," she wrote. With the baby, she very carefully descended the falling stairs and managed to reach the street.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Testimony of Miriam Saadia, USC, interview code 5137; Blat Fajga, Responses to a survey ("What changes did we experience during the war?") from children from the half-boarding school in the Warsaw Ghetto at 25 Nowolipki Street (After September 1941), YVA, AR.I/39.

⁶⁹ It is estimated that during the siege of Warsaw, about 21,000 wounded were treated in hospitals. Approximately 12–15,000 others were outpatients. Among the wounded were civilian casualties and 16,000 soldiers, and many died of their wounds. Unclaimed bodies were buried in the hospital gardens. See Maria Ciesielska et al., *The Doctors of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2022), 60, doi: 10.1515/9781644697276.

⁷⁰ Testimony of Thaddeus Gubala, USHMM, RG-50.030.0783.

⁷¹ Avrutzki and Greif, *Kochav Bin Tzlavim*, 19–20.

Adult roles were played by children in the siege, like obtaining food.⁷² In the days leading up to the war, some Jews stockpiled enough food for the initial days or two weeks of the siege.⁷³ Others with means managed to store a significant amount of food from before the war. In some households, there were cherries specially bought for Rosh Hashanah Jewish holiday, which falls in September. In the first days of the bombings, stores began to be emptied and closed. While bakeries continued to operate, people lined up from early morning until the early hours to receive bread, facing life-threatening situations due to exposure to German planes. Sometimes those in line for bread were killed, yet others continued to queue next to the deceased.⁷⁴ Under these circumstances, children took initiatives to obtain food, making a crucial contribution to feeding their families. Agile and determined, these children's qualities served them in earning bread.

For example, Erner York, aged ten, mentioned that while his father and sister stood in line for hours with minimal success, he, being more resourceful, always managed to push forward.⁷⁵ Zeev Pachter, aged 17, felt obligated as the oldest sibling, standing in line at night to acquire food. This was also dangerous at times of bombing.⁷⁶ Esther Gluzman, a student, recounted an instance when she and her sister stood in line for bread during an alarm. The noise of approaching planes caused panic, and they rushed home under gunfire, leaving their anxious mother waiting.⁷⁷

Jewish children obtained food from various other sources, such as by entering bombed and abandoned food factories. Abraham Lewent, who was 15 years old, collected cans of pickles from a factory with his sister. The pickles were hot due to the fire that was burning, but he and his family managed to survive thanks to this for two weeks.⁷⁸ Moshe Meler, who was 17 years old, and his sister found

⁷² Jewish public organizations and institutions initiated urgent aid operations for the thousands of Jews affected. Adolf Berman, a public activist, noted that CENTOS launched a feverish action to assist new orphans, homeless Jewish children, and refugee children. The immediate task was to provide children with food and shelter. For instance, the house committee at 23 Nalewki Street set up a kitchen and sanitary center to serve refugees, and tenants donated money for these efforts in the first ten days of the war. See Adolf Berman, *Bamakom Asher Yeed Li Hagoral* [In the Place Destined for me by Fate] (Lohamei HaGeta'ot: Beit Lohamei HaGeta'ot, 1977), 51.

⁷³ Testimony of Tula Khodin, YVA, O.3/6628.

⁷⁴ Testimony of Moshe Meler, USC, interview code 31945.

⁷⁵ Hanan Elstein, *Yaldey Hamilchama: 1944–1948* [The Children of War 1944–1948: Children's Testimonies of the Holocaust] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, Hemed, Aliyat Gag, 2014), 30–31.

⁷⁶ Testimony of Zeev Pachter, USC, interview code 31902.

⁷⁷ Esther Gluzman (After October 1, 1941), Essays written by students of the public primary school at ul. Nowolipki 68, Warsaw Ghetto, YVA, AR.I/337.

⁷⁸ Testimony of Abraham Lewent, USC, interview code 13308.

an abandoned food factory and managed to enter it, but they couldn't carry the food with them. "I began to think in terms of an adult... I had a personal initiative for the first time. I had a long coat, opened a section on the inside, in the lining under the sleeves, and pushed food in there. It just shows how quickly a person is able to absorb such things."⁷⁹

Many of the starving city residents were fed the meat of horses killed in the bombings. The sight of the dead horses on the side of the road shocked children who saw this sight repeatedly, and they were reluctant to take the meat to eat. Adelya Zilbershats, who was 14 years old, saw someone cutting meat from a dead horse and did not want to take the meat herself. She finally took a piece with great trepidation and brought it to her mother. The mother cooked the meat outside and let people with small children eat it.⁸⁰

Getting drinking water was also difficult since the water pipes in the buildings had burst. Sometimes water came out of the pits caused by the bombings, and the tenants would boil and drink it. Zilbershats had a broken bucket to which she tied an iron, and she went with her brother to the Vistula River to fetch water, a long distance from their home. They succeeded in this only partially because the bucket was heavy, and some of the water spilled on the way. Jewish children carrying buckets of water encountered Polish children or bullies who would attack them, beat them, steal the buckets or spilt the water.⁸¹ The food situation was critical. Scavenging, even pilfering, were commonplace.⁸²

Although the water they managed to bring was boiled, it was not safe to drink, and some children contracted dysentery. Water was also essential for maintaining hygiene and cleaning the body, but due to the shortage, many were prevented from bathing for weeks. Avrutzki's grandmother made sure that the family members cleaned themselves using the one bowl of water that was available to them. They dipped a towel and rubbed the body with it in turns: first the child, followed by the grandmother, the mother, and finally the father.⁸³ Only some of the Jews washed their clothes because they had no clothes to change. In houses that were not damaged, there was a kind of large "kettle" for washing, which was done by women. The men stood in a line, and together they took the pots and walked in long lines to the Vistula. Eight-year-old Stanislaw Soszynski

⁷⁹ Testimony of Moshe Meler, USC, interview code 31945.

⁸⁰ Testimony of Adelya Zilbershats, USC, interview code 7861. See also testimony of Zeev Rozenberg, USC, interview code 48786.

⁸¹ Testimony of Adelya Zilbershats, USC, interview code 7861.

⁸² Moorhouse, *Poland 1939*, 240.

⁸³ Avrutzki and Greif, *Kochav Bin Tzlavim*, 17.

said that “these problems made people all the stronger; nothing unites like misfortune. Joy can divide, while unhappiness brings people together. This scene was as if from a shocking dream.”⁸⁴

Children also played an important part in removing family belongings and possessions from the burning apartments. However, this possibility was not faced by every child, as there were some who fled their burning homes and were left with only the clothes on their bodies. Some of those items had sentimental or financial value to one or more family members. The rescue of the property was initially done while running away from the house, under the bombs. Nechama Fahan also remembers that at the last moment before the house burned down, her father jumped into the burning house to take out a picture of her sister who was in mandatory Palestine.⁸⁵ Zilbershats told that immediately after a bomb hit their house, their apartment on the first floor began to burn. She wanted to go inside the house to take some things, and even though she couldn’t, she refused to give up:

I had some rope, I tied it to the iron, and I went up to the house. I closed my mouth and took a few things: a pot, flour and salt, a blanket and clothes. What I could get, I put in a bag. Also, potatoes and bread that I threw to my brother and sister. There was a lot of smoke, and everything was burning. I took a few things that could be saved, and then I got down from the window. I wanted to go up again, but I couldn’t because everything caught fire.⁸⁶

Children also participated in removing goods from their families’ stores and factories. Abraham Lewent testified that his father sent him to help relatives save items from the textile factory they owned. They walked down the street with the soles of their shoes burning from the heat but managed to get the goods out in a cart.⁸⁷ Even during breaks from the bombs, there were children who went into their houses to look for objects, clothes, or kitchen utensils. Peretz Hochman recalled how his mother sent him to their apartment on the fourth floor to get something. Then a shell fell in the house, and he fell a floor and a half. After he recovered, he went down to the basement and told his family about what happened.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Testimony of Stanislaw Soszynski, USHMM, RG-50.030.0217.

⁸⁵ Testimony of Nechama Fahan, YVA, O.3/7006.

⁸⁶ Testimony of Adelya Zilbershats, USC, interview code 7861.

⁸⁷ Testimony of Abraham Lewent, USC, interview code 13308.

⁸⁸ Testimony of Peretz Hochman, USC, interview code 7343.

Throughout the month of September, children found ways to cope up with the new situation. Children kept playing, for example, even few days before the end of the siege, on September 25, when bombardment from planes and guns began and continued non-stop throughout the day, night and the next day and night. According to diarist Stanisław Sznapman, “Women lamented and children cried. They prayed aloud, kneeling on the doorsteps of their homes.”⁸⁹

There were children whose prayers helped them cope with the difficulty. Pnina Weiss wrote in her memoirs that on the second day of the war, she was playing with her son Moshe at their home when the noise of airplanes and an alarm sounded. “Moshe was afraid, but he was quiet. I told him that there was nothing to be afraid of, and I said with him a prayer that he used to say before going to bed since he was three years old – ‘God will save us and protect from all evil’ (and kissed the Mezuzah).” She believed this helped him overcome his fear, and from then on, when he heard the noises, he repeated the prayer.⁹⁰ Older children participated in public prayers and kept the Jewish traditions with their family as a sort of attempt to maintain a certain routine, especially because in those days, the Jewish Tishrei holidays took place. The attack during the holy days, on late September, was centered on the northern part of Warsaw, especially on the Jewish district, leading many Jews to believe the Germans bombed the Jewish district with intention.⁹¹

Poria Sokel, who was 13 years old, fasted on the Day of Atonement, and she remembers that before the fast, she was given a slice of bread. However, the bombings made the halachic existence of these religious practices difficult for Jews. Ten-year-old Rachel Rotem participated in a prayer held in her home when the Germans bombed massively the Jewish streets. “I was seized with anxiety. People wrapped in prayer shawls, women in the kitchen praying. Suddenly bombs fell, and people didn’t know what to do during prayer.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Stanisław Sznapman, “Diary from the Ghetto,” AŻIH, 302/198.

⁹⁰ Pnina Weiss, *Zichronot: 1939–1940* [Memories: 1939–1940] (Jerusalem: The Family Publishing, 2011), 75.

⁹¹ Testimony of Shlomo Gazit, YVA, O.3/8262. Before World War II, there was no precisely defined “Jewish district” in Warsaw; in the nineteenth century, bans on Jews settling in some city streets were lifted. In 1919, the percentage of the Jewish population only in Muranów exceeded 90% of the inhabitants, in Powązki it reached 80%, and in Grzybów, Leszno and the vicinity of the Town Hall it fluctuated around 50%. A large concentration of Jewish people also lived in the area of Grzybowska, Krochmalna and Twarda streets further south. The name of the Jewish district or the northern district was only customary – Jews lived in all other districts of left-bank and right-bank Warsaw. The most densely populated area of Nalewki Street was an easy and large target for German bomb attacks. See Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, 5–6.

⁹² Testimony of Rachel Rotem, USC, interview code 39463.

Children also took an active role in civil defense, digging trenches or building barricades and carrying messages.⁹³ Already in the days leading up to the outbreak of war, Jewish youth were mobilized to defend the city against a potential German invasion. Alongside men and women of various ages, both Jewish and non-Jewish, many actively participated in the construction of barricades in the streets. Nine-year-old Renata Zajdman, for example, spent days during August 1939 digging trenches with a shovel and learning how to wear a gas mask.⁹⁴ This mobilization wasn't merely spontaneous; it was organized and guided by the Air Defense League [Liga Obrony Powietrznej i Przeciwgazowej, LOPP] that had existed in Poland between the two world wars. Military Training [PW] was introduced as a compulsory subject in high schools in 1937, with the aim of preparing young people of pre-conscription age so that they could perform shortened military service in the future.⁹⁵ Another organization that played a significant role in preparing society for war was the Polish Scouting Association. This was a national-civic education and a patriotic activity. In 1938, this organization had 290,000 members aged ten to nineteen. The scouting movement focused on preparing youth to defend the country in the event of war, with particular attention given to training young people in observation and reporting, firefighting, and emergency response. These are just a few examples of how Warsaw had been anticipating war for years.⁹⁶

Through radio broadcasts, the mayor rallied citizens to defend themselves, especially as the city's police force had been mobilized for battle. As a result, virtually every apartment building was turned into an anti-aircraft defense unit, and volunteers were organized to distribute food.⁹⁷ Each quarter or block had volunteers with armbands who had the authority to distribute instructions. Before the siege commenced, they could compel tenants to evacuate their apartments and seek shelter in the basements, enforce blackout conditions, and monitor those suspected of collaborating with the enemy, such as tenants who violated lighting restrictions – viewed as signals to German planes. They also ensured the presence of sandbags and water on staircases in case of fires, and guarded against

⁹³ Richard C. Lukas, *Did the Children Cry? Hitler's War Against Jewish and Polish Children, 1939–1945* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1994), 12–13.

⁹⁴ Testimony of Renata Skotnicka-Zajdman, USC, interview code 37068.

⁹⁵ Rozwadowski and Ignatowicz, *Boje o Warszawę*, 35.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38. See also Biskupska, *Survivors*, 26–27, 38–39.

⁹⁷ Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 216.

looting in abandoned apartments.⁹⁸ Individuals like Mordechai Goldhacht, affiliated with the Scouts youth movement and volunteering for LOPP, found a sense of purpose and military duty at the war's onset. He was issuing orders and participating in various tasks related to defense.⁹⁹ This voluntary activity was fraught with danger. Nathan Janower, who was 16 years old, spent a month in a Polish hospital after being injured while digging in the street. "The nurse said later that everyone on the street was quiet, but I screamed, and that's how they realized I was alive... I couldn't walk and move my arm... The doctor said I was lucky my bones weren't hurt."¹⁰⁰

For many children and teens, war brought with it exciting opportunities and the chance to prove themselves as full adult members of society, to enact the heroic ideals on which they had been raised, and to play a role in the latest act of Poland's struggle to remain an autonomous and independent state.¹⁰¹ In writings addressing Jewish-Polish relations during the war, Emanuel Ringelblum, the founder of the underground archive *Oneg Shabbat*, emphasized the significant role played by the youth in defending the city. He described how youths in various blocks, including numerous Jews, combated relentless attic fires using sand and water collected from bathrooms. Under German pilot attacks, they removed incendiary bombs, fostering unity amidst wartime chaos.¹⁰² The immense willingness of Jewish children to participate in the defense of the city demonstrates not only their unique characteristics as a group, but also reflects broader connections between Jews and Poles in Warsaw and Poland as a whole. Both Jews and Poles cooperated together, and for some Jewish youths, this was their first encounter with gentiles, including young Poles.¹⁰³

The issue of Jewish children during the siege is closely connected to the special character that Jewish-Polish relations took on during those days. At the

⁹⁸ See more about LOPP in Paweł Piotrowski, "Liga Obrony Powietrznej i Przeciwigazowej na Mazowszu w latach 1928–1939," *Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Płockiego* 7 (2015): 222–252.

⁹⁹ Testimony of Mordechai Goldhacht, YVA, O.3/8471.

¹⁰⁰ Testimony of Nathan Janower, USC, interview code 54389.

¹⁰¹ Erica L. Tucker, *Remembering Occupied Warsaw: Polish Narratives of World War II* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 51.

¹⁰² Emanuel Ringelblum et al., *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1974), 26.

¹⁰³ According to Jeff Koerber, Jewish children grew increasingly isolated from their gentile neighbors' children once they entered school. Only those attending an integrated Polish public school spent time with gentiles. See Jeff Koerber, "Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Prewar Poland as Holocaust Sources," in *Agency and the Holocaust: Essays in Honor of Debórah Dwork*, ed. Thomas Kühne and Mary Jane (Cham: Springer International, 2020), 23, 26, doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-38998-7.

onset of the war, the majority of Jews in Poland set aside previous conflicts and stood alongside the Polish populace to defend their struggling homeland. They fostered a deep sense of unity with the Polish nation. Jews perceived the days of the campaign as a collective experience shared by both Jews and Poles, now confronting a common enemy.¹⁰⁴ The siege intermingled Varsovians in ways unimaginable in peacetime. Old antagonisms were temporarily suspended of necessity and pre-war political parties, social classes, and ethnic groups cooperated under siege. Polish antisemitism fluctuated as Christian and Jewish communities cooperated.¹⁰⁵ Jews joined in the military and civil mobilization and were relieved to note that, at least in this supreme crisis, they could find a degree of acceptance as fellow citizens.¹⁰⁶ They believed that equality between Jews and Poles, which would certainly develop further during the course of the war, would change the face of Poland and strengthen the position of the Jews in the country.¹⁰⁷

Although the issue of Polish-Jewish relations is truly complex and multi-layered, its dynamics before and during the siege are crucial for understanding the broader context. Polish Jews represented the second-largest minority in pre-war Poland, a community with 800 years of history, and, in many cases, were considered both a religious and national minority by themselves and the Poles. On the eve of World War II, the Jewish population in Poland was the largest in Europe, constituting about ten percent of the total population.¹⁰⁸ Between the two world wars, Polish Jews maintained complex and often tense relations with the majority society. Tensions heightened, especially in the second half of the 1930s, as antisemitism grew.¹⁰⁹ However, this tension eased somewhat in the year before the war began, as Poland came to see Nazi Germany, with its immediate threat to the country's borders, as the true enemy.

As the siege neared its end, the spirit of the populace had been devastated. The people of Warsaw not only denounced the Germans but also complained

¹⁰⁴ Havi Dreifuss (Ben-Sasson), *Relations between Jews and Poles during the Holocaust: The Jewish Perspective* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2017), 39–41.

¹⁰⁵ Biskupska, *Survivors*, 22, 40.

¹⁰⁶ Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 425.

¹⁰⁷ Dreifuss, *Relations between Jews and Poles*, 45.

¹⁰⁸ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution: 1933–1939* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 217–218.

¹⁰⁹ Jews experienced economic oppression in Poland during those years. For example, a 1938 Polish law made it nearly impossible for Jews to enter the legal profession. The boycott of Jewish businesses intensified, and Jewish workers were increasingly excluded from employment. Discriminatory enforcement of regulations against Jewish bakers, porters, and slaughterhouse workers, among others, further pushed Jews out of these trades. See Wasserstein, *On the Eve*, 404.

about their own administration for abandoning and forsaking its citizens to face their grim fate. The prevailing sentiment appeared to be that continuing was futile, as within a few days, the whole city would be inundated with devastation and mortality. It was in this time of resentment and hopelessness that the brief occurrence of Jewish-Polish solidarity, which had emerged from the prewar political turmoil and peaked during the construction of the trenches, began to show signs of fracture. In the closing days of the siege, hostility resurfaced.¹¹⁰

Warsaw's month-long resistance against the German airstrikes ultimately fell short, yet it cultivated a profound sense of solidarity among the residents, instilling in them a feeling of valorous and distinctive struggle.¹¹¹ Warsaw's Jewish residents believed that the stand during the siege was possible, among other factors owing to the cooperation between Jewish and Polish members in city's civil forces and in part to the many Jews who volunteered for help.¹¹² Similar to the Jewish soldiers in the Polish army who demonstrated loyalty to Poland through their participation in the war, Jewish children took on semi-military roles and volunteered for the struggle for Warsaw. This is important because this active involvement of children reflects another aspect of Jewish-Polish relations during that period.

On September 28 the guns fell silent. The German army had not yet entered the city, and Warsaw was in the grip of chaos and anxious expectation. As the citizens of Warsaw left their shelters and poured into the streets, the scene that spread out before them was shattering. About 25 percent of the city's buildings had been totally destroyed or badly damaged. It is estimated that about fifty thousand people had been killed or injured. The streets were covered with dust, heaps of ruins, and the carcasses of horses. Diaries and memoirs of the period repeat over and over again the lament that arose when the full extent of the damage was finally assimilated: the beautiful Warsaw all had known was lost forever.¹¹³ Two days after the city had fallen, the Nazi forces still had not entered Warsaw. Mobs broke into warehouses and made off with anything that came to hand. The homeless went out in search of shelter, and those fortunate enough to have a roof over their heads scrambled around in search of food for their families.¹¹⁴ Following the German occupation of the city, they immediately initiated anti-Jewish measures that disrupted the communal urban environment. In the

¹¹⁰ Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, 7.

¹¹¹ Biskupska, *Survivors*, 23.

¹¹² Dreifuss, *Relations between Jews and Poles*, 50–51.

¹¹³ Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, 8.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

early weeks and months, they enforced a new racial and spatial hierarchy that marginalized Jewish Varsovians and deepened the divide between them and the gentile population.

Conclusion

Children survivors often identified themselves as adults, aware of the responsibilities they had undertaken despite their young age. These children, unaccustomed to death, faced its harsh reality for the first time during the siege. Born after the First World War, they had only heard about the horrors of war but had never experienced it firsthand. The testimonies of those who were children during this period reveal the significant impact of the siege, marking a month of extreme transition from a free life to one under occupation.

During the siege of Warsaw in September 1939, Jewish children employed various survival strategies to cope with the harrowing conditions. The relentless bombings and artillery attacks forced many to constantly seek temporary shelters, moving from one hideout to another, often with their families but sometimes alone. Basements and makeshift shelters with strangers became common refuges. The resilience and resourcefulness of these children were remarkable, as they adapted quickly to their new reality.

This period of upheaval was a critical breaking point for Jewish children in Warsaw. Not only were their lifestyles severely disrupted, but many also experienced separation from at least one parent, usually the father. This initial month, between the summer of 1939 and the beginning of German rule, forced children to rapidly adapt to new and harsh realities. As we examine the survival strategies that emerged, it becomes clear that children played crucial roles in their families' survival efforts.

Children felt a profound sense of responsibility towards their families, a stark contrast to their lives before the war. They demonstrated agency, making choices and taking actions that significantly impacted their survival and that of their loved ones. Separated from friends, dislocated from their homes, and often witnessing the suffering of family members, Jewish children in Warsaw endured a profound disruption of their childhood.

These experiences also reveal the bravery and significant initiatives taken by the children. They sought solace and strength, demonstrating a deep understanding of their circumstances and taking practical actions to ensure their survival and help others. Through their perspective, we gain a unique insight into their daily struggles and resilience during the Holocaust.

This article has provided a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of children during the Holocaust, focusing on their survival strategies. By highlighting their efforts to survive the challenges of the Second World War, we see how they rose to these challenges and played a crucial role in their family's survival. This discussion emphasizes the varied survival strategies employed by children and the importance of their testimonies in understanding this period.

The experiences of these children during the siege also increased their knowledge and strategies for survival, which became crucial once the Germans took over Warsaw. Their ability to adapt and persevere in the face of adversity showcases their remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. Children also took on active roles within their communities, providing first aid, tending to the wounded, and assisting in makeshift hospitals set up in the ruins of the city. The combination of mobility, community involvement, and resourcefulness defined the survival strategies of Jewish children during the siege, showcasing their ability to adapt and persevere in the face of adversity.

The comprehensive picture presented here is a starting point for further exploration of the diverse experiences during the Holocaust. The validity of these conclusions should be examined in relation to broader circles of experience, such as comparing the topic with other cities under siege. There is potential for further research that could present a more expansive picture of the diverse experiences during the Holocaust, narrating a broad and intricate story that needs to be explored, deepened, and expanded. This approach allows us to pave the way for investigating the history of Jewish children in Poland during the Holocaust, particularly in times of crisis.

DIVIDED MEMORY: DEALING WITH THE PAST IN THE EAST GERMAN TOWN OF EISENHÜTTENSTADT AFTER THE UPHEAVAL OF 1989–90

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Abstract

This paper explores perceptions of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in Eisenhüttenstadt, the “first socialist town of Germany,” following the collapse of the state socialist dictatorship in East Germany. Despite its being the most well-known “socialist town” in Eastern Bloc, no systematic research has been done into how the town dealt with its troubled past. By analyzing discussion and representation of the town’s past in the public space through the year 2010, this study investigates how a town like Eisenhüttenstadt, which has no pre-socialist history, dealt with its past as East Germany transitioned away from state socialism. It also examines the impact of the town’s unique past on its current identity. The author argues that *Diktaturgedächtnis* [the memory of dictatorship], the lack of a pre-socialist past, and the town’s rejection of radical strategies for dealing with the past have led to complex collective memories and town identity in Eisenhüttenstadt. This complexity manifests itself in the embrace of different symbolic representations of history in different parts of the town and in splits in the public and private, and internal and external, collective memories.

Keywords: socialist town; divided memory; mnemonic hegemony; GDR; Eisenhüttenstadt

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Introduction

A town without a past but with a great future.
(*Neue Zeit*, on Eisenhüttenstadt, 1960)¹

The home of the “new people” is now just another beleaguered place in eastern Brandenburg. One in five inhabitants is unemployed. The local radio station holds lotteries where people can send in their unpaid bills. Those who can, move away.
(*Die Zeit*, 2003)²

In the radical political and social upheaval of 1989–90 in East Germany, the transformation of urban identity and the symbology in civic spaces was on the agenda everywhere in the former GDR. At the same time, interest in the Eastern Germany’s pre-socialist past was revived in some instances. In many cities, the GDR was derided and accused of the destruction of genuine, uncorrupted tradition. Streets and even entire cities were given back their old names, some GDR-era buildings were demolished to allow the resurrection of “old” buildings, and some decaying buildings were lavishly restored and renovated.³ The problem with Eisenhüttenstadt was and still is that the town has no pre-socialist history. Stalinstadt – the name it bore until 1961 – was founded in 1950 as a model town of the GDR.

In this article, I explore how the town dealt with its state-socialist past in the post-1989 context and the impact its specific history has had on the town’s identity. The focus of my research is on the period from 1990 to 2010. The latter year was marked by a big celebration of 60 years since the town’s founding. I chose this period somewhat arbitrarily, but it is sufficient to demonstrate the changes in the approach to the past that took place in the town. It was a time when the crisis of transformation of the 1990s gave way to relative stability and certainty. It is also important to note that it was before the rise of right-wing populist movements, which have introduced new motifs into the politics of memory in Eastern Germany. As I show, the mnemonic hegemony of *Diktaturgedächtnis*

¹ “Zauberworte des Erfolges,” *Neue Zeit*, August 14, 1960.

² Michael Allmaier, “Namensänderung: die verbotene Stadt,” *Die Zeit*, February 27, 2003, https://www.zeit.de/2003/10/Eisenh_9fttenstadt/komplettansicht.

³ See e.g. Pierre Nora, “Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory,” *Eurozine*, April 19, 2002, <https://www.eurozine.com/reasons-for-the-current-upsurge-in-memory/>; Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11–30; Aleida Assmann, “Geschichte findet Stadt,” in *Kommunikation – Gedächtnis – Raum*, ed. Moritz Csáky and Christoph Leitgeb (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), 23–27.

(the memory of dictatorship) and the absence of a pre-socialist past led to multiple splits in the town's collective memory and perceived identity after the upheaval of 1989–90. They also resulted in the revival of different symbolisms in districts that were incorporated into the town in 1961, a split between public and private memories of the town's past, and yet another split between internal and external collective memories.

After the reunification of Germany, Eisenhüttenstadt became the focus of a number of academic studies. Researchers were primarily concerned with the architecture and public art of the planned town, but also with its general history and development. Nevertheless, the public treatment of the GDR's past in the town after reunification has not been given sufficient attention, especially in a way that places that public treatment in historical perspective. An exception are essays by Andreas Ludwig that recounted the development of the town's image in local histories of Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt and press accounts.⁴ I build upon some of Ludwig's ideas and expand upon them. Some of the texts accompanying a museum exhibition, *Aufbau west – Aufbau ost* (1997), which compared the towns of Wolfsburg and Eisenhüttenstadt, also shed light on the politics of the memory of the socialist state shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but they are mainly focused on the GDR period.⁵

My interest in Eisenhüttenstadt is not primarily about what has happened in the minds of individuals, but about what has happened in the public sphere, as defined by civil society and the state.⁶ There is no single "town memory," but

⁴ Andreas Ludwig, "'Traum der Zukunft – Wirklichkeit'. Stadtgeschichte, Selbstbild, Fremdbild in Eisenhüttenstadt," in *Eisenhüttenstadt*, ed. Valérie Lozac'h (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999), 9–20; Ana Kladnik and Andreas Ludwig, "Cultural Heritage of Post-Socialist New Towns. A Comparison of Eisenhüttenstadt and Velenje," *Mesto a dejiny* 5, no. 2 (2016): 50–67; Andreas Ludwig, "Wo die Zukunft Gegenwart war: Phasen der Selbstbeschreibung Eisenhüttenstadts," in *Schattenorte: Stadtimages und Vergangenheitslasten*, ed. Stefanie Eisenhuth and Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2017), 157–171.

⁵ Gottfried Korff, "Mentalität und Monumentalität im politischen Wandel. Zur öffentlichen Namengebung in Wolfsburg und Eisenhüttenstadt," in *Aufbau West. Aufbau Ost*, ed. Rosmarie Beier (Berlin: DHM, 1997), http://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/katlg24.htm#navob; Jörn Schütrumpf, "'Wo einst nur Sand und Kiefern waren...' 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' im Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost," in *Aufbau West. Aufbau Ost*, ed. Rosmarie Beier (Berlin: DHM, 1997), https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/katlg15.htm; Jörn Schütrumpf, "'Young Town on an Old River'. Selbstverständnis und Selbstdarstellung von Stalinstadt," in *Aufbau West. Aufbau Ost*, ed. Rosmarie Beier (Berlin: DHM, 1997), https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/katlg26.htm.

⁶ Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (November 1999): 333–348, doi: 10.1111/0735-2751.00083.

rather a multiplicity of different narratives, which are dialogically connected.⁷ Some of these memories have achieved dominance over others and become hegemonic. In this case I adopt Berthold Molden's concept of mnemonic hegemony.⁸ Molden bases his concept on the discourse and hegemony theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, which insists that the links between discursive elements have a contingent and incomplete character.⁹ Such poststructuralist approaches tend to exaggerate the pliability and elasticity of the past in the hands of contemporary actors.¹⁰ Some authors have criticized this approach by pointing out that the past can in fact be resistant to contemporary interpretations. For example, Michael Schudson has emphasized that the way contemporary people deal with the past is not entirely arbitrary, but is constrained by "the structure of available pasts."¹¹ Jeffrey Olick adds that the "past includes not only the history being commemorated but also the accumulated succession of commemorations, as well as what has occurred between those powerful moments."¹² A socialist town with no prior history is an opportunity to confirm or refute the validity of this critique.

First, I look at the hegemony of the memory of dictatorship in the reunified Germany and its role in Eisenhüttenstadt's crisis of identity. Then I will analyze

⁷ Valentin Voloshinov, *Marksizm i filosofija iazyka* (Moskva: Labirint, 1993), 104–5.

⁸ Berthold Molden, "Mnemonic Hegemony? The Power Relations of Contemporary European Memory," in *EUTROPEs. The Paradox of European Empire*, ed. John W. Boyer and Berthold Molden (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014), 104–130; Berthold Molden, "Resistant Pasts versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory," *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (2016): 125–142, doi: 10.1177/1750698015596014. For other adaptations of the concepts of hegemony to the study of collective memory and memory politics, see Oliver Marchart, "Das historisch-politische Gedächtnis. Für eine politische Theorie kollektiver Erinnerung," in *Gedächtnis im 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ljiljana Radonic and Heidemarie Uhl (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 43–77, doi:10.14361/9783839432365-003; and Günther Sandner, "Hegemonie und Erinnerung: Zur Konzeption von Geschichts- und Vergangenheitspolitik," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 30, no. 1 (2001): 5–17.

⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: NLB, 1977), 92–115; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2014).

¹⁰ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 162; Molden, "Resistant Pasts," 139. For a critique of the voluntarist skew in the theory of Laclau and Mouffe, see Benjamin Opratko, *Hegemonie. Politische Theorie nach Antonio Gramsci*, 2nd ed. (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2014), 143–145. See also Perry Anderson, *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (London: Verso, 2017), 96.

¹¹ Michael Schudson, "The Present in the Past versus the Past in the Present," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 287–290.

¹² Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 58.

the local controversy surrounding the politics of memory in the 1990s: the renaming of the town and many of its streets, and the replacement of the town's coat of arms. These controversies revolved around the question of how the town should deal with the omnipresent legacy of the GDR after it disappeared. After that, I will address splits in the collective memory and perceptions of the town's identity, some of which I have already mentioned. These splits arose because in Eisenhüttenstadt it was impossible to ignore the GDR's past, and because some alternative narratives that were critical of the state-socialist past suffered from inherent weaknesses. Finally, I turn to celebrations of the town's founding, which logically should also celebrate a collective identity. However, I show how difficult it is for the town's inhabitants to cope with its past.

Because I am interested in the public treatment of the past, my sources consist mainly of the local and national press and published histories of the town and the steelworks. Other sources include archival materials from the town council such as reports, minutes, and resolutions. These documents shed light on the tension between memory and politics and the conflicts that arose between representatives of different political parties. Finally, Erich Opitz has published some documents of the opposition movement Neues Forum that are fruitful for analysis.¹³

Mnemonic Hegemony and Identity Crisis

Since 1990, the prevailing narrative in the German public space has portrayed the GDR as a dictatorship – remembering an *Unrechtsstaat* [unconstitutional, unjust state] characterized by inefficiency, shortages, oppression, and resistance.¹⁴ Martin Sabrow calls this memory *Diktaturgedächtnis*.¹⁵ Diktaturgedächtnis served to legitimize and stabilize the new political and economic order in Germany.¹⁶ It amounted to what Antonio Gramsci calls a hegemony based on the intellectual and moral leadership of a dominant class.¹⁷ A particular

¹³ Erich Opitz, ed., *Wende – Papier(e) – Wende* (Eisenhüttenstadt: Bürgervereinigung “Fürstenberg (Oder)”, 2010).

¹⁴ Pamela Heß, *Geschichte als Politikum. Öffentliche und private Kontroversen um die Deutung der DDR-Vergangenheit* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014), 208; Michael Meyen, “Wir haben freier gelebt”. *Die DDR im kollektiven Gedächtnis der Deutschen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 71–159.

¹⁵ Martin Sabrow, “Die DDR erinnern,” in *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 18.

¹⁶ Heß, *Geschichte als Politikum*, 23–29.

¹⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Klaus Bochmann, Wolfgang Fritz Haug, and Peter Jehle, vol. 8 (Hamburg: Argument, 2012), 1947.

mnemonic hegemony is constructed by favoring certain memories over others. A hegemony determines what is acceptable and unacceptable, which memories are legitimate and which are illegitimate, and what is worth remembering and what can be forgotten. Molden states, “Hegemony thus establishes one particular narrative as a quasi-natural universality and delegitimizes alternative forms of reasoning.”¹⁸ However, this is not done through mnemonic violence as in dictatorships, where entire layers of memory are officially consigned to oblivion, but through the organization of consent in and through civil society.¹⁹ Counter-narratives challenging the hegemonic memory do exist.²⁰ So can communities of passive memory, so long as the communities’ distinct memories remain unarticulated and do not challenge the hegemonic memory.²¹ Jenny Wüstenberg’s and Pamela Heß’s research shows that Diktaturgedächtnis is not imposed solely by the state, but is shared and driven by much of civil society, particularly by the victims of the Soviet rule and by other critics of the SED regime. These opponents of the former regime played a significant role in post-reunification Germany by exerting pressure from below and creating new sites of memory.²²

For a brief period, the citizens of the former GDR seemed to broadly share the Diktaturgedächtnis – after all, they had just seen off a repressive regime and were finally united with the democratic Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). However, the costs of transition to a new economy and continuing divisions between East and West Germany led to disappointment and more positive reassessments of the GDR past. Although certain aspects of the GDR were idealized, it never went so far as to result in a “restorative nostalgia.”²³ A split emerged between public and private memories of the GDR.²⁴ The structure of civil society

¹⁸ Molden, “Resistant Pasts,” 126.

¹⁹ Antonio Gramsci, “Letter to Tatiana Schucht (September 7, 1931),” in *Letters from Prison*, ed. Lynne Lawner (London: Quartet Books, 1973), 204–205; Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Klaus Bochmann and Wolfgang Fritz Haug, vol. 4 (Hamburg: Argument, 2012), 873–874.

²⁰ Gramsci describes the process of creating hegemony as the constant formation and superseding of unstable equilibria. Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Klaus Bochmann and Wolfgang Fritz Haug, vol. 7 (Hamburg: Argument, 2012), 1561.

²¹ Molden, “Resistant Pasts,” 135.

²² Jenny Wüstenberg, *Zivilgesellschaft und Erinnerungspolitik in Deutschland seit 1945* (Bonn: LIT Verlag, 2020), 240–288; Heß, *Geschichte als Politikum*.

²³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41–49; Katja Neller, *DDR-Nostalgie: Dimensionen der Orientierungen der Ostdeutschen gegenüber der ehemaligen DDR, ihre Ursachen und politischen Konnotationen* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 183–187.

²⁴ Where the dictatorship memory does not dominate, a less radical way of dealing with the socialist past is possible. In the capital cities of Belarus (especially) and Kazakhstan (to a lesser extent),

in eastern Germany is not entirely clarified. Naïve Tocquevillian claims about the triumph of democracy do not take into account the extent to which civil society represents a population and the extent to which the links between civil society and the population are “organic.” They generally obscure the relationship between memory, power, and the population.²⁵

Most likely, there was a crisis of representation in the East, in which the leaders of civil society were more united with the West German political elites than with the people of the former GDR.²⁶ Most people in the GDR were not victims of the regime, so they could not recognize themselves in stories of dictatorship and repression.²⁷ Many mnemonic actors were aware of this gap between public and private memories. The later inclusion of the theme of everyday life under state socialism was not intended to discourage Diktaturgedächtnis, but to reinforce it by creating a compromise.²⁸ By recalling not only the repressive experience of a limited number of people, but also the more widespread and understandable experiences of everyday life,²⁹ the promoters of the hegemonic anti-GDR memory tried to make it more palatable to East Germans and thus prevent the spread of “Ostalgie.”³⁰

the Soviet past was not rejected but was recycled by the newly independent republics and accepted as part of their identity. Nelly Bekus, “Ideological Recycling of the Socialist Legacy. Reading Townscapes of Minsk and Astana,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 5 (May 2017): 794–818, doi: 10.1080/09668136.2017.1350259.

²⁵ Although Wüstenberg makes important points in her introduction to the concept of civil society, she does not address the matter of how representative of the population was the movement to remember the victims of repression in the GDR. See Wüstenberg, *Zivilgesellschaft und Erinnerungspolitik*, 21–25, 232–288. For a general critique of Tocquevillian approaches to civil society, see Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870–1945* (London: Verso, 2019).

²⁶ This crisis of representation was observed before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. See Volodymyr Ishchenko and Oleg Zhuravlev, “Post-Soviet Vicious Circle: The Crisis of Hegemony and the Crisis of Revolution,” in *The Anthem Companion to Gramsci*, ed. Dylan J. Riley and Marco Santoro (London: Anthem Press), forthcoming.

²⁷ Thomas Ahbe, *Ostalgie: Zum Umgang mit der DDR-Vergangenheit in den 1990er Jahren* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2005), 42.

²⁸ Andrew H. Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering the GDR: Official and State-Mandated Memory since 1990,” in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic*, ed. David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30–33. According to Gramsci, this compromise can never concern the essential. In his case it concerns the material foundations of the bourgeoisie. This is also true in the case of the dictatorial character of the GDR. See Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, vol. 7, 1567.

²⁹ Returning to Gramsci, he explicitly describes the struggle for hegemony as working with the contradictions in everyday consciousness. Opratko, *Hegemonie*, 44–45.

³⁰ Heß, *Geschichte als Politikum*, 217–222; Wüstenberg, *Zivilgesellschaft und Erinnerungspolitik*, 272–274.

The hegemonic post-reunification mode of remembrance shattered the official, fundamental myths of the old GDR that Eisenhüttenstadt was the first truly socialist town, a town of the future built from nothingness, and the town of the “new man.”³¹ As early as 1990, the local history museum’s exhibition about Eisenhüttenstadt’s “difficult beginning” was taken down. Instead, visitors were offered a nostalgic look at everyday objects of the 1920s and 1930s.³² The *Heimatkalender*, a magazine about local history, published in the last days of the regime, on the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the GDR, was filled to the brim with commemorations of communist heroes and important events. The next edition of the calendar was completely devoid of all that.³³ From 1991 to 1999, no celebrations of the founding of Eisenhüttenstadt were held.³⁴ The town’s identity crisis was aggravated by the fact that it was experiencing severe economic difficulties accompanied by heavy out-migration.³⁵ Unemployment and insecurity about the future replaced the GDR’s official recognition of the town’s importance and its privileges as a model socialist town inhabited by well-paid workers.³⁶ This was an identity crisis that required a way out.

³¹ Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der SED, ed., *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1966), 115; Schüttrumpf, “Young Town on an Old River”; Schüttrumpf, “Wo einst nur Sand und Kiefern waren...”

³² “Nostalgie aus der Kommode,” *Stadtspiegel*, February 1991; Beate Melzer, “Was erwartet der Besucher von seinem Heimatmuseum?,” *Stadtspiegel*, May 1991, 6–7; see also Thalia Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore. Wie Heimatmuseen in Ostdeutschland an die DDR erinnern* (Berlin: Be.bra Verlag, 2013), 56.

³³ Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore*, 54.

³⁴ In a way, those celebrations were replaced by a new tradition, the multi-day “Oderfest,” which was held every October between 1991 and 1993. October 3, the Day of German Unity, was the highlight of the Oderfest folk festival. Maria Luise Stahl, “Gemeinsam mit ihnen neue Kulturtradition aufbauen,” *Stadtspiegel*, September 1991, 28–29; Sylvia Schulz, “Eisenhüttenstadts 2. Oderfest vom 1. bis 4. Oktober,” *Stadtspiegel*, September 1992, 15; “3. Oderfest – Programm,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 1993, 13–14.

³⁵ While the population of Eisenhüttenstadt was 52,393 in 1989, only 23,878 people lived there in 2019. *Statistisches Jahrbuch 2019* (Beeskow, Landkreis Oder-Spree, Amt für Personal und Organisation, 2019), 33–34. See also an ethnological study of the shrinking of the town’s population: Thomas Gottschalk, “Eisenhüttenstadt. Ein Phänomen schrumpft,” *Berliner Blätter. FrauenAlltag im östlichsten deutschen Osten: Eisenhüttenstadt*, no. 47 (2008): 129–139.

³⁶ Klaus-Dieter Gansleweit, “Zum Geleit,” *Heimatkalender für den Stadt- und Landkreis Eisenhüttenstadt* 9 (1991), 3–4; Schüttrumpf, “Young Town on an Old River”; Peter Weichhart, Christine Weiske, and Benno Werlen, *Place Identity und Images. Das Beispiel Eisenhüttenstadt* (Wien: Institut für Geographie und Regionalforschung der Universität Wien, 2006), 138–139.

The Controversies of the 1990s: Debate about Renaming the Town and Its Streets and Other Reminders of the GDR in the Public Space

Socialist city names often carry a highly symbolic charge.³⁷ When Eisenhüttenstadt was founded in 1950, SED party organs discussed different possibilities for naming it, such as Thälmannstadt and Karl-Marx-Stadt. Stalin's death on March 5, 1953 determined the choice however, and the town was named Stalinstadt.³⁸ That name did not last very long. After the XXII Party Congress of the CPSU in 1961 intensified de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, Stalinstadt was renamed Eisenhüttenstadt. The name change was accompanied by the incorporation of a small neighboring town, Fürstenberg, and a village, Schönfließ into the town limits. The name change was thus presented to the public as a logical bureaucratic change, rather than something motivated by politics.³⁹

In the early 1990s, there were heated discussions in Eisenhüttenstadt about renaming the town once again.⁴⁰ Gerd Krüger, a member of the Neues Forum, recalls with regret that the change was never made. His arguments in favor of changing the name are a good example of the changing themes of the prevailing discourse at the time. He first argued that goods from a town named simply for an industry would not sell well (a market economy argument). Second, he argued that the name Eisenhüttenstadt was not arrived at democratically but rather by fiat of the SED (an appeal to democracy). He added a condemnation of the incorporation of the town of Fürstenberg, saying that "over 700 years

³⁷ Rasa Balockaitė, "Coping with the Unwanted Past in Planned Socialist Towns: Visaginas, Tychy, and Nowa Huta," *SLOVO* 24, no. 1 (2012): 47; Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, "Die sozialistische Planstadt Eisenhüttenstadt im Vergleich mit Nowa Huta und Ostrava Kuncice," in *Von der "europäischen Stadt" zur "sozialistischen Stadt" und zurück? Urbane Transformationen im östlichen Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Thomas Bohn (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 103.

³⁸ Andreas Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt. Wandel einer industriellen Gründungsstadt in fünfzig Jahren* (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2000), 51; Jenny Richter, Heike Förster, and Ulrich Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt: Von der Utopie zur Gegenwart* (Marburg: Schüren, 1997), 34–35.

³⁹ Maoz Azaryahu, *Von Wilhelmplatz zu Thälmannplatz: Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1991), 171.

⁴⁰ Klaus Käthner, "Für alle Neuen nun Büros mit Telefon und Schreibmaschine," *Neuer Tag*, January 18, 1990; "Eisenhüttenstadt: Wird daraus bald Fürstenberg?," *Berliner Zeitung*, January 4, 1991, 17; "Fürstenberg?," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, January 4, 1991, 1; Gerd Krüger, "Name schadet der Wirtschaft," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, January 19, 1991, 9; Manfred Schieche, "(K)ein Beitrag für einen neuen Stadtnamen," *Stadtspiegel*, June 1992, 26; Günter Fromm, "Vor zehn Jahren: Runde Tische und demokratische Volkskammerwahlen," *Stadtspiegel*, March 2000, 24–25.

of tradition should weigh more than 40 years of propaganda” (tradition).⁴¹ In a document of the Neues Forum from 1990 it was suggested that the name of the town did not promote love of the homeland and would not attract tourists (market economy again). The claim was made that for “historical reasons” and “by tradition” it would be better to “restore” the old name of Fürstenberg (tradition again).⁴² The proposal to “rename the town back” to Fürstenberg would apply not only to the former small town but to all of Eisenhüttenstadt. Fürstenberg, however, would not be a democratically chosen name either. The power of these arguments, both for and against, was ultimately based in opposition to Stalinist economic logic and rule.

The opponents of the name change were represented strongly in the steelworks’ newspaper. They appealed to the close association of the town with the steelworks and to the costs of renaming the town, arguing that the funds could be used more productively. They also argued that Eisenhüttenstadt was widely known as a place of steel production and that this reputation was good for both the company and the town. A renaming could only have a detrimental effect. They did not use explicitly ideological arguments.⁴³ But it did imply a struggle between two visions for the town. The supporters of renaming wanted to break away from the town’s exclusive focus on steel production, which they saw as a Stalinist, GDR legacy. The opponents saw no future for the town other than in connection with the steelworks.

Because the renaming debate was causing such a stir, a town councilor for the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Veronika Schneider, issued a statement in the company newspaper emphasizing that there were no such plans and that the majority of town councilors were against renaming the town.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the idea resurfaced several times over the next few years.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Gerd Krüger, “Zur Erinnerung,” in *Wende – Papier(e) – Wende*, ed. Erich Opitz (Eisenhüttenstadt: Bürgervereinigung “Fürstenberg (Oder)”, 2010), 103.

⁴² Neues Forum, “RTL oder N3, Fürstenberg (Oder) oder Eisenhüttenstadt,” in *Wende – Papier(e) – Wende*, ed. Erich Opitz (Eisenhüttenstadt: Bürgervereinigung “Fürstenberg (Oder)”, 2010), 132.

⁴³ Bernd Koop, “Warum soll Eisenhüttenstadt umbenannt werden?” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 2 (January 1991): 1; Jürgen Loose, “Ein neuer Name für unsere Stadt?,” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 3 (January 1991): 6; “Aktuelle Information in der bewegten Zeit,” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 4 (February 1991): 3; Simone Krüger, “Warum Eisenhüttenstadt umbenennen?,” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 4 (February 1991): 6.

⁴⁴ Veronika Schneider, “Wer will Eisenhüttenstadt umbenennen?,” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 5 (February 1991): 6.

⁴⁵ Christian Arns, “Ein Museum mit lebendigem Inventar,” *Taz. Die Tageszeitung*, August 31, 1993, <https://taz.de/!1602427/>; Wolfgang Anton, “Ein neuer, würdiger Name. Wohnstadt Fürstenberg – Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt,” in *Eisenhüttenstadt: “erste sozialistische Stadt Deutschlands,”*

As can be seen from the debate over giving the town the name of Fürstenberg, the lack of a pre-socialist past did not mean that one could not be “invented.”⁴⁶ However, the “invented” past did not emerge out of nowhere, but through a shift in the representation of the actual past. Something that was peripheral to the official GDR narrative can be moved to the center and articulated anew. I call this process *Verschiebung* [a shift or displacement]. Although I am not reasoning in psychoanalytic terms, this strategy was not simply a shift in focus of attention but resulted from some “uncomfortableness” with the object of the *Verschiebung*.⁴⁷ This strategy helps to overcome an identity crisis by emphasizing continuity with the pre-socialist past. The Hungarian “new town” of Dunaújváros followed this path.⁴⁸ Although less active in pursuit of the strategy, the Nowa Huta Museum in Poland pursued much the same strategy, organizing exhibitions to commemorate the town’s “forgotten heritage.”⁴⁹ The town of Horishni Plavni in Ukraine’s Poltava region, founded in 1972 and known as Komsomolsk until 2016, followed a similar pattern. Horishni Plavni was originally a village located adjacent to, but not within, the town limits of Komsomolsk. It was swallowed up by an open-pit mine as iron ore mining expanded. However, local advocates of “decommunization” and the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance portrayed the town’s new name as a restoration of the “historical” name for the new town.⁵⁰

ed. Arbeitsgruppe Stadtgeschichte Eisenhüttenstadt (Berlin: Be.bra Verlag, 1999), 137; “Umbe-nennung vorgeschlagen: Eisenhüttenstadt soll Fürstenberg heißen,” *RP Online*, March 31, 2004, https://rp-online.de/panorama/eisenhuettenstadt-soll-fuerstenberg-heissen_aid-16917447; Jürgen Schwenkenbecher, “Im Schatten des Stahlwerks,” *Berliner Zeitung*, April 14, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050123185733/http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2004/0414/lokales/0006/index.html>.

⁴⁶ See Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–14.

⁴⁷ For the use of the Freudian notion of *Verschiebung* in the analysis of ideology and the ideological, see Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Elemente einer Theorie des Ideologischen* (Hamburg: Argument, 1993), 57–61.

⁴⁸ The Hungarian town formed a continuity of history from a Roman settlement of the 1st–5th centuries, through its existence as a village, to its socialist construction and up to the present. The socialist history of the town is thus only an episode or moment in a much longer national history. See Katarzyna Zechenter, “The Repositioning of Postsocialist Narratives of Nowa Huta and Dunaújváros,” *Revue des Études Slaves* 86, no. 1–2 (September 2015): 146–149, doi: 10.4000/res.691.

⁴⁹ Kinga Pozniak, “Reinventing a Model Socialist Steel Town in the Neoliberal Economy: The Case of Nowa Huta, Poland,” *City and Society* 25, no. 1 (2013): 126–128, doi: 10.1111/ciso.12009.

⁵⁰ A significant number, if not the majority, of Horishi Plavni’s residents opposed the renaming. The final decision on renaming the town was imposed by a resolution of the Parliament in Kyiv, i.e. from the outside. “Klub im. O. Tsarenka stvorvy unikal’ni istorychni karty,” *Kremenjuh tudei*,

The renaming initiative in Eisenhüttenstadt did not work out, in part because of the opposing positions of the residents of Fürstenberg and the main part of the town new-built by the GDR. The residents of the new town were rather pragmatic about the town name. The dissatisfaction of the residents of Fürstenberg and Schönfließ was at least partially offset by the fact that both names were reflected in the names of the town districts.⁵¹

The elements of *Verschiebung* strategy are reflected in claims that Eisenhüttenstadt did not emerge from nothing, that in this area there was more than just “sand and pine” before. By contrast, in the old GDR the push for industrialization and the assertion that the region on the banks of the Oder River only developed thanks to socialism were important tropes. The new discourse of historical continuity emphasized the fact that there were industrial enterprises in the region well before the GDR, but that they were dismantled by the Soviets or did not survive the shortcomings of the planned economy.⁵² Some histories of the town and the town’s museum begin their historical narratives with the founding of Fürstenberg.⁵³ It is possible to observe the tendency to *Verschiebung* in the attention paid to the rich prehistory of the region, which includes prehistoric settlements, Germanic graves from the Roman period, the medieval Fürstenberg and the Neuzelle monastery, and the beginnings of industrialization in the region.⁵⁴

May 23, 2017, <http://kremen.today/2017/05/23/klub-im-o-tsarenka-stvoriv-unikalni-istorichni-karti/>; Iurii Loza, “Chomu Horishni Plavni?” *Ukrains’kyi Instytut Natsional’noi Pam’iati*, 2016, <https://old.uinp.gov.ua/news/chomu-gorishni-plavni>; Mykola Stakhiv, “Istorychna dovidka pro budivnytstvo, status ta naimenuvannia v istorii mista Horishni Plavni,” *Svichado Prydnipriv’ia – mis’kyi kraieznavchyi al’manakh*, no. 10 (2016): 36–40; Mar’iana P’ietsukh, “Iak misto Komso-mol’s’k ob’iednalosia proty sela Horishni Plavni,” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, May 30, 2016, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/05/30/7110126/>.

⁵¹ “Hauptsatzung der Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Amtsblatt der Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt mit Bekanntmachungen aus dem Rathaus und der Stadtverordnetenversammlung* 1, no. 1 (January 1991): 1; Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 173–174.

⁵² Axel Drieschner and Barbara Schulz, “Ausstellung des Städtischen Museums ‘Feuer und Sand. Die Glasindustrie in Fürstenberg (Oder) 1864–1852,’” *Stadtspiegel*, December 2001, 30–31; Barbara Schulz and Axel Drieschner, “Rüstungswirtschaft und Zwangsarbeit in Fürstenberg (Oder). Sonderausstellung im Städtischen Museum Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Gedenkstätten-Rundbrief*, No. 144 (2008): 32–37.

⁵³ Helmut Ohl, *Städte im Aufbruch* (Fürstenwalde/Spree: Bock und Kübler, 1995), 61–62; Andreas Ludwig, “Kurze Geschichte Eisenhüttenstadts,” in *Eisenhüttenstadt. Architektur – Skulptur, Stadtbilder*, ed. Abteilung Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit Stadtverwaltung Eisenhüttenstadt (Eisenhüttenstadt: Fürstenberger Druck u. Verlag, 1998), 5–12; Hartmut Preuß, “Schirme, Scherben, Schiffe,” *Stadtspiegel*, February 2003, 18.

⁵⁴ Lara Bartscherer et al., *EisenhüttenStadt 2030. Abschlussbericht* (Berlin, 2005), 254.

Disputes arose over renaming streets in Eisenhüttenstadt at the same time as the debate over renaming the town, as in many other East German localities.⁵⁵ More than a year and a half passed between the founding of a working group on street names in November 1990⁵⁶ and the town council's final decision on the new names in May 1992.⁵⁷ This was a time of intense disputes between political parties, individual deputies, and residents. The atmosphere was filled with mutual recriminations,⁵⁸ a boycott of the vote by the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS),⁵⁹ the annulment of the council's first decision,⁶⁰ a crisis in the coalition between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Free Democratic Party (FDP) and SPD,⁶¹ a massive campaign to collect signatures against the renaming of some streets, and a demand for a referendum.⁶² A town councilor

⁵⁵ Maoz Azaryahu, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names: The Case of East Berlin," *Political Geography* 16, no. 6 (1997): 481; generally on the modern functions of street names, see Maoz Azaryahu, "Naming the Past: The Significance of Commemorative Street Names," in *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming*, ed. Lawrence D. Berg and Jani Vuolteenaho (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 55.

⁵⁶ Ganschow, Fraktionsvorsitzender der FDP, "Antrag zur Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 14. November – Bildung einer Arbeitsgruppe 'Straßennamen,'" Stadtverordnetenversammlung (14.11.1990), Stadtarchiv Eisenhüttenstadt (hereafter StA EHS); "Beschluß-Nr. 82/5/90. Beschlußprotokoll der 5. Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (14.11.1990), StA EHS.

⁵⁷ Ganschow, "Antrag zur Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 14. November"; "Beschluß-Nr. 82/5/90"; Rainer Werner, Bürgermeister und Leiter der Arbeitsgruppe "Straßennamen," "Ergebnis der 2. Beratung der AG 'Straßennamen' vom 27.04.1992," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (20.05.1992/26.05.1992), StA EHS; "Beschlußprotokoll der 23. Sitzung der SVV am 20.05.1992," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (20.05.1992/26.05.1992), StA EHS.

⁵⁸ "Wortprotokoll zum Antrag Nr. 038/Protokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (27.11.1991), StA EHS; "Harte FPD-Vorwürfe an PDS und Sozialdemokraten," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 20, 1992.

⁵⁹ "[Abschrift einer] Tonbandaufzeichnung. Top 4. Umbenennung von Straßen und Plätzen in Eisenhüttenstadt," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (23.10.1991), StA EHS.

⁶⁰ Christa Kraft, "Alte Straßennamen wieder allein gültig," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 12, 1992; Dagmar Püschel, "PDS: nicht enthalten, sondern abgelehnt," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 27, 1992.

⁶¹ "Beschlußprotokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV am 27.11.1991," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (27.11.1991), StA EHS; Klaus Rachow, "Antrag Nr. 038 auf teilweise Aufhebung des Beschlusses der SVV zur Umbenennung der Straßen der Neustadt in Eisenhüttenstadt (30.10.1991)," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (27.11.1991), StA EHS; "Wortprotokoll zum Antrag Nr. 038/Protokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV"; "Diskrepanz in vielen grundsätzlichen Fragen?," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 19, 1992.

⁶² Waltraud Bartsch, "An die Stadtverordneten der Stadt (01.11.1991). Um-Benennung der Helmut-Just-Straße," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (23.10.1991), StA EHS; Büro der SVV, "[Bericht über Zuschriften zu den Straßenumbenennungen]," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (18.12.1991), StA EHS; "Beschlußprotokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV am 27.11.1991"; "Protest gegen die

from the political party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen even resigned his mandate because he did not agree with the procedure and renaming. He claimed that some names were put on the list only because of “left-wing bias.”⁶³

These battles were fought over redefining the town’s symbolic space. The FDP and the CDU wanted to remove all signs of the “first socialist town” from the urban space, or as many as possible. The SED’s successor party, the PDS, wanted to keep many of them, although it did not oppose renaming as such. The SPD took a middle position. The idea of changing street names associated with the SED itself or functionaries of foreign Communist Parties who were in power was not controversial. However, changing the names of streets named for prewar communist luminaries like Ernst Thälmann, John Schehr, Fritz Heckert, and even Helmut Just, a GDR policeman allegedly murdered by West German anti-communists, were hotly debated.⁶⁴ The town council’s decision triggered a protest movement seeking a “citizen survey.” The survey’s proponents managed to collect signatures from more than 10% of the town’s eligible voters but their demands were ignored.⁶⁵ Thus, a crisis of hegemony was taking place at the urban level. The decisions of the town administration conflicted with the wishes of significant parts of the broader population. The struggle was an expression of identity crisis, because many street names not only reflected the history of the GDR and socialism, but also the local identity. Unsurprisingly, a SPD town councilor, Klaus Rachow, advocated canceling some of the newly chosen names, arguing that “tolerance of political dissent, the special history of the town, which is part of cultural history and forty years of lived and experienced history, demand extremely thoughtful and tactful approaches to renaming.”⁶⁶ Although all the changes proposed by the working group were ultimately enacted,

undemokratische Verfahrensweise der SVV am 23.10.1991 zur Umbenennung von Straßen in Eisenhüttenstadt (26.10.1991),” in Stadtverordnetenversammlung (23.10.1991), StA EHS.

⁶³ At the next meeting, the deputy stated that he would retain his seat on the town council but would no longer serve on committees. “Abschrift (Auszug) der Tonbandaufzeichnung von der SVV am 23.10.1991,” Stadtverordnetenversammlung (23.10.1991), StA EHS; “Beschlußprotokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV am 27.11.1991.”

⁶⁴ “[Abschrift einer] Tonbandaufzeichnung. Top 4.”; “Abschrift (Auszug) der Tonbandaufzeichnung von der SVV am 23.10.1991”; “Protest gegen die undemokratische Verfahrensweise der SVV am 23.10.1991”

⁶⁵ “Die Bürgerinitiative fordert ihre Mitbestimmung,” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 29, 1992; “Beschlußprotokoll der 17. Sitzung der SVV am 18.12.1991,” Stadtverordnetenversammlung (18.12.1991), StA EHS; Andreas Wendt, “Bis auf eine Änderung mit erstem Beschluß identisch,” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, May 21, 1992.

⁶⁶ Rachow, “Antrag Nr. 038.”

that was still the result of some compromise. Many leftist and communist symbols enshrined in street names were left untouched. Gottfried Korff explains this by saying that “they [the old names] were legitimized according to general historical-cultural criteria.”⁶⁷

Jani Vuolteenaho and Guy Puzey note that “naming practices ... often mirror covert cultural strategies to win popular consent for the prevailing political order.”⁶⁸ Incidentally, this also applies to decisions not to rename a street. Usually, the new names of the streets were politically neutral: Klement-Gottwald-Straße became Alte Ladenstraße, Otto-Grotewohl-Ring became An der Holzwolle, Marchlewskiring became Brunnenring, and General-Walter-Straße became An der Schleuse. In two cases where streets were renamed to honor famous people (poet Joseph von Eichendorff and pioneering doctor Ignaz Semmelweis), the choice seems to have been random, but it was not controversial.⁶⁹ The central street of Eisenhüttenstadt, formerly named Leninallee, was just slightly modified to become Lindenallee. Thus, the center lost a place-name with a strong ideological charge. The spirit of the “post-ideological” era in Germany was expressed in the neutrality of the new names.

A similar “de-ideologization” can be observed in the names of various institutions in the town. In the GDR, as is well known, not only streets but also factories, work brigades, schools and many other institutions were given commemorative names. In this instance, “decommunization” was almost complete. By 1993, almost all schools, even those named for politically neutral personalities, lost their former names and had them replaced by numbers.⁷⁰

The renaming of Straße des Komsomol was yet another symbolic revamping of the town’s identity. Even before the working group on renaming finished its work, the street was renamed Saarlouiser Straße, as proposed by Eisenhüttenstadt’s

⁶⁷ Korff, “Mentalität und Monumentalität.”

⁶⁸ Jani Vuolteenaho and Guy Puzey, “‘Armed with an Encyclopedia and an Axe’: The Socialist and Post-Socialist Street Toponymy of East Berlin Revisited through Gramsci,” in *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics, and Place*, ed. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek H. Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu (London: Routledge, 2018), 93.

⁶⁹ “Neue Städte – Neue Leitbilder,” Aufbau West, 1997, https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/asstlg08.htm.

⁷⁰ Korff, “Mentalität und Monumentalität.” The Ernst Thälmann Children’s Home, which kept its name at first, lost it due to a change of sponsors in 1995. Some schools got nicknames (new ones or their old ones) back after a while. Thus, one elementary school went by the name of the German communist writer Erich Weinert. Ulrike Schiller, “Neuer Träger für das Kinderheim in Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Stadtspiegel*, March 1995, 28–29; *Eisenhüttenstadt (Stadtplan)*, 9th ed. (Fellbach: Städte-Verlag, 2015).

CDU mayor Wolfgang Müller on the occasion of the town's Oderfest. The Oderfest took place on the first anniversary of German reunification and the fifth anniversary of the partnership between Eisenhüttenstadt and the city of Saarlouis in western Germany. That was the first such partnership established between East and West German towns, in 1986.⁷¹ The twinning of the towns was a harbinger of the ultimate unification of Germany. The idea, however, can be traced back to good relations between Erich Honecker and Oskar Lafontaine, then Minister-President of West Germany's Saarland.⁷²

According to Korff's accounts, only about 11% of all the street names in the town were changed.⁷³ Had not Fürstenberg been incorporated into Eisenhüttenstadt, this figure would have been considerably smaller. Eisenhüttenstadt, like Berlin and Leipzig, took a "moderate-minimalist approach" to renaming streets rather than a "radical-maximalist approach" (as did Rostock, for example).⁷⁴ The town council rejected a radical transformation of the town's symbolic space, although it was demanded by some actors.⁷⁵

One could say that some parts of the GDR symbolic canon have become part of Germany's popular memory. Nevertheless, that does not mean that the meaning of the names of monuments and streets in the former GDR is unchangeable. They can be articulated in different ways.⁷⁶ Because street names lack a narrative structure but do possess a narrativity, they are much more amenable to rearticulation than some other relics of the GDR.⁷⁷

Names such as Friedensweg, Friedenstraße, and Platz der Jugend have lost their ideological dimension. Divorced from historical context, they seem quite

⁷¹ "Beschluß Nr. 108/S/91. Beschlußprotokoll der Sondersitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (28.08.91), StA EHS.

⁷² Jörg Fischer, "Abenteuer Ost-West: 25 Jahre deutsch-deutsche Städtepartnerschaften," *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, June 2, 2011, <https://www.mz.de/deutschland-und-welt/politik/abenteuer-ost-west-25-jahre-deutsch-deutsche-stadtepartnerschaften-2261414>; similar renaming also took place in other East German cities after reunification. See Azaryahu, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names," 485.

⁷³ Korff, "Mentalität und Monumentalität."

⁷⁴ Azaryahu, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names," 484–485; about other East German cities, see Johanna Sänger, *Heldenkult und Heimatliebe: Straßen- und Ehrennamen im offiziellen Gedächtnis der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2006), 206–215.

⁷⁵ For example, Erich Opitz, a leading figure in the Bürgervereinigung Fürstenberg, proposed naming streets after Franz Thielenberg (1850–1924) and Heinrich Collina (1844–1919), who were honorary citizens of Fürstenberg. His proposal was rejected. Erich Opitz, "Ehrenbürger der Stadt Fürstenberg/Oder," *Stadtspiegel*, June 1991, 36–37.

⁷⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*.

⁷⁷ Maoz Azaryahu, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Kenneth Foote, "Street Names as Story and History," in *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2016), 141.

apolitical and nonideological. In the GDR, however, they were closely linked to SED policy.⁷⁸ As World War II and the Cold War slipped further into the past, rhetoric focused on peace no longer seemed so relevant. The cult of youth, which was characteristic of state socialism, and youthfulness as a representative metaphor for the town, are things of the past. An aging population and the exodus of young residents has robbed such street names of their meaning.⁷⁹ It is also no longer obvious which republic is meant by the name Straße der Republik.

However, the enthusiasm for renaming streets left the outdoor sculptures (at least those that were in the public space) and other art on the town's buildings untouched.⁸⁰ Walter Womacka was one of the leading artists of the GDR and created several artworks for Eisenhüttenstadt.⁸¹ In 2004, tensions arose when Womacka's name was proposed for inscription in the town's "Golden Book." Shortly thereafter his name was withdrawn because of his uncritical statements about repressive GDR policies. The controversy was a bone of contention between the PDS and the town's SPD mayor.⁸²

The situation surrounding the town's coat of arms is also instructive. At the turn of the twenty-first century, a town logo supplanted Eisenhüttenstadt's coat of arms. The coat of arms was created in 1973 and combines the red silhouette of a high-rise residential building with that of the steelworks and the blue outline of a dove of peace. Below the silhouettes are three blue waves. Thus, the coat of arms communicates clear associations with the GDR. Although the coat of arms was never rescinded or replaced, the town preferred to use the new logo with a cursive "e" above a blue or gray line.⁸³

There were some initiatives to design a new coat of arms.⁸⁴ In April 1998, for example, the CDU parliamentary group introduced a design that included the coat of arms of Fürstenberg next to the old Eisenhüttenstadt coat of arms,

⁷⁸ Elisabeth Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt und die Idealstadt des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Weimar: VDG, 2000), 192; Herfried Münkler, *Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2009), 422.

⁷⁹ Schütrumpf, "Young Town on an Old River"; see also Harry Hoffmann and Ernst Oldenburg, *Stalinstadt* (Dresden: Sachsenverlag, 1960), 18.

⁸⁰ Martin Maleschka, ed., *Architekturführer Eisenhüttenstadt Stalinstadt* (Berlin: DOM publishers, 2021), 7–9, 152–155, 158–159, 166–169, 172–173, 180–181.

⁸¹ Hartmut Preuß, "Walter Womacka. Malerei – Grafik – Keramik," *Stadtspiegel*, June 2004, 24–25.

⁸² "Nicht jeder darf ins Goldene Buch," *Lausitzer Rundschau*, October 2, 2004, <https://www.lr-online.de/lausitz/guben/nicht-jeder-darf-ins-goldene-buch-33330352.html>.

⁸³ Ludwig, "Wo die Zukunft Gegenwart war," 269; "Das vergessene Stadtwappen," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, March 31, 2015, <https://www.moz.de/lokales/eisenhuettenstadt/das-vergessene-stadtwappen-49851016.html>.

⁸⁴ Andreas Ludwig, "'Traum der Zukunft Wirklichkeit'. Stadtgeschichte, Selbstbild, Fremdbild in Eisenhüttenstadt," *Comparativ* 9, no. 3 (1999), 19.

as well as the eagle of Brandenburg on a smaller, lower field. In that proposal, the old coat of arms would not be completely replaced, but de-emphasized. The “roots” of the town would have been symbolized and Fürstenberg would have gotten equal recognition with the new town.⁸⁵ The town council finally decided to refer the CDU proposal to the town’s cultural committee.⁸⁶ After that, the topic disappeared from the town’s agenda.⁸⁷

Thus, the strategy of “decommunizing” the public space was applied only to a limited extent. Despite all the efforts of the town’s conservatives, liberals and some Fürstenbergers, the socialist past was not completely eliminated or discarded. However, the town’s attitude toward its past remained ambivalent. Even where streets were renamed, a desire to de-ideologize and depoliticize the public space predominated. Although some elements of a *Verschiebung* strategy can be observed, its radical application was largely rejected. Ultimately, it was difficult to dismiss the socialist past entirely. The moderate approach to change had implications for future challenges and ruptures in the town’s identity.

The Symbolic Separation of the Town Districts

Under SED rule, the town of Fürstenberg did not play much of a role in the general image of Eisenhüttenstadt.⁸⁸ Ludwig writes that there were two different discourses about Eisenhüttenstadt before 1989: “the reminiscence of the ‘difficult early years’ on the one hand and the representation of the sociopolitical achievements in the young town on the other.”⁸⁹ Eisenhüttenstadt’s self-image

⁸⁵ CDU-Fraktion, “Antrag 006/98 zur Stadtverordnetenversammlung vom 08.04.1998,” Stadtverordnetenversammlung (08.04.1998), StA EHS.

⁸⁶ “Beschluß Nr. 1003/60/98. Niederschrift der 60. öffentlichen Sitzung der SVV,” Stadtverordnetenversammlung (08.04.1998), StA EHS.

⁸⁷ There is no research on efforts to change the coat of arms of the other socialist cities, which makes it impossible to draw comparisons. Nevertheless, I found out that Dimitrovgrad, a Bulgarian town twinned with Eisenhüttenstadt, adopted a new coat of arms in 2001. It was designed by the coat of arms artist Hristo Tanev. It no longer contains symbols of socialism and workers, but rather of three villages from which the consolidated town was founded. Obshtina gr. Dimitrovgrad, “Reshenie No. 504 Ot 19.9.2001 G.,” *Dimitrovgrad. Oftsialen ueb sayt*, September 19, 2001, <https://www.dimitrovgrad.bg/bg/posts/view/2873>; “Dimitrovgrad smenil tri gerba za 63 godini,” *Dimitrovgrad.bgvesti.NET*, April 28, 2010, <https://www.dimitrovgrad.bgvesti.net/news/61146/dimitrovgrad-smenil-tri-gerba-za-63-godini>.

⁸⁸ Fritz Kracheel, *Eisenhüttenstadt (4-sprachiger Bildband)* (Dresden: Rat der Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt, 1968); Hellmut Opitz and Werner Bauer, *Eisenhüttenstadt* (Leipzig: VEB F. A. Brockhaus, 1975); Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost Betriebsparteiorganisation des VEB Bandstahlkombinat “Hermann Matern”, ed., *Unser Friedenswerk*, vol. 1 (Neustrelitz: Druckerei “Erich Weinert”, n.d.).

⁸⁹ Ludwig, “Traum der Zukunft Wirklichkeit,” 14.

became more diverse in the late GDR period, but, as Ludwig notes, this was expressed not only in a de-emphasis of the political and social pathos of the years of postwar reconstruction, but also “deep uncertainty about the town’s self-image.”⁹⁰ Thus, in part, the roots of the crisis of transformation in the 1990s could be found in the exhaustion of the potential of the SED’s future-oriented rhetoric in the 1970s. This situation already fostered interest in the region’s pre-socialist past in the GDR.⁹¹ Fürstenberg and Schönfließ began to cultivate their own identities intensively in the 1990s. Articles appeared in the local press about the need to write more about the history of Fürstenberg and the surrounding villages and to preserve their cultural heritage.⁹² On July 5–6, 1991, Fürstenberg held its first Old Town Festival.⁹³ An annual Bridge Festival later took its place.⁹⁴ An annual festival was also initiated in Schönfließ in 1991.⁹⁵ Sylvette Lemke describes the mood in Schönfließ as follows:

If, years ago, a stranger in Eisenhüttenstadt had asked about the village of Schönfließ, he would probably have received the correcting answer that Schönfließ was an old village, but that in reality it now belonged to Eisenhüttenstadt as normal. However, this fact was not so normal for the people of Schönfließ. In a survey among the inhabitants of the small village on the river, the basic tenor of the answers corresponded to a great local patriotism ... This was also reflected in the jubilee celebration, which began on June 20, 1991 and lasted for four days with the exuberant hustle and bustle of a folk festival character. To a non-Schönfließer, the impression was already awakened that in what was now officially recognized as a district of Eisenhüttenstadt, something that had slumbered for decades erupted like a volcano with joy of life in the festival days.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁹¹ Klaus-Dieter Gansleweit, ed., *Beiträge zur Geschichte Eisenhüttenstadts. Regionalgeschichtliche Veröffentlichung des Städtischen Museums Eisenhüttenstadt*, vol. 1 (Städtisches Museum Eisenhüttenstadt, 1986), 9; Ludwig, “Traum der Zukunft Wirklichkeit,” 165.

⁹² See e.g. Detlef Fechner, “Eine alte Wurzel von Fürstenberg – Nikolaikirche und Evangelische Nikolaigemeinde,” *Stadtspiegel*, January 1991; Gansleweit, “Zum Geleit,” 4.

⁹³ Sylvia Schulz, “Das war es, das 1. Altstadtfest in Fürstenberg/Oder,” *Stadtspiegel*, August 1991, 15.

⁹⁴ The bridge festival celebrates the Neue Deichbrücke, inaugurated on August 17, 1996, which plays an important role in Fürstenberg. Martina Lagemann, “Interview mit Bertram Kahlisch, dem Verantwortlichen für Organisation des Brückenfestes,” *Stadtspiegel*, July 1996, 2–4; “Impressionen zum Geburtstag der Neuen Deichbrücke,” *Stadtspiegel*, September 1996, 6–7; “2. Brückenfest in Fürstenberg/O.,” *Stadtspiegel*, July 1997, 26.

⁹⁵ Maria Minew, “675 Jahre Schönfließ,” *Stadtspiegel*, March 1991, 16–17.

⁹⁶ Sylvette Lemke, “Jubiläumsfeier in Schönfließ,” *Heimatkalendar für den Stadt- und Landkreis Eisenhüttenstadt* 10 (1992), 47.

Since the 1990s, numerous publications have appeared about the history of Fürstenberg in different eras, but mostly before its incorporation into Eisenhüttenstadt.⁹⁷ A civic association has erected several memorials to honor Fürstenberg's suppressed and all but forgotten past.⁹⁸

Fürstenberg now occupies a disproportionate place in the area's general constellation of urban cultural memory. Its symbolic importance has increased, although its share of Eisenhüttenstadt's total urban space has decreased.⁹⁹ This has not led to the integration of the whole town into a single long history in which socialism was only one element. Rather, the older districts of the town acquired a relatively independent identity and linking them to the "new town" was viewed somewhat negatively. This is especially true for Fürstenberg. The Soviet occupation, the GDR period, and especially the town's incorporation into Eisenhüttenstadt are all commented upon with an unmistakable negative slant in post-1990 publications.¹⁰⁰ The publications frame unrealized plans of the late 1960s for demolition of a large part of Fürstenberg as a hostile act by the GDR and the new town directed against the older town, which amounted to no less than an existential threat. In an essay about the planned demolitions,

⁹⁷ See e.g. Klaus-Dieter Gansleweit, Erich Opitz, and Manfred Schieche, *Das Alte Fürstenberg (Oder)* (Erfurt: Sutton, 1998); Gemeindegemeinderat der Nikolaikirche Fürstenberg, ed., *Auferstanden. Die Wiedereinweihung der Nikolaikirche zu Fürstenberg* (Jacobsdorf: Die Furt, 1999); Bürgervereinigung "Fürstenberg (Oder)" e. V., ed., "Die russische Kommandantur verlangt...": *Eine regionale Quellensammlung der ersten Nachkriegsjahre für Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung 1945–1949* (Eisenhüttenstadt, 2003); Martha Schulze, "Hoffentlich überstehen wir diese böse Zeit": *Das Fluchttagebuch*, ed. Erich Opitz (Eisenhüttenstadt, 2009); Bürgervereinigung "Fürstenberg (Oder)" e. V., ed., *Fürstenberger Blätter. Beiträge zur Geschichte von Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung*, vol. 1, 2011; Bürgervereinigung "Fürstenberg" e. V., ed., *Fürstenberger Blätter. Beiträge zur Geschichte von Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung*, vol. 2, 2017; Hagen Bernard, "Als Deutschlands schönste Tierheimchefin in den Fürstenberger Blättern – Jana Feister," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, April 5, 2021, <https://www.moz.de/lokales/eisenhuettenstadt/geschichte-als-in-fuerstenberg-russen-gegen-russen-kaempften-56085818.html>.

⁹⁸ See e.g. Erich Opitz, "Heinrich Pritzsche – ein verdienstvoller Bürgermeister unserer Stadt," *Stadtspiegel*, August 1998, 22–23.

⁹⁹ Wolfgang Anton, "Pendler und Zuzügler. Eine Industriegesellschaft formiert sich," in *Eisenhüttenstadt: "erste sozialistische Stadt Deutschlands,"* ed. Arbeitsgruppe Stadtgeschichte Eisenhüttenstadt (Berlin: Be.bra Verlag, 1999), 128; Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Klaus-Dieter Gansleweit and Erich Opitz, "Fürstenberg (Oder) im Wandel der Zeiten (Zeittafel)," *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung (Festschrift zur 750-Jahr-Feier von Fürstenberg/Oder)* 23 (2005), 51; Wolfgang de Bruyn, "Grußwort von Dr. Wolfgang de Bruyn," *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 23 (2005), 8–9; "Grußwort von Paul Jurrack," *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 23 (2005), 10–11; Norbert Brose, "DDR-Alltag und Nachwendzeit aus der Sicht eines Fürstenbergers," *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 23 (2005), 113–120.

Opitz went so far as to use the term “Final Solution,” which inevitably evokes associations with the Holocaust.¹⁰¹ These negative assessments of the relations between Eisenhüttenstadt and Fürstenberg were not held only by Fürstenberg’s active mnemonic actors. They represented the broader mood among Fürstenbergers.¹⁰² The authors of *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt* [1997] quote an employee of the Oder shipyard who says that Fürstenberg has “a completely different history, it has nothing to do with the town, it’s as old as the hills.”¹⁰³

As the *Verschiebung* strategy did not dominate, Eisenhüttenstadt’s neighborhoods continued to reinforce their historically separate identities, resulting in a split between their memories and those of the inhabitants of Eisenhüttenstadt proper. In this case, the term “split” does not refer to a competition for hegemony between different narratives of memory, rather to their dissociation and divergence. For example, the memory narratives promoted by the *Heimatvereins*, or local heritage associations, do not attempt to assert a distinct version of Eisenhüttenstadt’s identity, but simply to promote their own identity. The separateness of the new town and Fürstenberg is visible in the urban space, especially after the demolition of some empty GDR-era apartment buildings.¹⁰⁴

The former village of Schönfließ also maintains its own identity, although it is less salient than that of Fürstenberg. The Heimatverein in Schönfließ describes the village as an agro-industrial village (where brown coal has been mined since the nineteenth century) with distinct, rich traditions of its own that deserve to be revived, preserved and continued. The Heimatverein holds an annual local festival, organizes a carnival in accord with old village customs, and hosts other, smaller events. They also keep a chronicle of the village.¹⁰⁵ The participation of the inhabitants of Schönfließ in the construction of the steelworks and of the town of Eisenhüttenstadt is remembered rather fondly, in contrast

¹⁰¹ Erich Opitz, “‘Endlösung’ für Fürstenberg (Oder)? Zur Bauplanung in der zweiten Hälfte der sechziger Jahren,” *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 19 (2001), 47–51.

¹⁰² Bartscherer et al., *Eisenhüttenstadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, 128.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 174.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 98–100; Ruth Klawun, “Eisenhüttenstadt, eine Planstadt nach den ‘Sechzehn Grundsätzen des Städtebaus’ – Erhaltung und Perspektiven,” in *Kommunismus unter Denkmalschutz?*, ed. Jürgen Danyel, Thomas Drachenberg, and Irmgard Zündorf (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2018), 164–166; Stefan Lötsch, “Weitere 205 Wohnungen in Eisenhüttenstadt stehen 2021 auf der Abrissliste,” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, January 6, 2021, https://www.moz.de/lokales/eisenhuettenstadt/stadumbau-der-vii.-wohnkomplex_in-eisenhuettenstadt-schrumpft-weiter-49390826.html.

¹⁰⁵ Hans-Joachim Hübner, “Der Schönfließener Heimatverein e. V.,” *Stadtspiegel*, May 1994, 27.

to Fürstenberg.¹⁰⁶ The small village of Diehlo, which was annexed by Eisenhüttenstadt in 1993, preserves its separate village character but is not active in self-promotion.¹⁰⁷

A *Lieu de Mémoire* of the GDR? Marketing and Privatization

Eisenhüttenstadt had to live down a negative reputation after the *Wende* [turn] and reunification. The town presented itself as having favorable conditions for industrial development and high recreational and residential value. At the same time, the specialness of the town as the “first socialist town” in Germany, its architecture, and city planning were neglected because its socialist roots were part of its negative image.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the first four residential complexes built for the steelworkers in the 1950s were given heritage status by the unified Germany.¹⁰⁹ This allowed the town to modernize and renovate the buildings with the help of various subsidies. Redevelopment of the rapidly shrinking town mainly focused on upgrading those four housing complexes.¹¹⁰ The monumentality of the complexes’ architecture was a challenge because it was associated with totalitarianism and lacked a human scale.¹¹¹ In local publications, the subject of architecture or urban planning is either depoliticized or presented with an emphasis on aesthetics. The gap between utopia and reality is discussed in critical discourse terms.¹¹² Criticism of socialist monumentalism is most evident in discussions of the failure to complete construction of the city’s center, which was

¹⁰⁶ Heinz-Joachim Hübner, “Schönfließer Geschichte von damals,” *Stadtspiegel*, June 2000, 28–29.

¹⁰⁷ Gabriele Urban, “Alte und neue Ortsteile Eisenhüttenstadts,” *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 18 (2000), 31.

¹⁰⁸ Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 176; Klawun, “Eisenhüttenstadt, eine Planstadt,” 162.

¹⁰⁹ Parts of the residential complexes were already placed under protection in the GDR in 1977 and 1984, see Klawun, “Eisenhüttenstadt, eine Planstadt,” 162.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162–166.

¹¹¹ Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 38–39.

¹¹² See e.g. Beate Melzer, “EKO-Wohnstadt 1951/1952: ursprüngliche Stadtbebauungspläne,” *Stadtspiegel*, no. 4 (March 1992), 7–8; Günter Fromm, “Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt: die ursprüngliche Pläne für den Aufbau der Stadt und des Zentralen Platzes,” *Stadtspiegel*, March 1993, 18–20; Joachim Palutzki, “Die ‘Architektur der Nationalen Bautraditionen’ in Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* (1995), 28–33; Axel Drieschner, “Sonderausstellung des Städtischen Museums ‘Planstadt Stalinstadt – StadtBauKunst,’” *Stadtspiegel*, August 2006, 20–21; Axel Drieschner, “Eine Stadtkrone für Stalinstadt,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 2006, 28–30; Marina Wehlisch, “Großgaststätte ‘Aktivist’ in Eisenhüttenstadt – ein Denkmal?,” *Kreiskalender Oder-Spree*, 1995, 36–37.

intended to serve as the dominant feature of the entire town.¹¹³ Comparisons of Eisenhüttenstadt's socialist-era architecture with that of the Nazi era advanced by some conservative actors are immediately rejected.¹¹⁴

The desire of the town administration to attract tourists was there at the beginning of the 1990s, but it was not exactly clear what would attract the tourists. Initially, emphasis was placed on nature in the surrounding area or on Fürstenberg, rather than on the new town.¹¹⁵ The idea of consciously marketing the heritage of the GDR was met with criticism from a CDU faction leader, Lothar Richter. He feared the town would become a pilgrimage site for old Stalinists.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, it was soon clear that the town's unusual history was attractive to tourists, the media, and academics.¹¹⁷ Attracting tourists by marketing the town's socialist heritage has been a recurring motif over the years, raised in various ways by the town administration.¹¹⁸ In many ways, Eisenhüttenstadt's socialist legacy is now seen as a commodity or a "soft" factor for attracting investment and tourists. Ludwig talks about the town's splintered image: "There is the self-perception of being an industrial town with favorable living conditions on the one hand ... and, on the other hand, a perception from the

¹¹³ Drieschner, "Eine Stadtkrone für Stalinstadt."

¹¹⁴ Fromm, "Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt: die ursprüngliche Pläne"; Herbert Härtel, "Eine notwendige Anmerkung zum Beitrag des Herrn Fromm," *Stadtspiegel*, March 1993, 21–22.

¹¹⁵ Hans Ness, Landrat, "An alle Fraktionen der SVV und des Kreistages vom 22.10.1990 – Bürgervotum Stadt- und Landkreismen," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (14.11.1990), StA EHS; "Fremdenverkehrsverband wirbt für Tourismus. Interview mit Silvia Schulz," *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 22 (August 1991): 7.

¹¹⁶ Arns, "Ein Museum mit lebendigem Inventar"; the CDU expressed the same objections with regard to the documentation center "Alltagskultur der DDR". See Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 180; Klaus Rachow, "Kunst ist schön, macht aber viel Arbeit (Karl Valentin)," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 13 (1995), 71.

¹¹⁷ Ludwig, "Wo die Zukunft Gegenwart war," 170–171; Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt*; Ruth May, *Planstadt Stalinstadt: Ein Grundriss der frühen DDR, aufgesucht in Eisenhüttenstadt* (Dortmund: IRPUD, 1999); Wolfgang Kil, "Der letzte Monolith. Baudenkmal Stalinstadt," *Bauwelt*, no. 10 (1992): 497–505; Marco Schmidt, *Eisenhüttenstadt – die erste sozialistische Planstadt der DDR: eine Analyse zur Umsetzung der 16 Grundsätze des sozialistischen Städtebaus* (Hamburg: Diplomatica Verlag, 2012); Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*; Andreas Ludwig, "Eisenhüttenstadt," in *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 128–138.

¹¹⁸ Klaus Rachow, "Mit Selbstbewusstsein ein neues Bild der Stadt aufbauen," *Stadtspiegel*, February 1993, 7; Maria Minew, "Interview mit Sylvia Schulz, Beauftragte für Stadtmarketing," *Stadtspiegel*, February 1995, 6–7; Jörg Ihlow, "Stadtmarketing als neue Aufgabe in der Stadtentwicklung Eisenhüttenstadts," *Stadtspiegel*, June 2005, 5–7; In the final report of the project "Eisenhüttenstadt 2030" (2005), tourism was again mentioned as an important factor in economic development. The main focus of the report was on architecture, industry and nature. See Bartscherer et al., *Eisenhüttenstadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, 145–146.

outside that the urban and industrial heritage of Eisenhüttenstadt is something special in comparison to new towns elsewhere and with the industrial landscape of Germany.”¹¹⁹

The private sector has also come up with marketing initiatives. One example is from Timo Schön, a business consultant from Braunschweig. In 1993, he promoted the idea of building an open-air museum on a town’s island, a popular recreational area for residents. The museum would exhibit “curiosities of the GDR” and be a kind of GDR in miniature. As correspondent Christian Arns of *Die Tageszeitung* noted: “[T]he few people Schön has taken into his confidence are not enthusiastic about it. The idea of one day living in a museum doesn’t appeal at all.”¹²⁰

In 1993, the Alltagskultur der DDR documentation center was founded under the direction of the West Berlin historian Andreas Ludwig.¹²¹ This was not meant to be a museum of “Ostalgie.” According to Ludwig’s conception, the dictatorship and everyday life should not be thought of as opposites, but as complementary, dialectically connected things. The documentation center’s exhibitions were expected to encourage a critical examination of the past.¹²² The town itself and the building (a former nursery) that houses the documentation center provide a good backdrop for a museum of everyday life in the GDR.¹²³ However, the history of Eisenhüttenstadt was not the center’s main focus.¹²⁴ On the one hand, the documentation center provides the town with a unique museum of everyday life based on a scientific concept and a unique collection; on the other hand, it reinforces the idea of the town as an open-air museum of the GDR and a “reflection of a completed social epoch.”¹²⁵ Various researchers and observers documented the

¹¹⁹ Kladnik and Ludwig, “Cultural Heritage,” 58.

¹²⁰ Arns, “Ein Museum mit lebendigem Inventar.”

¹²¹ Regina Göschl, *DDR-Alltag im Museum: geschichtskulturelle Diskurse, Funktionen und Fallbeispiele im vereinten Deutschland* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2019), 107.

¹²² Andreas Ludwig, “Das Gewohnte wird Fremd. Ein Dokumentationszentrum der Alltagskultur entsteht,” *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 14 (1996), 24–27; Göschl, *DDR-Alltag im Museum*, 138–173, 312–313; Kerstin Langwagen, *Die DDR im Vitrinenformat: zur Problematik musealer Annäherungen an ein kollektives Gedächtnis* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2016), 220–221.

¹²³ For details see Göschl, *DDR-Alltag im Museum*, 130–138.

¹²⁴ This was one of the criticisms raised in 2012–2013 during the controversy over cutting municipal funding for the center. The main reason for the cuts was the municipality’s overindebtedness. See *ibid.*, 122–123; Sabine Rennefanz, “Eisenhüttenstadt: Streit um die DDR-Erinnerung,” *Berliner Zeitung*, December 2, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210420185735/https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/eisenhuettenstadt-streit-um-die-ddr-erinnerung-li.39837>.

¹²⁵ Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 235.

reluctance of Eisenhüttenstadt's inhabitants to live in a GDR museum and their feeling at the same time that they were already living in one.¹²⁶

Surveys done for the EisenhüttenStadt 2030 project showed a clear gap between the perception of the town by external observers/visitors and the perception by its inhabitants. When asked what they would show visitors from out of town (multiple answers were possible), 83% of the townspeople answered "the green environment" and 59% said "the island." Only 46% of the answers mentioned the "historic new town."¹²⁷ There is a discrepancy between how the outside world sees the town and what its people consider important about it. This clear split in the inside and outside perceptions of the town can also be explained by the weight of the hegemonic memory of the GDR. Citizens do not want their town to be reduced to a mere relic of the GDR past, although that does not mean that they completely reject that past or feel no connection to it at all.¹²⁸

The History Workshop existed in Eisenhüttenstadt from 1994 to 2004. It was established at the initiative of historian Dagmar Semmelmann, who wanted to introduce a more subjective, individual, and at the same time multi-layered view of the past. Semmelmann attempted to look at the town's past from the perspective of the people who lived in it and their feelings and experiences.¹²⁹ The workshop held and recorded about 40 "big" round tables. About 200 residents participated, speaking on such topics as the years in which the steelworks and the town were constructed, popular education, trade and supply, and the relationship between the state and the church.¹³⁰ The plan was that that the workshop would record and preserve memories and facilitate discussion. Consequently, it would be a kind of collective *Aufarbeitung* [working through] of the

¹²⁶ Tino Kotte and Rita Finkbeiner, "'Heimatismuseum' in der Zukunft? Versuch einer Konzeption für das Städtische Museum Eisenhüttenstadt," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 19 (2001), 61; Bartscherer et al., *EisenhüttenStadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, 36–37; Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore*, 7.

¹²⁷ Bartscherer et al., *EisenhüttenStadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, 231–232.

¹²⁸ Semmelmann describes some of the logic of rejection and resignation that she uncovered in the course of the history workshop's activities. See Dagmar Semmelmann, "Nachwort," in *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch: Geschichte/n der ersten sozialistischen Stadt Deutschlands*, ed. Dagmar Semmelmann, Gudrun Prengel, and Ursula Krüger, vol. 1 (Berlin: Ed. Bodoni, 2000), 291–293; it corresponds with what Meyen writes in Meyen, "*Wir haben freier gelebt*," 13, 225–227.

¹²⁹ Helga Boehm, "Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt e. V. stellt sich vor," *Stadtspiegel*, October 1994, 28–29.

¹³⁰ Dagmar Semmelmann, Gudrun Prengel, and Ursula Krüger, eds., *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Ed. Bodoni, 2004), 7.

past.¹³¹ By involving various citizens of the town, the workshop gave a voice to those who did not have access to public resources otherwise.¹³² As Semmelmann writes, the intent was to document “[the] diversity of ways of experiencing and evaluating the GDR’s past, including critical voices that remained unarticulated or even suppressed during GDR times.”¹³³

The meetings offered a very different perspective than the hegemonic memory. It remembered the GDR mainly for its positive aspects. The focus was not on social and political power but on life experiences. The reminiscences people presented reflected an *Arrangementgedächtnis* (a memory of arrangements) and sometimes a *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* (a memory of progress), while the aspects that constituted the *Diktaturgedächtnis* were hardly ever mentioned.¹³⁴ The sense of nostalgia¹³⁵ was so strong that the initiators of the history workshop themselves regretted that the participants’ perspectives were so one-sided.¹³⁶ The work of the group highlighted the split between the public memory and the private memories of the residents of Eisenhüttenstadt.

The initiators of the workshop regarded this split between public and private memories as a problem that needed to be solved.¹³⁷ The most important result of their work was the publication of two volumes of the *Eisenhüttenstädter*

¹³¹ Boehm, “Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt e. V. stellt sich vor”; Günter Fromm, “Die subjektive Sicht auf die Stadtgeschichte,” *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 14 (1996), 28–30.

¹³² Group Popular Memory, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method,” in *Making Histories. Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, ed. Richard Johnson et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 207.

¹³³ Semmelmann, “Nachwort,” 289.

¹³⁴ Sabrow, “Die DDR erinnern.”

¹³⁵ Although the concept of nostalgia is often criticized for how commonly it appears in Eastern European memory politics, I consider it useful because it denotes something that people do actually feel. I understand “nostalgia” to be a cultural, polysemous, and affective practice that expresses a longing for something that has been lost. It is built on a person’s memory of the past and awareness of the impossibility of reliving that past, in short, on the presence of the absent. See Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko, “The Politics of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-Socialist Practices,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2004): 490–493, doi: 10.1353/imp.2004.0067.

¹³⁶ Boehm, “Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt e. V. stellt sich vor,” 29; Semmelmann, “Nachwort,” 291.

¹³⁷ Within the workshop itself, there was great diversity in the participants’ views of Eisenhüttenstadt’s history and its present. Occasionally, sharp conflicts developed from those differences. They nearly led the workshop to collapse. Of the 14 people active in the work of the history workshop, about eight of them were either members of the PDS or close to the PDS. Author’s conversation with Dagmar Semmelmann on January 18, 2022, Berlin; Dagmar Semmelmann, Gudrun Prengel, and Ursula Krüger, eds., *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch: Geschichte/n der ersten sozialistischen Stadt Deutschlands*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Ed. Bodoni, 2000), 494–495; about two active co-creators see Dagmar Semmelmann, *Porträts von drei Lehrerinnen aus Eisenhüttenstadt. Drei*

Lesebuch.¹³⁸ The two volumes are filled with excerpts from conversations with contemporary witnesses to Eisenhüttenstadt's history, grouped according to themes and edited for better readability. The selection of testimonies was aimed at providing a critical view of the past and avoiding its idealization, but interpretation and evaluation are left to the reader. The work of the History Workshop represented a dialogue in which people with different experiences and points of view listened to each other. In selecting texts, the editors, who themselves held a critical view of the GDR, curated a dialogue with their interlocutors. The result is a negotiated, complex, and balanced version of local history.

The attention the workshop organizers paid to private memory and the plurality of experiences made it possible to avoid apologizing for the former regime and its slogans without devaluing people's experiences and aspirations. But this created two problems: how to construct a collective memory and a collective identity out of the inhabitants' many fragmented experiences, and how to deal with nostalgic motifs that from the hegemonic point of view were considered as trivializing the old regime, or at least how to encourage self-reflection from the workshop participants.

A similar divide between the actors' attempts to construct a critical narrative of the GDR and the nostalgic feelings of some residents was apparent in the activities of the town museum.¹³⁹ Thalia Gigerenzer, who visited the museum in 2008, quotes two visitors' entries from the museum's guest book: "And then someone comes along and says it was all worth nothing! Thank you!" And: "As a participant in the name planning and a resident of the town since 1954, I would like to thank everyone involved in the exhibition for this journey through the memory of the years of reconstruction, pride, and pioneering. It helps us to endure the present."¹⁴⁰ The split between the public, hegemonic memory and private memories is characteristic of eastern Germany and has been discussed several times already. For other cities, local narratives and the split in the memories of the GDR are not so important because they are subsumed into a longer

Varianten einer engagierten Identifikation mit der DDR und ihrem Schulsystem [Marthel Sturm, Helga Boehm, Ursula Krüger], vol. 2–3 (Berlin, 2014).

¹³⁸ Semmelmann, Prengel, and Krüger, *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch*; some excerpts from conversations also appeared earlier in the *Stadtspiegel* and the *Heimatkalender*. "Auskünfte über die Arbeit der 'Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt,'" *Stadtspiegel*, November 1994, 28–29; "Auskünfte über die Arbeit der 'Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt,'" *Stadtspiegel*, December 1994, 24–25; Fromm, "Die subjektive Sicht auf die Stadtgeschichte."

¹³⁹ Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore*, 58–64.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore*, 61 and another example 145–146.

local history. In Eisenhüttenstadt, however, the split has led to difficulty in normalizing the town's identity.

None of the actors studied were able to construct a mythology that would override the old myth of reconstruction yet would be appealing enough so as not to dismiss the lived experiences of locals. On the one hand, there is the rather bleak image of the town as a museum of the GDR (which is how the town is presented to the outside world). This image reduces the town to a relic of an anti-human dictatorship that is long gone. On the other hand, there have been attempts to construct a critical narrative that reflects human experiences and creates some distance from the town's past. This new narrative is contradictory and complex. It recognizes the past but offers no collective identity or anything to unite citizens across generations. It treats the past as something external to today and outdated, no longer a reference point and model for the present as it was under the GDR.

The history of the town's development can today be presented as a contradictory, zigzag course and not as a continuous upward trajectory as it was under the GDR. However, this approach creates unease and instability among the inhabitants, which the myth wants to avoid because it should promote a clear orientation and confidence.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, their approach to the history of Eisenhüttenstadt does not provide the townspeople with the affection that is needed for construction of a new identity.

Sometimes post-reunification texts can be found in the local media where the founding myth is repeated almost unchanged. However, it is completely depoliticized. The role of the SED is practically ignored and an allegedly widespread covert opposition to its rule is constructed.¹⁴² This strategy on the part of the authors of those texts involves a decoupling of the founding myth from its origins in the state socialist regime. However, it is not very convincing and has not been pursued much further. It does, however, point out some of the difficulties the town faces in constructing its identity.

¹⁴¹ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C. H. Beck, 2006), 40; Roland Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 296; Münkler, *Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen*, 11.

¹⁴² See e.g. Herbert Nicolaus, "55 Jahre EKO Stahl," *Stadtspiegel*, October 2005, 4–6. In another article, Hans Bentzien, once a high SED functionary who fell out of favor during the GDR era, describes GDR Minister Fritz Selbmann as a covert critic of the regime. See Hans Bentzien, "Ein Mann der ersten Stunde: Fritz Selbmann," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 20 (2002), 75–81.

Narratives of Victimhood and Resistance

Narratives of victimhood and resistance to state socialism have occupied a significant part of the public sphere since the 1990s. In the local press, in museums, and in public memorials, narratives emphasizing the violence, arbitrariness, and political oppression of Soviet occupation and the SED government have replaced the old GDR narratives of Soviet-German friendship, liberation, and the victories of socialism. Victims have replaced heroes.¹⁴³ Numerous articles appear in the local press, mostly on important anniversaries like those of the June 17, 1953 uprising and the Wende in 1990. Early on in the construction of the new history of the town after 1990, the 1953 uprising was recognized as a popular uprising. The celebration of it reached a peak in 2003 when a commemorative plaque was unveiled in the Fürstenberg town hall.¹⁴⁴ Most of the articles about the revolution and reunification published in Eisenhüttenstadt were penned by a single author.¹⁴⁵ They follow a “schematic narrative

¹⁴³ “Ausstellung ‘Umschulungslager existieren nicht,’” *Stadtspiegel*, November 1999, 28–29; Günter Fromm, “Wie war das in Fürstenberg/Oder? Von der Schaffung der Einheitspartei 1946 bis zur Verkündung der Einheitsliste 1950,” *Kulturspiegel Eisenhüttenstadt*, September 1990, 18–20; Günter Fromm, “Als Fürstenberg Festungsstadt war...,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 1995, 4–5; Katrin Jänisch, “Fluchterlebnisse einer Heimatvertriebenen,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 1995, 22–23; Dieter Sichtung, “Kriegserreignisse 1945 bei Fürstenberg/Oder,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 1995, 26–27; Günter Fromm, “Im KZ Buchenwald, aber nach Kriegsende,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 1998, 24–26; Erich Opitz, “Dokumente aus dem Stadtarchiv. Die Befreier brachten nicht nur Brot,” *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 12 (1994), 58–59; Günter Fromm, “Volkstrauertag,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 2003, 14–16; Günter Fromm, “Vor 60 Jahren,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 2005, 2–4; Erich Opitz, “Ereignisse der Nachkriegszeit in Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung,” *Fürstenberger Blätter. Beiträge zur Geschichte von Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung* 1 (2011): 71–84; Günter Fromm, “Volkstrauertag,” *Stadtspiegel*, November 2010, 17–20; Heinz Bräuer, “In Memoriam Reinhard Gnettner,” *Stadtspiegel*, August 1994, 4–5; Anna Kaminsky, ed., *Orte des Erinnerns: Gedenkzeichen, Gedenkstätten und Museen zur Diktatur in SBZ und DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2016), 183.

¹⁴⁴ Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 49–58; Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 63–66; Günter Fromm, “Vor 50 Jahren,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 2003, 19; Günter Fromm, “Vor 50 Jahren – Juniaufstand,” *Stadtspiegel*, June 2003, 10–13; 1953. *Ein Jahr in Politik und Alltag. Presseberichte aus Ost und West. Begleitpublikation zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung im Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* (Eisenhüttenstadt: Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR, 2003); Kaminsky, ed., *Orte des Erinnerns*, 163–164.

¹⁴⁵ Günter Fromm, “Rückschau im November 92 auf den November 1989 in Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Stadtspiegel*, no. 11 (November 1992): 19–20; Günter Fromm, “Wende und basisdemokratische Bewegung in Eisenhüttenstadt seit 1989,” *Kreiskalendar Oder-Spree. 10 Jahre danach*, 1999, 27–34; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Das letzte Zetelfalten,” *Stadtspiegel*, May 1999, 26–28; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Wende in der DDR,” *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 17 (1999), 33–41; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Forum (SED-) Medienpolitik und Meinungsfreiheit,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 1999, 30–31; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Das Gesicht zum Volke,” *Stadtspiegel*, November 1999, 12–13; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren:

template”¹⁴⁶ filled with local facts that support a “narrowing of the revolution and reunification.”¹⁴⁷ The oral histories Semmelmann collected show that as a result of the Wende, the ideas promoted by the GDR about what happened on June 17, 1953 were substantially revised. After the Wende, many former SED members renounced their previous understanding of the uprising and embraced a new hegemonic framework for the memory of the protests – that they were a popular uprising favoring political democracy.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the process of change and rethinking took place in communicative memory among individuals as well as on the cultural level.

I have already mentioned examples of how the victims of the SED regime are remembered, but nevertheless they play a subordinate role in the general constellation of the town’s memory. The memorials to victims and resistance are not located in the center of the new town, but in Fürstenberg. Moreover, they are very small in size. Only one exhibit in the city museum is dedicated to the 1953 uprising. The protests of 1989 are not commemorated in any way in the urban space. A search for a monument or a street dedicated to the resistance or the people involved in the opposition is hopeless, although such resistance did take place.¹⁴⁹ The only street (named in 2002) whose name can be connected in some way with the resistance is named for Eisenhüttenstadt’s first parish priest, who long fought for the construction of a church in the “first socialist town.”

Eisenhüttenstädter Stasiobjekte wurden aufgelöst,” *Stadtspiegel*, December 1999, 24–25; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Demos, Runde Tische und Wahlkampf,” *Stadtspiegel*, 2000, 24–25; Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Runde Tische und demokratische Volkskammerwahlen”; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Vorbote der Marktwirtschaft, ehrenamtliche Stadträte und Stasiobjekte,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 2000, 24–25; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: rasante Veränderungen in der Kommunalpolitik und im Alltag,” *Stadtspiegel*, July 2000, 10–11; Günter Fromm, “Der 17. Juni 1953 und der November 1989 in Eisenhüttenstadt,” in *Orte der Freiheit und der Demokratie in Deutschland*, ed. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. (Sankt Augustin, 2010), 48–50.

¹⁴⁶ James Wertsch, “The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory,” *Ethos* 36, no. 1 (2008): 122–124.

¹⁴⁷ Martin Sabrow, “Mythos 1989,” *Deutschland Archiv*, November 28, 2019, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/300737/mythos-1989/>.

¹⁴⁸ Dagmar Semmelmann, “*Schauplatz Stalinstadt/EKO*” *Erinnerungen an den 17. Juni 1953*, vol. 2 (Potsdam: Brandenburger Verein für politische Bildung “Rosa Luxemburg”, 1993), 5–39; Dagmar Semmelmann, “Der 17. Juni in der Erinnerung ehemaliger Betriebsangehöriger des Eisenhüttenkombinates Ost in Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt,” in *Das unverstandene Menetekel – Der 17. Juni 1953* (Potsdam: Brandenburger Verein für politische Bildung “Rosa Luxemburg”, 1993), 38–50.

¹⁴⁹ Günter Fromm, “Gedanken zu unseren Eisenhüttenstädter Straßennamen,” *Kulturspiegel Eisenhüttenstadt*, November 1990, 9; Werner, “Ergebnis der 2. Beratung der AG ‘Straßennamen’ vom 27.04.1992.”

That street is also located in Fürstenberg.¹⁵⁰ This dearth of recognition cannot be compared with Nowa Huta in Poland, where memories of the resistance against the former communist regime take center stage.¹⁵¹ In Dunaújváros in Hungary, a monument to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution is located right on the main square.¹⁵²

The economic difficulties of the 1990s, the persisting divide between East and West Germany, the burden of the memory of the Nazi past, and the unfinished debate about what the SED regime actually represented might partly explain Eisenhüttenstadt's relative lack of commemorative names and monuments.¹⁵³ However, it does not explain why most of the memorials to the 1953 resistance and repression are located in Fürstenberg and not the center of Eisenhüttenstadt.

There are a number of possible explanations for that. The people who actively participated in the 1953 uprising probably left the town and even the GDR after it took place, since most of them were new to the town anyway.¹⁵⁴ Most of today's residents and their parents came to Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt in the years after the uprising. The 1953 protests and those in the fall of 1989 were not as massive in Eisenhüttenstadt as they were elsewhere in the GDR. The church there did not play a role as a platform for opposition groups. The first dialogue between the 1989 protesters and the SED was initiated by the SED's district leadership on October 25, 1989. "Monday demonstrations" did take place, but they were not as large, relatively speaking, as in other cities in the GDR.¹⁵⁵ The town's SED mayor, Ottokar Wundersee, is reputed to have said, "The revolution

¹⁵⁰ Jörg Niendorf, "Eine Straße für den Missionar," *Berliner Morgenpost*, April 9, 2006, <https://www.morgenpost.de/printarchiv/wwbm/article104425789/Eine-Strasse-fuer-den-Missionar.html>.

¹⁵¹ Zechenter, "The Repositioning of Postsocialist Narratives," 143–146; Pozniak, "Reinventing a Model Socialist Steel Town," 115–116, 122, 125–126.

¹⁵² Sándor Horváth, "New Towns, Old Spaces? Hidden Paths of Memory and Representations of City Spaces in Sztálinváros, Hungary," in *Neue Städte. Vom Projekt der Moderne zur Authentisierung*, ed. Andreas Ludwig (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 82.

¹⁵³ These factors are enumerated by David Art. See David Art, "Making Room for November 9, 1989? The Fall of the Berlin Wall in German Politics and Memory," in *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 195–212.

¹⁵⁴ This is probably true for other places as well. See Myriam Renaudot, "Der Siebzehnte Juni," in *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 518; Fromm, "Vor 50 Jahren – Juniaufstand."

¹⁵⁵ Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 105; Fromm, "Vor zehn Jahren: Eisenhüttenstädter Stasiobjekte wurden aufgelöst," 24–25.

would not have started from Eisenhüttenstadt.”¹⁵⁶ Election results in the town show above-average support for the leftist PDS/Die Linke – between 25.5 and 35.9 percent of the vote in 1990, 1993, 1998, 2003, and 2008.¹⁵⁷ So it is not just a matter of retrospective nostalgia for GDR. The poll results indicate that a significant number of residents, many of whom were involved in the construction of the GDR, still feel connected to it, the ideals of socialism, and the image of the “first socialist town.” However, that does not mean that they identify completely with the old GDR regime and its policies of oppression.¹⁵⁸ Nor does it mean that those who vote for other contemporary parties do not have warm feelings for the past and pride in what was built under state socialist rule. Their feelings are not as obvious as those of the residents who still vote for socialism because they can have various motivations for voting as they do.¹⁵⁹

Celebrating the Founding of the Town: Desacralization and Emptying Out

Eisenhüttenstadt’s green spaces, the absence of dark tenement courtyards, and the availability of kindergartens and schools are essential, if not the most important, advantages the town offers in the daily lives of its residents. But the elements of everyday routine do not constitute an identity.¹⁶⁰ Because they contrast with everyday life, local festivals contribute to the formation of civic identity

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Christian von Ditfurth, “Das schwarze Loch. Wie die CDU aus der Geschichte floh,” in *Blockflöten. Wie die CDU ihre realsozialistische Vergangenheit verdrängt* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1991), 137. I say “reputed to have said” because I could not find the original source of this quotation. The earliest mention of it I found is in von Ditfurth’s text, but he does not give the source.

¹⁵⁷ “Vorläufiges Ergebnis der Kommunalwahlen am 6. Mai 1990,” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, May 8, 1990, 3; “Endgültiges Ergebnis der Volkskammerwahlen vom 18.3.1990 im Bezirk Frankfurt (Oder),” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, March 24, 1990, 5; Landesamt für Datenverarbeitung und Statistik Brandenburg, ed., *Kommunalwahlen 1993* (Potsdam, 1994), 114; Landesamt für Datenverarbeitung und Statistik Brandenburg, ed., *Kommunalwahlen 1998* (Potsdam, 1998), 247; Landesbetrieb für Datenverarbeitung und Statistik Brandenburg, ed., *Kommunalwahlen 26.10.2003* (Potsdam, 2003), 172–173; Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, ed., *Statistischer Bericht. Kommunalwahlen im Land Brandenburg am 28.09.2008* (Potsdam, 2008), 86; Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 117.

¹⁵⁸ Neller, *DDR-Nostalgie*, 293.

¹⁵⁹ On the connection between contemporary pro-socialist political orientation, GDR nostalgia, and attachment to the GDR, see *ibid.*, 299–300.

¹⁶⁰ Jan Assmann, “Der zweidimensionale Mensch: Das Fest als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses,” in *Das Fest und das Heilige. Kontrapunkte des Alltags*, ed. Theo Sundermeier (Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1991), 15.

more than any other medium for transmitting collective memory.¹⁶¹ A town's festivals construct the group identity of its inhabitants and affirm it by reference to its founding myths, invocation of its great past, and the opportunities they offer for collective action.¹⁶²

The first major celebrations of Stalinstadt's founding were held in 1960 to mark its tenth anniversary. The *Hüttenfestspiele* lasted for a whole week. At that time the town and the steelworks were magnificently decorated. Various events and mass displays of physical culture were organized to involve and attract as many residents to the festivities as possible. A sort of "passion play," *Blast das Feuer an* [Stoke the Fire], was performed every evening. It staged the founding myth of the construction of the town and the steelworks over and over again. The play set the tone for the week of celebrations and even years later was remembered fondly.¹⁶³ The official founding day was fixed as August 18, 1950, the day the "first blow of the axe" began the felling of the surrounding forest. One constantly repeated story told of how the then-Minister of Heavy Industry, Fritz Selbmann, traveled to the region following a decision of the Third Party Congress and announced to assembled spectators that a new industrial area and a new town would be built on the site. He then symbolically struck a tree with an axe and cut it down, giving the signal to start clearing the area.¹⁶⁴

The Hüttenfest was held regularly. High-ranking guests were always invited to the anniversary events.¹⁶⁵ Newspaper articles glorified the legendary "blow of the axe." They lauded the first builders as heroic role models and praised the role of young people in building the first socialist town.¹⁶⁶ They highlighted the constant growth and development of the town. Of course, they insisted that the town's growth would not have been possible without the leadership of the Party and the kind support of the Soviet Union. A parade down Leninallee was

¹⁶¹ Kazimierz Żygulski, *Święto i kultura* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych, 1981), 7–8; Assmann, "Der zweidimensionale Mensch," 24.

¹⁶² Żygulski, *Święto i kultura*, 159–160.

¹⁶³ Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 71–74; Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 190–192; Andreas Ludwig, "50 Jahre Eisenhüttenstadt: Stadtjubiläen und Geschichte im politischen Kontext," *Die alte Stadt. Vierteljahresschrift für Stadtgeschichte, Stadtsoziologie und Denkmalpflege* 28, no. 1 (2001): 44–46.

¹⁶⁴ See e.g. Heinz Colditz and Martin Lücke, *Stalinstadt. Neues Leben – neue Menschen* (Berlin: Kongress-Verlag, 1958), 5–6; Hoffmann and Oldenburg, *Stalinstadt*, 7; Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost Betriebsparteiorganisation des VEB Bandstahlkombinat "Hermann Matern": 11–10.

¹⁶⁵ See e.g. "Prominente Gäste," *Unser Friedenswerk*, no. 33 (August 26, 1965).

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. Dieter Essler, "15 Jahre Werk und Stadt: Von Anfang an dabei," *Unser Friedenswerk*, no. 31 (August 12, 1965).

the central event of the celebrations.¹⁶⁷ “Formal” traditions like the Hüttenfest fostered a communal bond among the town’s residents.¹⁶⁸ The identity crisis of the 1990s was manifested in the fact that the town’s founding days were not celebrated after reunification until the year 2000. The last time Eisenhüttenstadt held a festival in honor of its founding before that was in 1990, when it was still in the GDR. Judging by the photos, it was a rather more modest celebration than previous ones, and already lacked the paeons to socialism and explicit socialist messaging.¹⁶⁹

After 1990, official distaste for the state-socialist past made it difficult to hold such celebrations in Eisenhüttenstadt.¹⁷⁰ The first major post-reunification celebration occurred in 2000, representing a “return of the repressed.” It took place from August 24 to August 27 (not a week earlier, which would have required direct attention to the legendary “first axe blow”). The celebration was held along Lindenallee under the banner, “Walk Through History and the Future.” Individual sections of the route corresponded to each of the five decades of the town’s history. The section closest to the steelworks was labeled “a nostalgic shindig” on the festival map. The last section of the route represented 2010. The main festival stage was located there and the town’s mission statement “Eisenhüttenstadt 2010” was presented there.¹⁷¹ Each section of the route exhibited successively older motor vehicles (not only from the GDR and the Eastern Bloc). On August 27, a classic car parade and a historical fashion show were held.¹⁷² Popular music from the past decades accompanied the whole festival. The Friedrich-Wolf-Theater presented films produced by the GDR’s DEFA studio.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ 15 Jahre Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost, *Unser Friedenswerk (Festausgabe)*, no. 32 (August, 19, 1965); *Unser Friedenswerk*, no. 25 (July 9, 1970); 20 Jahre Werk und Stadt, *Unser Friedenswerk (Festausgabe)*, no. 22/23 (June 25, 1970); *Unser Friedenswerk* 75, no. 23 (June 2, 1975); Im Zeichen des 25. Jahrestages, *Unser Friedenswerk* 75, no. 26 (July 1, 1975) 8; *Unser Friedenswerk* 75, no. 27 (July 2, 1975); *Unser Friedenswerk* 75, no. 25 (June 4, 1975); see also Andreas Ludwig, “50 Jahre Eisenhüttenstadt: Stadtjubiläen und Geschichte im politischen Kontext,” *Die alte Stadt* 28, no. 1 (2001): 46–49.

¹⁶⁸ Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 178–179; Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 192.

¹⁶⁹ “Impressionen vom Volksfest ‘40 Jahre Werk und Stadt,’” *Kulturspiegel Eisenhüttenstadt*, no. 9 (September 1990): 14–15.

¹⁷⁰ The case of Nowa Huta shows how problematic it can be to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of a socialist town. See Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 179; Pozniak, “Reinventing a Model Socialist Steel Town,” 129.

¹⁷¹ “Eisenhüttenstadt wird 50,” *Stadtspiegel*, July 2000, 2.

¹⁷² “50 – IFA-Oldtimer zum Stadtjubiläum!,” *Stadtspiegel*, August 2000, 27.

¹⁷³ “Kino Friedrich-Wolf-Theater,” *Stadtspiegel*, August 2000, 35.

The Eisenhüttenstadt 2010 mission statement for the future was devoid of ideology. It referred to very practical things such as work, leisure, quality of life and bringing town administration closer to the citizenry.¹⁷⁴ However a glimmer of a new ideological orientation can be gleaned from Mayor Rainer Werner's greeting to festival goers. He wrote, "Eisenhüttenstadt sees itself as a town in Europe and this thought should flow into our anniversary."¹⁷⁵ For the most part, however, the structure of the festival itself indicated a boom of nostalgia.

Ludwig notes that although the town's 50th anniversary was celebrated with a lively week of festivities, a critical examination of the town's history was not carried out by the town itself, but in publications by the steelworks and private citizens.¹⁷⁶ A planned revision of the permanent exhibits in the city museum, which would include the history of the "new town" to a greater extent, was not realized.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, there was commentary in the town's magazine, the *Stadtspiegel*, that was at least sanctioned by the town. Together with the festival's program, the *Stadtspiegel* published a chronology of the town's development, which united different historical tendencies. On the one hand, it contains a heroic but wholly depoliticized remembrance of the town's construction; on the other hand, there is discussion of the residents' orientation towards the West and their disbelief in the GDR's official ideology. The magazine's chronicle ended in the 1990s, when freedom brought with it difficulties that the town began to overcome when the steelworks were successfully privatized.¹⁷⁸

Suddenly, the festival became an annual tradition with considerable attendance.¹⁷⁹ An analysis of the programs of all the subsequent celebrations up to 2010 shows some atypical characteristics of that year's festival.¹⁸⁰ In no other

¹⁷⁴ "Chronologie – Eisenhüttenstadt im Spiegel der Zeit," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2000, 7.

¹⁷⁵ "Grußwort des Bürgermeisters Rainer Werner," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2000, 2.

¹⁷⁶ Ludwig, "Wo die Zukunft Gegenwart war," 169; he means the following publications Herbert Nicolaus and Lutz Schmidt, *Einblicke – 50 Jahre EKO Stahl* (Eisenhüttenstadt, 2000); Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*; Anton, "Ein neuer, würdiger Name. Wohnstadt Fürstenberg – Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt"; Semmelmann, Prengel, and Krüger, *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch. Geschichte/n der ersten sozialistischen Stadt Deutschlands*.

¹⁷⁷ Ludwig, "50 Jahre Eisenhüttenstadt," 51.

¹⁷⁸ "Chronologie – Eisenhüttenstadt im Spiegel der Zeit."

¹⁷⁹ According to the organizers, 180,000 visitors attended the festival in 2004 and more than 200,000 in 2006. See 5. Stadtfest Eisenhüttenstadt vom 27. bis 29.08.04, Stadtfest Eisenhüttenstadt, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050316160626/http://dasstadtfest.de/aktuelles.php>; „Mit dem Herzen dabei“ – Ostbrandenburg feierte in Eisenhüttenstadt, Stadtfest Eisenhüttenstadt, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070205050142/http://www.dasstadtfest.de/website/aktuelles.php>.

¹⁸⁰ The festival program was published every year in a special August edition of the *Stadtspiegel*. See *Stadtspiegel* from 2001 to 2010.

year were the decades of the GDR recalled in similar form. The striking feature of the subsequent festivals was an increasingly eclectic combination of various entertainments for children and adults, including concerts by country, pop, and rock bands, children's shows, amusement rides, and raffles, which became the focal point of the entire festival. The only element with a clear historical reference that remained was the classic cars. However, they too were more a form of "retro" entertainment than a manifestation of a deep *Ostalgie*. Veronika Pehe uses the term "retro" for a non-affective nostalgia: "The term 'retro' is used to designate a memory regime devoid of affect or lived memory, a pick-and-mix attitude capitalizing on the stylistic repertoires of the past, which lends it to various irreverent and ironic iterations, while feasting on the colors, sounds and textures of socialism."¹⁸¹ In contrast to nostalgia, it is a view on the past from the perspective of an established and triumphant liberal democracy. This approach to the past differs from what is typical of town foundation celebrations, anniversaries, and jubilees. According to Sabrow, jubilees (and other anniversaries of founding), illuminate the past positively, emphasize success, and serve to celebrate a particular legitimacy.¹⁸²

Greetings published in the *Stadtspiegel*, delivered by Eisenhüttenstadt's former SPD mayor Werner and his successor, PDS/Die Linke mayor Dagmar Püschel, did not contain any specific historical reference to the GDR.¹⁸³ Püschel's greeting, however, was somewhat different from Werner's. It focused on moments of community solidarity demonstrated in the 1990s in the struggle to preserve the steelworks and the organization of the first festival after unification.¹⁸⁴

Rogers Brubaker and Margit Feischmidt distinguish two different ideal types of commemorative mood: the sacralized and the desacralized. The first, sacralized type demands a serious, sublime tone and pathos, which is achieved

¹⁸¹ Veronika Pehe, *Velvet Retro: Postsocialist Nostalgia and the Politics of Heroism in Czech Popular Culture* (New York: Berghahn, 2020), 11.

¹⁸² Martin Sabrow, "Jahrestag und Jubiläum in der Zeitgeschichte," in *Historische Jubiläen*, ed. Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: AVA, 2015), 19.

¹⁸³ Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2005, 3; Werner, "Grußwort des Bürgermeisters Rainer Werner"; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2002, 2; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2003, 3; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2004, 3; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2001, 2; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2006, 3; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2007, 3; Werner, "'Hütte, auf geht's' – Kultursommer in unserer Stadt"; Rainer Werner, "Grußwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2009, 3; Dagmar Püschel, "Grußwort – Eisenhüttenstadt lebt seine Geschichte," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2010, 5.

¹⁸⁴ Püschel, "Grußwort – Eisenhüttenstadt lebt seine Geschichte."

by resorting to heroic language and mythopoetic narrative forms. The second type relies more on spectacle and entertainment.¹⁸⁵ Jubilee celebrations in the GDR were quite close to the first type. Town festivals in the FRG, on the other hand, were more in line with the second type. It is important to point out that such celebrations can never be completely desacralized, because this robs them of their festivity, their difference from everyday life, and reduces them to a simple entertainment.¹⁸⁶ Such festivals are characterized by their celebration of “historical becoming and presumed significance for the future.”¹⁸⁷

The organizers of the celebrations after 2000 in Eisenhüttenstadt minimized their “seriousness.” They downplayed the city’s history and what they did allow was more “retro” than not. They did not represent a living tradition, and considered the past to be something exotic rather than a template for the future. They focused on entertainment rather than memory, although focusing on memory would provide the town with certainty and an orientation. A local blogger suggests:

The town festival as a spectacle, admittedly successful in promoting its aims so far, can be a building block in the formation of a self-understanding of the people of Eisenhüttenstadt, but at its predominantly consumer and event-oriented core it ultimately satisfies mainly private needs. In addition, one must also make clear that the success of the event is based predominantly on attendance by city escapees and other out-of-towners who come and just want to have a good time.¹⁸⁸

In the GDR, the festival celebrated the “axe blow” and the heroism of the builders. The history of the town was directly linked to ideas of peace, socialism, and the superiority of the socialist system over the capitalist system. Nothing of that is left today. The festival is supposed to celebrate unity and identity, but it is no longer filled with that content. It has been “eventized.”¹⁸⁹ It fails to reconcile

¹⁸⁵ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 168–170.

¹⁸⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i renessansa* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 13–14.

¹⁸⁷ Sabrow, “Jahrestag und Jubiläum in der Zeitgeschichte,” 13.

¹⁸⁸ Ben, “Stadtwappenpflege – in der Diskussion,” Weblog für eine alternative Stadtwahrnehmung, November 29, 2006, <http://eisen.huettenstadt.de/archives/426-Stadtwappenpflege-in-der-Diskussion.html>.

¹⁸⁹ “Eventized” means that festivals and celebrations are deinstitutionalized (i.e., official sponsors forfeit their role), destructured (more inclusive from the social and design points of view), profanized (everything is meant to be a “nice experience”), multiplied, and economized (subjected to profit maximization). See Winfried Gebhardt, “Feste, Feiern und Events. Die etwas andere Freizeit,” in *Handbuch Freizeitsoziologie* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015), 415–429.

the town's founding myth with its new reality, and no strategies have been found for eliminating or rearticulating the old mythology in favor of a new one.

This is not simply a matter of covering up the GDR past, as happened with Nazism in Wolfsburg after the war.¹⁹⁰ The GDR past is mediated through other sites of memory and commemorative practices. Narratives that relativize the founding myth have their limits. An exhibition or a book can be both complex and critical because of its narrative character. In those cases, the dialectic of form versus content allows for different strategies for dealing with the past. On the other hand, festivals or celebrations of a city's founding require comprehensive and positive identification with the town and its history. Fractures in a town's identity can be discerned where in other media they remain hidden. A festival is a place for evoking a myth and not building complicated representations. At the same time, depoliticization and de-ideologization have their limits. This explains the festival greeting of PDS/Die Linke mayor Püschel. Her greeting was an "assertion of an identity" based in the 1990s, in years of difficulty and uncertainty. Unlike the memory of the GDR, the struggle to preserve the steelworks in the 1990s was not something contradictory and divisive in Eisenhüttenstadt.

Conclusion

The hegemony of the *Diktaturgedächtnis* and the absence of a pre-socialist past have led to splits in Eisenhüttenstadt's collective memory and identity. In contrast to some other Eastern European new socialist towns, Eisenhüttenstadt did not adopt radical strategies to come to terms with its past. The debate over renaming the town and streets in the early 1990s resulted in a moderate, depoliticized and de-ideologized approach to transforming the public space. Many remnants of the socialist past in the urban landscape were retained because of their perceived significance to the local identity.

The inability of those who sought to construct the town's identity to fully implement their strategy of *Verschiebung* and shift a new hegemonic narrative to the center of civic consciousness resulted in later-incorporated communes asserting their symbolic independence and reviving memories of their past that were suppressed in the GDR. Meanwhile, the town's transformation into a museum of the GDR was met with criticism from some residents. While Eisenhüttenstadt attracts researchers and tourists with its socialist past, external and internal

¹⁹⁰ Alexander Kraus, *Stadt ohne Geschichte?: Wolfsburg als Demokratielabor der Wirtschaftswunderzeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 17–26, 429–440.

memories of that period are different. There was also a discrepancy between public and private memories of the GDR. The new, critical narrative undermined the old, established myths without offering viable alternatives.

The lack of an alternative narrative was evident in the town's founding celebration, which lacked any reference to the past beyond its formal acknowledgment.

A distance to the GDR has led to the "cooling" of mnemonic conflicts – especially as the older generation passes – but also to solidification of *Diktaturgedächtnis* among those who no longer have a personal connection to the GDR.¹⁹¹ Although the town's image as an open-air museum continued to solidify and the town festival was not filled with "content," some changes can be noted. A narrative of overcoming the difficulties of post-reunification economic and social transition is beginning to take hold as a new basis for the identity of the town.¹⁹² However, the rise of the right-wing AfD party in Eisenhüttenstadt indicates that the socio-economic effects of transformation in the 1990s are still weighing heavily on the town's inhabitants despite a relative economic upturn. The crisis of representation in Eisenhüttenstadt continues.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Meyen, "Wir haben freier gelebt," 225.

¹⁹² Sonderausstellung 'Ohne Ende Anfang. Zur Transformation der sozialistischen Stadt' (04.07.21–29.05.22), Das Museum Utopie und Alltag, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.utopieundalltag.de/ohne-ende-anfang-zur-transformation-der-sozialistischen-stadt/>.

¹⁹³ Philip Manow and Hanna Schwander, "Eine differenzierte Erklärung für den Erfolg der AfD in West- und Ostdeutschland," in *Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland: Wahlverhalten in Zeiten politischer Polarisierung*, ed. Heinz Ulrich Brinkmann and Karl-Heinz Reuband (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2022), 163–191, doi:10.1007/978-3-658-33787-2.

BEYOND CONQUEST: DECOLONIZING ADVENTURE SPORTS THROUGH OUTDOOR COUNTERSTORIES

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Abstract:

This paper explores decolonial outdoor counterstories written by minoritized adventure athletes, focusing particularly on Indigenous voices within the sports of rock climbing, (ski) mountaineering, highlining, and, marginally, white-water kayaking. Traditional adventure narratives have long been dominated by white, masculine figures who glorify conquest, reinforcing patriarchal, colonial, and anthropocentric ideas that marginalize diverse perspectives and contribute to environmental degradation. In contrast, contemporary decolonial counterstories challenge these exclusionary notions, reclaiming outdoor spaces and redefining success not as domination, but as a deep connection with nature, community, and personal well-being. By presenting Indigenous and other marginalized perspectives, these narratives critique and subvert Western colonial ideologies, promoting a more inclusive and ecologically mindful approach to outdoor sports. This paper argues that these counterstories contribute to the creation of a collective decolonial outdoor counternarrative that could inspire pro-environmental actions among adventure athletes who experience climate anxiety. The analysis highlights how these athletes are not only reshaping the cultural landscape of outdoor sports but also advocating for a shift from competitive dominance to collaborative coexistence, thereby supporting a more equitable and sustainable interaction with the natural world.

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Introduction

Writing about adventure and expeditions has always been intrinsic to the activities of Western adventure athletes. Traditional adventure narratives have shaped the outdoor sports and what constitutes success. Due to the long history of Western patriarchal domination, these narratives have excluded diverse voices, reinforcing narrow ideas of heroism dominated by white, masculine figures who have long predominated as cultural producers in the outdoor spaces.¹ By glorifying the trope of a strong, white male mountaineer who conquers the mountain, conventional adventure narratives perpetuate harmful ideas about masculinity, domination, and conquest. Stories of heroic deeds and mastery over oneself, others, and nature continue to be powerful in outdoor sports communities today, excluding many minoritized bodies, perpetuating the neocolonial patriarchal status quo, and upholding anthropocentric ideas about human place in nature.

Currently, via decolonial outdoor activism, minoritized athletes are reappropriating spaces that have been stolen, colonized, and commodified, challenging settler colonialism, patriarchy, and white and human supremacy. Their written, oral, visual, and embodied counterstories challenge the narrow ideas of belonging and what constitutes success in outdoor spaces. These modes of resistance range from written memoirs to spoken podcasts, which provide a modern platform to nourish the Indigenous oral tradition, to Instagram accounts that create global networks of solidarity using the power of storytelling, to decolonial outdoor activist photos and videos that effectively combine the art form with the outdoors to spread the activist decolonial message.

This paper will analyze selected written contemporary outdoor counterstories by minoritized athletes to show how they challenge the dominant notions about nature, and who belongs in it. It will explore how they contest Western anthropocentric narratives that perpetuate environmental destruction by presenting Indigenous perspectives on the outdoors and nature. The paper will

¹ Julie Rak, *False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Nonfiction* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2021), 5.

argue that these counterstories can contribute to the creation of a decolonial outdoor counternarrative which sparks pro-environmental action among adventure athletes who experience climate anxiety through their sports.

Nonetheless, a framework for decolonizing outdoor sports involves shifting the focus from individual connection to nature to a collective, justice-centered approach that respects Indigenous sovereignty, authority, and cultural heritage. By emphasizing these principles, outdoor sports can become a platform for genuine allyship and transformation, breaking away from colonial legacies to build relationships that honor the land and its original stewards. Decolonial outdoor counterstories can be the first step towards the creation of a decolonial outdoor counternarrative.

The analyzed counterstories are written by minoritized adventure athletes, mostly Indigenous, in the closely connected outdoor adventure sports of rock climbing, (ski) mountaineering, highlining (slacklining at heights), and white-water kayaking. By examining their experiences, the paper will identify common characteristics that collectively form a counternarrative, underscoring how they challenge traditional norms and inspire a rethinking of the adventure sports landscape. These athletes often confront and redefine the boundaries of what is considered as success in their disciplines, placing higher values on inner emotions such as joy and connection, rather than on external validation and pre-conceived ideas of conquest. Through their engagements with environmental activism and Indigenous knowledge systems, they can play a role in fostering a more holistic understanding of the human place in nature. The paper will thus demonstrate how these decolonial counterstories challenge dominant discourses and reshape the narrative around adventure sports. As such, they offer transformative visions for the future of outdoor sports and environmental stewardship, urging a shift from competitive dominance to collaborative coexistence, promoting a more equitable and ecologically conscious approach to exploring and preserving the natural world.

Geographically, this paper is predominantly, but not exclusively, located on Turtle Island, i.e., in the settler-colonial nations of United States and Canada as the primary context for examining the decolonial potential of outdoor counternarrative. This focus is not only because, at least in contemporary times, “North America is the home of the extreme sport phenomena... the spiritual base of many lifestyle sports,” but also due to the recent surge in outdoor activism.²

² Belinda Wheaton, “Introducing the Consumption and Representation of Lifestyle Sports,” *Sport in Society* 13, no. 7/8 (September–October 2010): 1057, doi: 10.1080/17430431003779965.

Through inclusive initiatives such as Natives Outdoors, Climbers of Color, and women-only gatherings and expeditions, adventure athletes are actively diversifying adventure sports on Turtle Island and beyond, reappropriating spaces that were stolen, colonized, and commodified, thereby challenging settler colonialism, patriarchy, and white and human supremacy.

Decolonial Outdoor Counternarrative

Following decolonial scholars, such as Haunani-Kay Trask, Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, decolonization involves dismantling the structures of power and knowledge established by colonialism and reclaiming Indigenous sovereignty and epistemologies.³ Trask emphasizes the political struggle for Indigenous rights and self-determination, focusing on the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism on Native Hawai'ian lands and people.⁴ Goodyear-Ka'ōpua expands on this by highlighting the importance of revitalizing Indigenous practices, languages, and governance systems as essential components of decolonization.⁵ Decolonization is not just about rejecting colonial impositions but also about reasserting and practicing Indigenous ways of being and knowing in a modern context.

Understanding decolonization as a framework provides a foundation for exploring how counternarrative can support these efforts. Following the critical race studies scholar Benjamin Blaisdell, I understand counternarrative as a proactive practice that can inspire further activism and societal change. Blaisdell differentiates between a counterstory – individual stories that contrast with dominant narratives – and a counternarrative, which he defines as a “methodology, of which individual counterstories can be a part.”⁶ As a practice, it involves centering minoritized perspectives and epistemologies in one's everyday life.

Decolonial outdoor counternarrative thus entails actively working towards decolonization in outdoor spaces, a practice that can be undertaken by anyone, regardless of their identity. As a white climber, highliner, and scholar, I can

³ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40, doi: 10.25058/20112742.n38.04.

⁴ Haunani-Kay Trask, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 1–20.

⁵ Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawai'ian Charter School* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 3–25.

⁶ Benjamin Blaisdell, “Counternarrative as Strategy: Embedding Critical Race Theory to Develop an Antiracist School Identity,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 36, no. 8 (2023): 1559, doi: 10.1080/09518398.2021.1942299.

engage in pursuing a decolonial counternarrative by following lessons learned from individual counterstories told by Indigenous and other minoritized peoples within the outdoor community. While I can tell counterstories about my experience as a woman in outdoor spaces, I must also acknowledge the privileges I possess from other aspects of my identity.

The first step toward creating a decolonial counternarrative in outdoor sports thus lies in actively subverting or challenging traditional colonial narratives – whether these are propagated through writing, film, or other forms of storytelling. By disrupting traditional colonial narratives, counternarrative creates space for stories rooted in relationality, respect, and Indigenous ways of knowing, moving away from conquest toward kinship. This paper will thus examine a selection of contemporary counterstories that reframe human relationships with the land and nature in ways that resist the colonial impulse and open pathways to decolonial practices.

The selection of counterstories explored here is motivated by several factors: the background of the authors – most, though not all, of whom are Indigenous; the contemporary context in which they are written; and the types of counternarratives they construct. Among these is *Flow: Women's Counternarratives from Rivers, Rock, and Sky*, a forthcoming collection that brings together voices working to redefine outdoor engagement through culturally and ecologically informed perspectives. Through analyzing these stories, this paper will illuminate how contemporary counterstories could contribute to decolonization, moving beyond critique to embody and explore relational, reciprocal, and sovereignty-respecting approaches to land and outdoor engagement.

However, a decolonial approach in this context cannot rely solely on promoting a connection to nature or wilderness, as William Cronon cautioned in his critique of the American wilderness ideal.⁷ Cronon highlighted that the concept of wilderness, as celebrated in Western thought, often reinforces a colonial mindset by positioning nature as an uninhabited, pristine space separate from humanity – an idea that disregards and erases Indigenous relationships with the land that predate colonial interference. This idealized view not only excludes Indigenous histories and presence but also romanticizes a “return” to wilderness that aligns more closely with settler nostalgia than with genuine respect for Indigenous stewardship and sovereignty.

⁷ William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), 69–90.

To be considered part of a decolonial counternarrative, counterstories must go beyond advocating for environmental connection. They should engage with a broader decolonial vision that upholds Indigenous governance, sovereignty, and relational epistemologies. Such stories challenge rather than replicate colonial narratives, recognizing that true decolonization in outdoor sports involves disrupting long-standing frameworks that commodify nature and ignore Indigenous land rights. This involves rethinking the language, images, tropes, and ideologies that have historically defined outdoor sports and addressing who is centered, whose knowledge is valued, and whose voices lead the movement, especially since non-white bodies have historically been excluded from both outdoor sports and environmentalism despite being most affected by environmental injustices.

Sarah Jaquette Ray's work, particularly in *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (2017), delves into how outdoor recreation and environmentalism intersect with issues of race, class, and ability in the U.S. context. Ray examines how environmental discourses and practices in outdoor sports often exclude marginalized communities, especially those affected by environmental injustices. She argues that a narrative of environmental purity and a romanticized wilderness often ignores or marginalizes Indigenous and non-white communities' experiences and relationships with nature, which are shaped by different socio-historical dynamics. Ray critically addresses how outdoor recreation ideals often "weaponize" nature as a tool for social control, reinforcing who belongs in these spaces and who does not, which in turn supports environmental narratives that ignore colonial histories and Indigenous sovereignty.⁸

It is thus useful to identify some of the major characteristics of "decolonial outdoor counternarrative" to help foster more conscious outdoor communities that respect both minoritized human practitioners of adventure sports and the landscapes, including their nonhuman inhabitants. To achieve this, I will examine selected counterstories written by predominantly Indigenous and female adventure athletes to identify common characteristics that collectively form a counternarrative that is inclusive and non-anthropocentric. However, the results of my findings should not be seen as a closed, definitive list but rather as an open, fluid set of some of the most prominent characteristics that I identified through a decolonial lens.

For my analysis, I have selected written counterstories from minoritized adventure athletes engaged in the so-called "extreme" sports of rock

⁸ Sarah Jaquette Ray, *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 48–50.

climbing, (ski) mountaineering, highlining (slacklining at heights), and, marginally, white-water kayaking. This selection is motivated by my active participation in these sports, which enables me to provide a more nuanced and informed perspective as an insider. Research has shown that “insider” status can offer unique access to the lived experiences, norms, and narratives within specific communities, potentially yielding insights that are difficult for external observers to capture.⁹ However, simply participating in these sports does not inherently result in the capacity to analyze them critically, especially through a decolonial lens. To build a more thorough perspective, this analysis thus draws on both lived experience and engagement with decolonial theory and scholarship. Additionally, recognizing the limitations of “insider” perspective allows for a more reflective and rigorous critique, one that actively seeks to disrupt and question the established narratives and structures within these sports.

At times, I will use the generic term “climbing” to refer to both rock climbing and mountaineering. Rock climbing refers to the sport of ascending rocks, usually with the aid of ropes and specialized equipment. Mountaineering involves the ascent of mountains and combines hiking, rock climbing, ice climbing, and sometimes skiing, often at high altitudes and over multi-day expeditions, and navigating a variety of terrains and weather conditions. Ski mountaineering involves the ascent and descent of mountains on skis. While both rock climbing and mountaineering share common elements and skills, their contexts and specific challenges can differ significantly. When relevant, I will clearly differentiate between the two.

The balance sport of highlining has its roots in rock climbing. It is a subdiscipline of slacklining practiced at great heights, where participants walk, balance, or perform tricks on a flat, stretchy, one-inch-wide nylon or polyester webbing anchored between two sturdy points, such as trees, rocks, or buildings. Originating in the 1960s among Ahwahnee (i.e. California’s Yosemite Valley’s) climbers, highlining requires not only physical skill but also mental fortitude and trust in one’s gear and teammates. Although the sport involves some risks, especially during the rigging process, it is otherwise relatively safe compared to mountaineering or white-water kayaking.

White-water kayaking involves navigating a kayak through rivers with rapid currents and turbulent waters. It demands physical strength, precise control, and an understanding of river dynamics as kayakers tackle varying levels of rapids,

⁹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012).

classified by their difficulty and risk, from easy Class I to extremely challenging and dangerous Class V.

All of the above activities fall under the category of adventure sports. They are also often labeled as “extreme” sports or risk sports due to their inherent dangers. However, both practitioners and researchers often prefer other terms, such as “alternative” or “lifestyle sports,” which better reflect the cultural and social dimensions of these activities, emphasizing their counternarrative aspects that are frequently overshadowed by sensationalized media portrayals.¹⁰

Sports theoretician Belinda Wheaton suggests that the term “extreme” can be misleading, as it tends to focus solely on the risk and danger involved. Instead, Wheaton argues that “extreme” can also refer to other aspects of the sport, such as the practitioners’ “extreme commitment” to their activities.¹¹ This commitment often encompasses a deep-seated passion, a lifestyle choice, and a community-oriented ethos that contrasts with mainstream sports culture. Many researchers of lifestyle sports consider them as “sites where norms and boundaries are transgressed,”¹² thus categorizing them as counter-cultural activities. For example, Wheaton, who coined the term “lifestyle sports” in the 1990s, observes that many scholars in sports culture see “such activities as having presented an alternative and potential challenge to traditional ways of ‘seeing’ ‘doing’ and understanding sport.”¹³ By analyzing adventure sports through the lens of alternative or lifestyle sports, we can better appreciate the dedication, culture, and values of their practitioners, which are crucial elements of the counternarrative they represent.

In their paper, “Dancing with Nature: Rhythm and Harmony in Extreme Sport Participation,” Eric Brymer and Tonia Gray explore how extreme sports participants increasingly view nature not as a force to conquer but as a partner to engage with harmoniously.¹⁴ Instead of pursuing danger or conquest, many athletes describe these experiences as fostering deep connections with the natural environment, where risk is secondary to a sense of unity with nature. This shift

¹⁰ Victoria Robinson, *Everyday Masculinities and Extreme Sport: Male Identity and Rock Climbing* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 2.

¹¹ Belinda Wheaton, “Introduction: Mapping the Lifestyle Sport-Scape,” in *Understanding Lifestyle Sports: Consumption, Identity and Difference*, ed. Belinda Wheaton (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–28.

¹² Robinson, *Everyday Masculinities*, 1.

¹³ Wheaton, “Introducing the Consumption,” 1057.

¹⁴ Eric Brymer and Tonia Gray, “Dancing with Nature: Rhythm and Harmony in Extreme Sport Participation,” *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 9, no. 2 (2009): 135–149, doi: 10.1080/14729670903116912.

highlights a perspective in which athletes see themselves as “dancing” with natural elements, moving in sync rather than exerting dominance or control. This reframing aligns with their emphasis on flow, immersion, and a non-adversarial relationship, which contradicts the mainstream depiction of extreme sports as thrill-seeking or inherently risky endeavors.

Brymer and Gray’s findings challenge the popular perception that extreme sports are motivated purely by risk-taking; instead, participants express a feeling of safety and belonging when immersed in these natural settings. They often describe nature as indifferent, a force that requires blending in rather than controlling. This interaction, metaphorically framed as a “dance,” speaks to the participants’ awareness of nature’s power and their role within it, rather than an urge to dominate or subdue it.

However, as this paper demonstrates, the practice of adventure sports is deeply rooted in colonial histories. Their representation has been shaped by colonial discourse, and they still often perpetuate a masculinist culture and a conquest-of-nature ethos. For instance, in rock climbing, narratives frequently celebrate individuals who “conquer” challenging routes or “dominate” imposing landscapes, as seen in high-profile achievements like free soloing Yosemite’s El Capitan. Such feats are often framed within language that emphasizes bravery, dominance, and the mastery of one’s environment, characteristics traditionally associated with a masculinist framework. Similarly, in mountaineering, climbers often aim to “bag peaks” or “summit” as many high-altitude mountains as possible, reinforcing a goal-oriented, individualistic pursuit that sometimes overlooks the complex ecological and cultural significance of these landscapes. Even in white-water kayaking, phrases like “taming the rapids” imply a battle against nature, framing rivers as wild spaces to be subdued.

These examples illustrate how adventure sports, though evolving, often continue to reproduce a culture that privileges conquest and mastery over cooperative, place-based respect, often sidelining decolonial approaches that could offer alternative ways to engage with the land and waters on which these sports take place. Despite their counter-cultural veneer, these sports remain predominantly white, middle-class, male, and heterosexual spaces, with restricted access for minoritized peoples and other ways of being and practicing these activities. Moreover, its practitioners often perpetuate settler-colonialism by disrespecting Indigenous lands and culture, which highlights the urgent need for decolonization within these activities.¹⁵

¹⁵ Robinson, *Everyday Masculinities*, 1.

Through the analysis of the selected counterstories, this paper suggests that outdoor adventure sports offer unique opportunities for decolonization due to their inherent closeness to nature. The environmental emotions experienced by practitioners – both anxiety about environmental degradation and a profound connection to nature – can serve as powerful catalysts for change. Practitioners of these sports, with their intimate relationship with natural landscapes, are well-positioned to lead the decolonization of outdoor sports and beyond. By engaging with and amplifying counterstories from Indigenous and other minoritized athletes, these communities can begin to dismantle colonial legacies and foster more inclusive and respectful outdoor practices by embodying a decolonial outdoor counternarrative.

The concept of embodiment emphasizes the interconnectedness of physical experience, identity, and place. Theoretical discussions of embodiment can be traced back to the works of scholars such as Merleau-Ponty, who highlighted the body as the primary site of experiencing and understanding the world.¹⁶ In this context, embodiment is not merely about physical presence but encompasses a deeper awareness of how one's body interacts with and relates to the environment, culture, and community. This perspective aligns with Indigenous worldviews that emphasize relationality and kinship with the land, where bodies are seen as integral to understanding one's connection to place. By embracing embodied experiences in outdoor practices, minoritized athletes can share their lived realities and perspectives, allowing them to reclaim agency over their narratives. This reclamation is crucial for challenging hegemonic representations that often portray nature as a site for conquest rather than a sacred space of relationship and care.

Moreover, embodiment in this context also connects to movements for social justice, where physical presence and lived experience are critical to understanding systemic inequalities and colonial histories. The act of engaging with the land – whether through climbing, hiking, or other outdoor activities – can become a powerful form of resistance, fostering a sense of belonging and recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems. By centering embodiment in decolonial outdoor counternarratives, these practices not only highlight diverse ways of knowing but also create pathways for more inclusive and respectful relationships with the land and its original stewards. Through such engagement, the potential for healing and reconnection with the environment is realized, allowing for the emergence of practices that honor both individual and collective experiences rooted in place.

¹⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962).

Colonial Adventure Narrative

Traditional adventure writing has played a significant role in shaping and perpetuating ideas of conquest, mastery, and dominance. This is most clearly visible within the context of mountaineering. Classic texts often celebrate the act of summiting as the pinnacle of achievement, framing climbing as a metaphor for human control over nature. Works such as Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna: First Conquest of an 8000-meter Peak* and *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer exemplify this narrative.¹⁷ Moreover, they have defined who belongs in the outdoor spaces, historically excluding other-than-white bodies.

Contemporary exemptions of non-traditional writing by white male athletes that challenge or expand these dominant narratives exist. For instance, Kilian Jornet, in his book *Summits of My Life*, shares his experiences not just of summiting but of deeply connecting with the landscapes he traverses, emphasizing the joy of movement and the importance of the journey rather than merely the destination.¹⁸ Similarly, Alex Honnold's narratives, particularly in *Alone on the Wall*, while showcasing impressive climbing feats, also highlight the mental and emotional aspects of climbing, pushing against the simplistic notions of conquest.¹⁹ Moreover, the historical practices of certain mountaineers, such as Mark Twight, reveal alternative values in climbing that transcend mere summits. Twight, known for his work in the European Alps, often chose routes for their technical challenges rather than their elevation, promoting the idea that climbing can be an artistic expression and a personal journey rather than solely a quest for summits. This ethos resonates in the rock climbing community, where many climbers prioritize the difficulty and style of ascents over reaching the top of a particular route.

Despite these examples, most of the traditional adventure memoirs celebrate conquest and individualism. In her book-length study *False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Nonfiction*, Julie Rak conducts a detailed analysis of traditional mountaineering narratives, showing how they glorify the image of the heroic, fearless male climber, embodying physical strength, mental fortitude, and a "never give up" attitude. This portrayal has perpetuated the view that climbing is merely a masculine activity, sidelining climbers who fall outside this

¹⁷ Maurice Herzog, *Annapurna: First Conquest of an 8000-meter Peak* (Paris: Arthaud, 1956), and Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air* (New York: Villard Books, 1997).

¹⁸ Kilian Jornet, *Summits of My Life: Daring Adventures on the World's Greatest Peaks* (Boulder, CO: VeloPress, 2018).

¹⁹ Alex Honnold and David Roberts, *Alone on the Wall* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018).

hyper-masculine mold as mere spectators or “unwanted others,” invading masculine territory.

Moreover, Rak demonstrates that adventure narratives have historically been used as political and nationalistic tools. The climbing of previously unclimbed peaks has been portrayed not only as personal or scientific achievement but also as a demonstration of national prowess, cultural superiority, and symbolic authority over nature. As Rak notes, “since the eighteenth century, the act of climbing the highest mountains has played a central role in the way that much of the world has imagined conquest, human achievement, and the place of wilderness in social life.”²⁰ This political dimension has further entrenched the idea that mountaineering is a domain of Western dominance, reinforcing a narrow and exclusionary view of success and heroism.

Traditional adventure writing has been instrumental in reinforcing these notions. Bruce Barcott notes, “mountaineering is the most literary of sports” because of its centrality in shaping and maintaining ideas about climbing, identity, and the human place in nature.²¹ Writing about climbing has often emphasized themes of conquest and mastery over nature, mirroring broader societal values of individualism and domination. This literary tradition has both reflected and perpetuated Western ideals of superiority and control.

Rak further underscores the importance of narrative in defining climbers’ sense of self and purpose, and in establishing the norms of a “successful” climb. Traditional Western narratives have created a skewed valuation system where “the belief that mountaineering is about reaching the highest point (and not about the experience of getting there, the difficulty of the climb, or even the identity of the climber) creates the idea of a lesser climb, or one that does not count.”²² This focus on the summit as the only true achievement has perpetuated a narrow and hierarchical understanding of success in climbing. It has fostered a dominance of certain narratives and marginalized others, reinforcing a singular vision of what constitutes an “authentic” climbing experience.

The dominance of traditional adventure narratives has rendered the experiences of other-than-white-male adventure athletes invisible, fostering the false belief that only male Western adventurers have historically participated in these pursuits. In *In Her Nature: How Women Break Boundaries in the Great Outdoors*,

²⁰ Julie Rak, *False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Nonfiction* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2021), 5.

²¹ Bruce Barcott, “Cliffhangers: The Fatal Descent of the Mountain-Climbing Memoir,” *Harper’s* (August 1996): 64.

²² Rak, *False Summit*, 6.

Rachel Hewitt challenges the mistaken belief that women's involvement in outdoor sports is a fairly recent development.²³ Despite societal barriers, women have long engaged in mountaineering and other outdoor activities, though their narratives were often unpublished and hidden from the public, much like their accomplishments.

Hewitt documents numerous instances of women participating in significant mountaineering expeditions throughout history, illustrating that their contributions have been systematically underrepresented. For example, Hewitt highlights the story of Fanny Bullock Workman, an American geographer and mountaineer who, in the early twentieth century, set several women's altitude records and published detailed accounts of her climbs. Yet, despite her impressive feats, her stories were overshadowed by those of her male contemporaries.²⁴ Similarly, the accomplishments of women like Annie Smith Peck, an American suffragist who was part of the first expedition that summited the northern peak of Mount Huascarán in Peru, were frequently downplayed or ignored in mainstream mountaineering literature despite fulfilling the culturally constructed standard of reaching, technically hard, summits.²⁵

Hewitt addresses how these narratives were not just ignored but actively suppressed. She explores how women's mountaineering achievements were dismissed as anomalies or attributed to the assistance of male climbers, thereby reinforcing the notion that mountaineering was inherently a masculine pursuit. This historical marginalization has contributed to the persistent invisibility of women's contributions to the sport. Hence, Hewitt argues for the importance of reclaiming and celebrating these lost narratives to provide a more inclusive and accurate history of mountaineering and outdoor sports. She emphasizes that acknowledging the diverse history of these activities is crucial not only for recognizing past achievements but also for inspiring future generations of women adventurers. As she writes, "it is therefore important not to be fooled by how the *history* of outdoor sport has been hitherto presented. Despite persisting claims that 'few' women walked, ran, hiked or climbed, a wealth of evidence attests that the hills were alive with the sound of women."²⁶

Just like Rak, Hewitt calls for the inclusion of diverse voices to challenge the entrenched norms and expand the understanding of what it means to be

²³ Rachel Hewitt, *In Her Nature: How Women Break Boundaries in the Great Outdoors* (London: Vintage, 2023).

²⁴ Hewitt, *In Her Nature*, 63–69.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 95, emphasis in original.

a successful adventure athlete. Moreover, “it is worth paying attention to the voices of these women, because they show the pleasures and pitfalls, the meanings and values, of the natural world and the capabilities of the human body, in far greater and more astonishing variety than we are used to hearing.”²⁷ Yet, as Victoria Robinson’s book-length study *Everyday Masculinities and Extreme Sport* suggests, “although many women are involved, the sport [of rock climbing] retains a particularly male image and culture.”²⁸ Listening to diverse perspectives in outdoor sports is imperative to challenge the dominant narrative that has traditionally shaped these activities. In the era of climate change, these voices can also enrich our understanding of our place in the natural world and help instill the values needed to safeguard it.

Similarly to women, Indigenous peoples have long participated in outdoor activities, both before and after European colonization. Their engagement with the land through climbing, canoeing, kayaking, and snowshoeing is often rooted in a relationship with nature that emphasizes respect, survival, and stewardship rather than merely achieving the highest or fastest performance. Indigenous people played a key role in the mapping of the continent and acted as guides to European explorers. Many summits on the continent, including the most difficult ones, carry marks of Indigenous presence that has been omitted in traditional colonial accounts. As Whittle notes, “the erasure of Indigenous people from the history of North American mountaineering likewise supported the illusion of a terra incognita.”²⁹ The construction of the landscape as empty and/or its inhabitants as passive has served as the main justification for colonization.³⁰

Indigenous climbers have traditionally used climbing as a means of accessing sacred sites or conducting ceremonial activities rather than pursuing summit goals, reflecting a profound spiritual relationship with the landscape. For instance, in the southwestern United States, the Navajo (Diné) as well as the Hopi and Zuni peoples have historical connections with cliff dwellings and sacred rock formations. In the northwest, the Blackfoot Nation has historically used rock formations for spiritual and cultural purposes and continues to do so. Recently, the Blackfoot Nation has enforced a decades-old closure of the sacred

²⁷ Ibid., 95.

²⁸ Robinson, *Everyday Masculinities*, 1.

²⁹ Joe Whittle, “Adventures on the Turtle’s Back,” *Alpinist*, June 13, 2018, <https://alpinist.com/features/adventures-on-the-turtles-back/>.

³⁰ Val Plumwood, “Decolonizing Relationships with Nature,” In *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-Colonial Era*, ed. William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (London: Earthscan, 2003), 51–78.

Chief Mountain used for traditional fasting rituals and home to a newly reintroduced bison population. The closure aims to protect the area, its human and nonhuman inhabitants and the preservation of cultural and spiritual practices.³¹

Similarly, Devils Tower in Wyoming, located on land traditionally inhabited by the Lakota, Cheyenne, and several other nations, is a significant site where climbing intersects with Indigenous cultural practices, prompting ongoing discussions about access and respect for its sacredness. Devils Tower attracts thousands of rock climbers each year who are leaving a significant environmental mark in the local ecosystem. Since 1995, there has been a voluntary climbing closure in June that respects Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices, particularly the Lakota Sun Dance. Despite a 75% reduction in climber traffic during this month, some climbers still ignore the ban.³²

This disrespect from climbers reveals deeper issues related to settler-colonialism in outdoor sports. As Dustin et al. note, “the climbers’ disregard for the voluntary ban during the summer solstice can be seen as an extension of a settler-colonial mindset that ignores or undermines indigenous cultural practices and beliefs.”³³ Settler-colonialism is characterized by the ongoing displacement and marginalization of Indigenous peoples.³⁴ This is evident in the outdoor sports community when climbers prioritize their climbing goals over Indigenous cultural practices. The climbing ban at Devils Tower, which honors Indigenous ceremonies, is an essential act of respect and recognition of the sacredness of the land. Hence, the climbers’ resistance to the ban underscores a failure to acknowledge this historical and cultural context, reflecting a continuation of colonial attitudes.

By disrespecting Indigenous lands, climbers are exercising their settler-colonial privilege and perpetuating the settler-colonial dynamics that have historically shaped their sport. As the climber Chris Kalman writes, “While the Oglala Lakota of the Pine Ridge Reservation are one of the most disenfranchised groups in the U.S., climbers have got to be one of the most privileged. They

³¹ Taylor Inman, “Thinking of Climbing Chief Mountain? Think Again as Blackfeet Enforcing Closure,” *Hungry Horse News*, June 19, 2024, <https://hungryhorsenews.com/news/2024/jun/19/blackfeet-enforcing-chief-mountain-closure-glacier-park-concurs/>.

³² “Devils Tower Voluntary June Closure: An Opportunity to Show Respect,” *Access Fund*, May 2024, <https://www.accessfund.org/latest-news/news-and-events/news/climbers-honor-the-june-closure-at-devils-tower>.

³³ Daniel L. Dustin et al., “Cross-Cultural Claims on Devils Tower National Monument: A Case Study,” *Leisure Sciences* 24, no. 1 (2002): 83, doi: 10.1080/01490400252772845.

³⁴ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 2012): 388, doi: 10.1080/2201473x.2012.10648834.

can afford to buy thousands of dollars of equipment and travel far and wide to engage in a sport that introduces them to heightened risk of injury or death.”³⁵ Kalman’s observation emphasizes that for climbers, risk is a chosen and often celebrated aspect of the sport, involving voluntary engagement with danger for personal achievement and thrill. This choice is facilitated by financial resources and mobility, underscoring a privilege not universally accessible. Conversely, marginalized groups face involuntary, often life-threatening, risks imposed by systemic inequities and historical disenfranchisement, including economic hardship, lack of healthcare, and environmental injustices. Climbing, as a sport, operates within a framework of privilege that often overlooks the involuntary struggles faced by Indigenous and marginalized communities. Hence, climbing on stolen land necessitates an awareness of and respect for the cultural, historical and natural significance of these sites.

Another stark example of climbers disregarding Indigenous cultural sites is the incident at Sunshine Wall in Utah, where Richard Gilbert illegally bolted a route on a rock face adorned with ancient petroglyphs of the Fremont people. Native Hawai’ian climber Skye Kolealani Razon-Olds emphasized the emotional pain caused by such acts of desecration, noting that similar problems have plagued climbing areas in Hawai’i for years.³⁶ The former executive director of Access Fund, Chris Winter, attributes such incidents to the traditional colonial narrative that has sidelined principles of sustainability and inclusivity and prioritized individualism and nationalism. He explains, “It was about attaining the summit and doing first ascents, drawing people to the sense of accomplishment that comes with these feats.”³⁷ His acknowledgment of the need for decolonial approaches marks a significant move towards creating a more equitable and respectful engagement with the lands and people who have been historically marginalized and dispossessed.

The dominant masculine colonial narrative is also evident in the naming of climbing routes. This tradition of route naming aligns with the broader colonial strategy of (re)naming geographical places to assert dominance and mark territory, often disregarding a visible Indigenous presence. The vast majority of

³⁵ Chris Kalman, “It’s Time to Rethink Climbing on Devils Tower,” *Outside Online*, July 25, 2018, <https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/climbing/why-its-time-rethink-climbing-ban-devils-tower/>.

³⁶ Cody Nelson, “Defaced Petroglyphs Force Rock Climbers to Reckon with Sport’s Destructive Past,” *The Guardian*, May 4, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/may/04/rock-climbing-native-american-indigenous-people>.

³⁷ Nelson, “Defaced Petroglyphs.”

climbing routes have been named by white men due to both patriarchy and settler-colonialism, as naming rights are typically granted to the first ascensionist – a position historically inaccessible to women and people of color because of systemic barriers. As a consequence, many climbing route names are oppressive to marginalized groups, including women, racial minorities, and sexual minorities, and they “serve to maintain the masculine sporting space of the mountain.”³⁸ Additionally, these names perpetuate a colonial mindset of “conquering” the land. For instance, in Canada, the route name “She Got Drilled” reflects an intersection of misogyny, racism, and an anthropocentric and feminized view of nature.³⁹

Today, the settler-colonial tradition of first ascent naming rights remains widely accepted globally, often going unchallenged even when route names are discriminatory. Research indicates that “most participants are frustrated by the overt objectification and sexualization” found in these oppressive names.⁴⁰ Since 2020, a grassroots movement advocating for the renaming of oppressive routes has gained momentum in North America, with organizations like Climb the Gap leading efforts to compile lists of misogynistic, racist, or homophobic route names. Ultimately, renaming these routes and lands presents an opportunity to challenge colonial practices and reframe relationships with the land and its Indigenous inhabitants. As such, it is an important part of the decolonial outdoor counternarrative.

Decolonial Outdoor Counterstories

In recent years, scholars have increasingly recognized the significant value of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), also known as traditional knowledge (TK) or Indigenous knowledge (IK). These knowledge systems have been developed over countless generations and are rooted in the experiences and observations of Indigenous communities. TEK is based on a deep understanding of the natural world, verified and enriched by the wisdom of elders, and passed down through oral traditions, experiential learning, and other forms of record-keeping. It encompasses a holistic understanding of ecosystems, species interactions,

³⁸ Jennifer Wigglesworth, “The Cultural Politics of Naming Outdoor Rock Climbing Routes,” *Annals of Leisure Research* 25, no 5 (2022): 608, doi: 10.1080/11745398.2021.1949736.

³⁹ Wigglesworth, “The Cultural Politics,” 614.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 607.

and environmental changes, making it an invaluable knowledge in facing the impacts of climate change.⁴¹

In his work, Len Necefer (Navajo) blends TEK with modern conservation practices, advocating for the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in environmental discourse. Necefer is also the founder and CEO of Natives Outdoors, a company that seeks to elevate Indigenous voices in the outdoor industry and increase their participation in adventure sports.⁴² Through Natives Outdoors, he highlights the contributions of Native peoples to land stewardship and conservation, while also promoting outdoor recreation as a means of cultural expression and connection to ancestral lands. The company also raises awareness about Indigenous issues.

Necefer promotes decolonial outdoor counternarrative through his adventure counterstories published in prominent outdoor magazines like *Alpinist*. In “Water is Life,” he centers the four sacred Navajo mountains as the primary characters, fostering a profound relationship with them through mountaineering and skiing. This connection has also deepened his ties to his ancestral roots. Necefer reflects, “For many years I did not realize that the places referenced in ceremonies actually existed. Now I understand that my disconnect from the sacred mountains was in large part due to histories and policies that formed the context that I was born into as a Navajo.”⁴³ He further reflects on how assimilation policies, which prevented him from learning Navajo, “stunted my relationship with my grandparents just as it did my relationship to the mountains.”⁴⁴ For Necefer, mountains are viewed as relatives, as “living beings ... that the tribes and their members have a duty to protect.”⁴⁵ This perspective emphasizes the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the land, contrasting with Western views of nature as a resource for recreation or conquest.

The perception of mountains as inanimate objects that can be conquered enables settlers managing dispossessed Indigenous land to exploit it, for instance, by building ski resorts that harm local ecosystems. An example recounted by Necefer involves Arizona Snowbowl, a ski area on sacred land for thirteen tribes. The resort uses artificial snow made partly from recycled wastewater, which

⁴¹ Fikret Berkes, Johan Colding, and Carl Folke, “Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management,” *Ecological Applications* 10, no. 5 (October 2000): 1251–1262, doi: 10.2307/2641280.

⁴² Natives Outdoors, “Natives Outdoors,” <https://www.natives-outdoors.org/>.

⁴³ Len Necefer, “Water Is Life,” *Alpinist*, October 5, 2020, <https://alpinist.com/features/water-is-life/>.

⁴⁴ Necefer, “Water Is Life.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

contaminates plants and other living entities on the mountain. It also harms the local Indigenous communities directly as they rely on the waters from the melted snow. This example highlights cultural differences in environmental management and underscores the need for decolonial approaches to land use.

In response to the environmental and cultural impact of traditional Western skiing practices, Necefer reflects, “For years, I thought of skiing only in relation to the desecration of this sacred space.”⁴⁶ However, he eventually discovered a decolonial approach to skiing and being outdoors which involves engaging with the land in a way that respects and honors its cultural and spiritual significance, rather than exploiting it for recreational purposes. By doing so, Necefer found not only a “a refuge and anchor” in his life but also a deeper connection to his ancestral roots and the sacred landscapes of his people. As he writes, “I didn’t fully realize the sacredness of the mountains until I experienced the stillness brought by snow ... I began to understand the power of this form of water – the immense respect and diligence it requires and the fragility of the climate that fosters it.”⁴⁷ His experience highlights the potential of outdoor sports to inspire deeper connection to the environment.

Necefer also acknowledges the interconnectedness of the mountains and the rivers in the valleys, observing, “Below my feet, the water on that peak would go on to the Colorado River – which provides our community life in the desert – in just a few months.”⁴⁸ This recognition emphasizes that snow on the mountains is vital not only for outdoor enthusiasts but also for sustaining both human and nonhuman life. However, Necefer’s story illustrates the urgency of preserving these environments not only for their ecological importance but also for their cultural and spiritual heritage. As he writes, “Some elders say that when we lose connection with the land, the land will die and so will we.”⁴⁹ This dire prediction fuels his desire to document the sacred mountains, imparting their teachings to future generations. Necefer poignantly likens his journeys over rapidly receding snowfields to “doing final rounds of visits with my elders who are sick and soon to walk on into the next world.”⁵⁰ This metaphor emphasizes the deep sense of loss and ecological crisis. He terms this phenomenon “an impending dispossession,” reflecting the profound connection between Indigenous people and their land.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Experiencing the impacts of climate change firsthand, Necefer faces strong climate anxiety, admitting, “A feeling of fear overcame me as I thought about what would be left to share about this place in my lifetime.”⁵¹ This anxiety is shared by his Indigenous expedition partner, who poignantly asks, “What if I’m the last skier?”⁵² These sentiments drive a sense of urgency to act, compelling them to ensure the sport’s legacy and spark environmental action. Their subsequent expeditions are motivated by a desire to raise awareness about climate change through adventure sports, as Necefer clearly states, “We’re headed up the mountain to tell a story about climate change.”⁵³ His decolonial outdoor counterstory highlights the intersection of cultural heritage, outdoor sports, and environmental activism, illustrating the need for immediate action to preserve these landscapes.

In another story in *Alpinist* titled “Adventures on the Turtle’s Back,” Indigenous rock climber Joe Whittle (Hasinai and Lenape) echoes Necefer’s perspective on venturing into the mountains. He states, “There is no more goal attached to my efforts on cliffs or mountains than there is on a trip home for a holiday. The purpose is simply to be with your relatives and to be present.”⁵⁴ Like Necefer, Whittle views the mountains as relatives, a source of wisdom that “can teach us humility and acceptance of our role in the natural order.”⁵⁵ He believes outdoor sports can serve as medicine, helping “heal from the traumas of colonialism and rebuild [Indigenous] identities.”⁵⁶ This healing, however, is contingent on perceiving wild places not as a possession, underscoring the transformative potential of outdoor sports when approached with reverence and respect for nature.

Whittle contrasts the colonial mindset of domination and control with the Indigenous approach to nature: “feelings of recognition, humility and remembrance mark our time in wild places – rather than fantasies of ‘discovery’ and ‘conquest.’”⁵⁷ He critiques the practice of Western mountaineers placing their country’s flag atop mountains, “that we view as a sacred relative,” and claims of first ascents as acts of settler-colonial dispossession.⁵⁸ He mocks traditional colonial ideas of success by asking “*Would an Indian ever measure the height of a mountain that he could climb?*” and by stating “*IT’S NOT LIKELY any Native*

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Whittle, “Adventures on the Turtle’s Back.”

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

people ever died of summit fever."⁵⁹ He concludes the story by highlighting the irony of writing for *Alpinist* without reaching the alpine zone due to bad weather, while underscoring that the journey's value lies in the experience and connection to the land, not in summitting. His story thus invites a reconsideration of how success and accomplishment are defined in outdoor activities, advocating for a decolonized approach that honors the land and its significance to Indigenous cultures.

In her story "Rematriating Our Lives: Indigeneity and What it Means to Climb," Piikani Blackfeet rock climber Micheli Oliver also reflects on how rock climbing helps her connect with the land, her ancestors, and her Indigenous culture. Like Necefer and Whittle, Oliver views outdoor sports as a form of healing, describing climbing as "a means of bringing joy to our own bodies and minds."⁶⁰ She writes that rock climbing is "the only time my brain quiets."⁶¹ Oliver politicizes this joy as a form of decolonial resistance, suggesting that by focusing on joy as the primary goal, traditional Western ideas of success, such as reaching the summit or sending a route, become secondary.⁶² This shift allows climbers to prioritize building connections with the land and protecting it for future generations.

Oliver emphasizes the importance of seeing oneself as a "future ancestor," which naturally leads to caring for the land. She urges non-Indigenous climbers to "learn to develop a less antagonistic relationship with nature; decolonized mentalities are for everyone."⁶³ Oliver sees climbing as a potential means to adopt this decolonized behavior, contributing to the creation of resilient, decolonized communities. Using an Indigenous metaphor, she acknowledges that while "climbing is only one piece of the woven basket," it is "part of larger strands that bring together a resilient community" that fosters decolonized societies.⁶⁴ Outdoor sports can thus serve as a pathway for decolonization, providing a space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can meet, understand, and connect with each other and the land. By prioritizing joy, connection, and future responsibility, climbers can transform their practice into a form of environmental

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

⁶⁰ Micheli Oliver, "Rematriating Our Lives: Indigeneity and What It Means to Climb," *Alpinist*, May 6, 2022, <https://alpinist.com/features/rematriating-our-lives-indigeneity-and-what-it-means-to-climb/>.

⁶¹ Oliver, "Rematriating Our Lives."

⁶² "Sending a route" means successfully climbing a route (a designated path on a rock face) from start to finish without falling or resting on any gear (in the case of sport climbing).

⁶³ Oliver, "Rematriating Our Lives."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

and cultural stewardship, ensuring the preservation of the land and its stories for future generations.

However, Oliver underscores that access to the outdoors is a privilege, influenced significantly by socioeconomic status. She highlights that the intersection of gender and race further dictates the level of risk individuals face in today's society. This is supported by Hewitt's research that reveals alarming statistics on street harassment: 65% of women in the United States have experienced street harassment, with 58% of women under 30 facing it while running, compared to only 4% of male runners. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, 68% of women of color encounter sexually suggestive speech daily or often, versus 55% of white women. The rising risk is also evident in the tragic statistic that more female runners were murdered between 2016 and 2022 than in the previous 28 years combined. In total, 65–99 per cent (depending on the study) of all women have reported male violence in the outdoor spaces.⁶⁵

Oliver is acutely aware of the broader societal dangers she faces due to her gender and race. Her parents' protective upbringing instilled in her a heightened awareness of the exoticization and objectification she might encounter because of her looks: "They taught me to be continually aware that there are those who don't see me as the human I am but as an object."⁶⁶ Oliver highlights the persistent vulnerability that follows her everywhere: "Yet even in nature, as in any setting, we are not safe."⁶⁷ This acknowledgment underscores the reality that the risks she faces are not solely confined to urban environments but permeate all spaces, including the ostensibly neutral terrain of the outdoors. Various studies and reports highlight the unique challenges and dangers faced by people of color in outdoor recreation.⁶⁸ Historical segregation in national parks and other outdoor spaces has left a legacy of exclusion, contributing to the underrepresentation of people of color in these activities. For instance, between 2014 and 2018, 95% of visitors to national forests were white, while Black visitors made up only 1.2%.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Hewitt, *In Her Nature*, 189–191, 218–219, 368.

⁶⁶ Oliver, "Rematriating Our Lives."

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ See Emma Gosalvez, "Nature Gap: Why Outdoor Spaces Lack Diversity and Inclusion," *College of Natural Resources News*, December 14, 2020, <https://cnr.ncsu.edu/news/2020/12/outdoor-diversity-inclusion/>, or Leah Asmelash, "Outdoor Recreation Has Historically Excluded People of Color. That's Beginning to Change," *CNN*, December 14, 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/12/14/us/national-parks-history-racism-wellness-cec/index.html>.

⁶⁹ American Trails, "Historical Perspective on Racism in the Outdoors and Looking Forward – American Trails," <https://www.americantrails.org/resources/the-arch-of-history-is-long-but-it-bends-towards-justice>.

Oliver also highlights the stark disparities in how missing persons cases are handled based on race. She points out that when white individuals go missing, their disappearances often attract significant media coverage and public attention, including community-driven fundraising efforts that can generate substantial financial support for search and rescue missions. In contrast, the disappearances of Indigenous people typically go largely unnoticed outside of Indigenous communities, reflecting the broader issue of racial inequities in outdoor spaces. The public lands enjoyed by climbers, hikers, and skiers are traditional Indigenous lands, yet the systemic racism faced by people of color, including Indigenous peoples, extends into these outdoor spaces.

Oliver finds a powerful sense of agency in climbing, where she chooses to face and survive risks on her own terms. She writes, “in a world in which I can’t always control the hazards I face, when I climb, I am choosing to survive. I am taking my own life into my hands.”⁷⁰ Climbing becomes a form of resistance and empowerment. It is an assertion of her autonomy and strength in the face of societal and personal dangers. By interweaving her personal narrative of connection to the land, the outdoors, and climbing with documented facts about outdoor access, Oliver’s counterstory is a powerful call to decolonize outdoor spaces to make them safer and more welcoming for all individuals, regardless of their background. Her affirmation that “decolonized mentalities are for everyone” calls non-Indigenous people to embrace the decolonial outdoor counter-narrative by rethinking their relationship with nature.⁷¹

Decolonial outdoor counternarrative permeates the forthcoming anthology *Flow: Women’s Counternarratives from Rivers, Rock, and Sky*, edited by Denisa Krásná and Alena Rainsberry.⁷² *Flow* is a collective effort of women who love spending time outdoors to make visible the often underrepresented female experiences in the male-dominated adventure sports. *Flow* is a collection of nineteen counterstories by women writing from a wide range of perspectives. From diverse countries from across the world, races and ethnicities, ages, sexual identities, and from new athletes to experienced women athletes. The book is to be published in spring 2025 by the Canadian outdoor publisher *Rocky Mountain Books* (RMB) that strives to promote minoritized voices and environmental consciousness through their publications.

⁷⁰ Oliver, “Rematriating Our Lives.”

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Denisa Krásná and Alena Rainsberry, eds., *Flow: Women’s Counternarratives from Rivers, Rock, and Sky* (Victoria, BC: Rocky Mountain Books, forthcoming).

Flow embodies decolonial principles by centering women's experiences in outdoor adventure and highlighting their connection to and care for the natural world. The transformative power of this decolonized relationship with nature is vividly depicted in these counterstories, including by non-Indigenous women. For example, the Czech highliner Anna Hanuš Kuchařová writes on her profound connection with the landscape that she sees from a different perspective when highlining: "When I encounter the landscape in my human smallness, she breathes on me with her eternity. She embraces me with an invisible force and remains in me as a gentle calmness."⁷³ Similarly, the Indian climber Kavitha Mohan reflects on her connection to the Himalayas: "I felt so tiny in front of the mighty Himalayas, but I knew I still belonged there. This is a place where I could be completely still as I gazed at the beauty and magnificence of the Himalayas."⁷⁴

The repeated trope of feeling small in the face of vast natural landscapes represents a significant departure from traditional narratives of male mountaineers who are portrayed, both in writing and in visual imagery, as central, dominant figures "conquering" the landscape, embodying notions of control, power, and human triumph over nature.⁷⁵ In contrast, the recognition of "human smallness" in nature signifies a sense of humility and respect as described in the above counterstories by Indigenous climbers. The trope of human smallness emphasizes the landscape's enduring presence and our own transient, respectful existence within it. Interestingly, this sense of "human smallness" does not lead to existential anxiety but, rather, provides a profound comfort rooted in a sense of belonging to something much larger and more enduring than one's life. This interconnectedness fosters a deep-seated respect for the environment and reinforces the idea that human lives are part of a greater, ongoing narrative, which echoes Oliver's idea of seeing herself as "future ancestor."

The intimate and spiritual connection to nature is a recurring theme in *Flow*. The 14-year-old Indigenous kayaker from Ecuador Rafa Sanchez portrays the river as a living being capable of extending a welcoming embrace: "When I entered the river, it felt so beautiful, it was like nature was welcoming you, like it was saying, come, come, come, come, come closer."⁷⁶ This personification underscores the Indigenous perspective of nature as a sentient, relational force, inviting a respectful and intimate relationship rather than seeing it as an impersonal resource. Sanchez's profound connection to the river is reflected in her

⁷³ Krásná and Rainsberry, eds., *Flow*, chapter 16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, chapter 8.

⁷⁵ Rak, *False Summit*, 36.

⁷⁶ Krásná and Rainsberry, eds., *Flow*, chapter 6.

environmental activism, which remains a central part of her life despite facing physical violence from illegal miners in Ecuador. As she recounts, “There have been many times in a row when they have thrown stones at us when we were only going down the river.”⁷⁷ Yet, even threats and violence are insufficient to deter those who view the environment as a relative. Sanchez’s counterstory thus highlights the strength of the Indigenous decolonial view of nature, which fosters a deep, respectful connection that transcends fear.

All Indigenous authors in *Flow* emphasize a profound connection with the landscapes they inhabit. The Mayan climber from Chiapas, Mexico, Sofia Tapia, describes her engagement with nature as a dialogue: “I like to feel the places, to arrive and ask for permission to climb the rocks. Because for me, everything has life. Everything around me, including the rock.”⁷⁸ Asking for permission is a common practice among Indigenous peoples, as Whittle explains in his *Alpinist* story: “The wild offers medicine to all people who know how to receive it as a gift, rather than claim it as a possession. This is why Native people ask permission to climb a mountain, dig a root, or catch a fish.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, the landscape is seen as a timeless space where one can reconnect with ancestors, as the Mexican-American Indigenous climber Janel Chávez describes: “As we stood there, I felt our ancestors among us; I felt their stories of struggle, hope, and love.”⁸⁰ This perspective illustrates a deep respect for the land and acknowledges a continuous, spiritual relationship with the natural world and those who came before.

Many authors in *Flow* reflect on how adventure sports provide an embodied experience of nature that goes beyond intellectual understanding. Sanchez’s counterstory illustrates this vividly through her kayaking experiences: “I entered the river and felt such a beautiful energy, such a pure energy, which I could enjoy in its entirety.”⁸¹ Similarly, Anna Hanuš Kuchařová describes how highlining enhances her sensory awareness: “My senses seemed to become more sensitive. I realized how much life pulses around us unnoticed. I heard new sounds, smelled new scents.”⁸² This heightened sensory experience underscores how engaging in these sports can sharpen one’s perception of the environment, revealing the subtle, often overlooked elements of nature. These accounts highlight

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, chapter 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, chapter 12.

⁷⁹ Whittle, “Adventures on the Turtle’s Back.”

⁸⁰ Krásná and Rainsberry, eds., *Flow*, chapter 7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, chapter 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*, chapter 16.

that adventure sports, regardless of cultural background, can foster a deep sense of interconnectedness with nature.

The Canadian highliner Mia Noblet notes the supportive and understanding energy fostered by all-women highline events, suggesting a departure from traditional competitive and male-dominated outdoor spaces: “It was intriguing to observe and be part of an environment that felt so different, in a way more cooperative and communicative in its approach.”⁸³ The Indian kayaker Naina Adhikari also notes, “The strength of a community is measured by the selfless actions of each individual member towards the wellbeing of the whole,” echoing the concept of interconnectedness.⁸⁴ She also underscores the importance of environmental stewardship, noting that during all-female kayaking expeditions, women organized sessions on topics like menstruation hygiene and the principle of “leave no trace” in the wilderness. This emphasis on collaboration, community, and care for the environment aligns with the Indigenous decolonial values.

Furthermore, the *Flow* athletes reflect on success in their sports and uniformly emphasize the journey, learning, joy, and connection over mere measurable achievements. Mia Noblet, who is a multiple-world-record holder across all genders, says, “Success, to me, is not just about breaking records. It’s about relishing the journey, learning, and being safe.”⁸⁵ Noblet’s emphasis on safety, especially in a sport that many consider dangerous, resonates deeply throughout *Flow*. This conceptualization of risk echoes Oliver’s words that women seldom feel entirely safe in any environment, so taking charge of their own safety in these high-risk activities is empowering.

This focus on safety and risk is a recurring theme in many of the stories. Like Oliver, women in *Flow* see the process of confronting “chosen fear” as essential to their growth. Czech climber Anna Šebestíková captures this sentiment, writing, “It is in the face of fear that we discover the depths of our resilience and the boundless potential within.”⁸⁶ These athletes do not shy away from fear – they embrace it, recognizing that learning to live with it is an ongoing journey. Sanchez echoes this, saying, “I learned to distinguish if it’s just fear or if it’s me protecting myself from danger. And if it’s fear, I say, Rafa, breathe.” However, she assigns the same importance to being able to walk away from a risky situation: “When I really see that it’s a danger, that something can happen to me, that I’m not ready for that, I say no. And I say to my coaches, ‘I’m sorry, I’m not ready for

⁸³ Ibid., chapter 19.

⁸⁴ Ibid., chapter 2.

⁸⁵ Ibid., chapter 19.

⁸⁶ Ibid., chapter 11.

this.”⁸⁷ This focus on staying safe sharply contrasts with “the hegemonic masculine ideal that men ‘tough through’ situations rather than ask for help.”⁸⁸ In a decolonial outdoor counternarrative, success includes making wise choices about risks, trusting one’s instincts, and understanding that there is no shame in stepping back from a climbing route or a lap in kayaking if it means prioritizing safety.

Flow is a testament to Oliver’s statement that “decolonized mentalities are for everyone,” as it demonstrates how even non-Indigenous athletes can adopt and embody the principles of a decolonial outdoor counternarrative. *Flow* highlights this inclusive approach by showcasing stories of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous athletes who are actively reshaping their relationship with nature, moving away from a mindset of domination and conquest to one of respect, reciprocity, and stewardship.

Conclusion

Despite their growing popularity, outdoor spaces and adventure sports remain exclusionary environments, often perpetuating the legacies of settler-colonialism through cultural practices and narratives that marginalize Indigenous and other minoritized groups. Despite the diversity and evolution of these sports, significant inequalities persist, rooted in historical patterns of racism, sexism, and systemic barriers that have predominantly positioned men as the cultural producers and gatekeepers. As a result, access to these outdoor spaces and sports has been limited for minoritized groups, further reinforcing these exclusionary practices. These inequities are further entrenched by colonial adventure narratives that glorify conquest and domination over nature, maintaining a framework that prioritizes competition, exclusion, and control over inclusivity and environmental respect.

This paper has outlined the concept of a “decolonial outdoor counternarrative” as a means of transforming outdoor spaces and adventure sports from their colonial foundations toward a more inclusive, equitable, and environmentally conscious paradigm. A decolonial outdoor counternarrative focuses on actively working towards decolonization in outdoor spaces, promoting values and practices that center Indigenous perspectives. This approach challenges the dominant narratives that have historically shaped outdoor sports and seeks to reshape

⁸⁷ Ibid., chapter 6.

⁸⁸ Wigglesworth, “The Cultural Politics,” 609.

the culture of adventure sports, that, with their countercultural characteristics and intrinsic closeness to nature, have a unique potential to drive this transformative change. The term “lifestyle sports” thus better captures the decolonial approach to adventure sports, as it reflects a holistic approach that encompasses not just the performance of the activity but also the values, community, and ways of living that surround it.

Decolonizing the discourse surrounding adventure sports involves cultivating decolonial outdoor counterstories which can inspire a proactive approach to reshaping the culture of these sports, fostering a shift from competitive dominance to collaborative coexistence. The analysis conducted in this paper of various decolonial counterstories demonstrates how integrating Indigenous values and practices that emphasize a deep cultural and spiritual connection with nature can transform outdoor activities into acts of cultural reclamation and environmental stewardship. Furthermore, the counterstories redefine success not as reaching the summit, but as cultivating community, cooperation, and a holistic relationship with both human and non-human elements of the natural world. They also highlight the importance of recognizing our own limits, valuing safety and well-being, and approaching risk in a way that empowers rather than objectifies the practitioners by reframing walking away from dangerous situations as a sign of maturity rather than weakness.

Moreover, the counterstories analyzed in this paper reveal how adventure sports can intensify a sense of environmental responsibility because of the environmental emotions that its practitioners experience. As Petr Vaškovic discusses in his paper, “Philosophical Perspectives on Climate Anxiety,” climate anxiety is a future-oriented emotional state tied to uncertain environmental threats, which can lead to feelings of meaninglessness.⁸⁹ However, Vaškovic also notes that this anxiety highlights the dependence of meaningful activities on humanity’s and the planet’s survival, fostering a sense of responsibility for the wider human and non-human community.⁹⁰ Adventure sports, by provoking a unique intersection of emotions – joy, empowerment, calmness, and climate anxiety – can foster a deep sense of connection to the environment, motivating positive environmental actions. These emotions create a balance, preventing climate anxiety

⁸⁹ Petr Vaškovic, “Philosophical Perspectives on Climate Anxiety,” in *Handbook of Philosophy of Climate Change*, ed. Gianfranco Pellegrino and Marcello Di Paola (Cham: Springer, 2023), 20, doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-16960-2_144-1.

⁹⁰ Vaškovic, “Philosophical Perspectives,” 20.

from escalating to a point of despair or “climate denialism,” instead encouraging a proactive and engaged response to environmental issues.⁹¹

As a result, many adventure athletes today are expanding their roles beyond their sporting achievements to become advocates for environmental and social justice, increasingly incorporating decolonial Indigenous principles into their work. This shift is evident in the efforts of prominent figures like Alex Honnold, a well-known white male climber, and Jeremy Jones, a renowned mountain snowboarder and founder of Protect Our Winters (POW), an organization dedicated to addressing climate change.⁹² These athletes, through their platforms and influence, are championing causes that intersect with both environmental sustainability and Indigenous rights. The Navajo climber Len Necefer collaborates closely with both Honnold and Jones, serving on the board of the Honnold Foundation, which works with Indigenous communities globally to provide access to solar energy for marginalized populations.⁹³ Their cooperation highlights the significant convergence between Indigenous leaders and non-Indigenous allies in the outdoor community.

The involvement of influential figures like Honnold and Jones in spreading a decolonial outdoor counternarrative is particularly significant. As privileged men in positions of power, they possess a unique ability to amplify messages of social justice and environmental responsibility to a broad audience. Their participation can help bridge the gap between mainstream outdoor communities and the decolonial movements led by Indigenous and other marginalized voices. Moreover, as noted by Wigglesworth, when powerful figures use their platforms to highlight social injustices, their actions “will be seen as less self-interested,” lending greater credibility to their advocacy efforts.⁹⁴ This perception can be instrumental in reaching audiences who might otherwise be resistant to these messages.

Nevertheless, while the involvement of prominent figures like Alex Honnold and Tommy Caldwell with Indigenous athletes and activists is notable, it does not necessarily signal a shift toward decolonial practice. Although environmental protection efforts by Honnold and others contribute to important conservation goals, these efforts largely align with a mainstream narrative in adventure sports that prioritizes sustainability over systemic change. While this environmental

⁹¹ Ibid, 7.

⁹² Protect Our Winters, “POW International – Protect Our Winters,” 2019, <https://protectourwinters.org/>.

⁹³ Honnold Foundation, “Honnold Foundation,” n.d., <https://www.honnoldfoundation.org/>.

⁹⁴ Wigglesworth, “The Cultural Politics,” 610.

stance is commendable, it often lacks a radical critique of the outdoor industry's structural entanglement with colonialism, failing to address how dominant narratives continue to marginalize Indigenous governance, sovereignty, and cultural practices. Their involvement thus highlights a critical tension in contemporary outdoor sports: the difference between supporting decolonial counterstories and actively engaging with the structures of power and knowledge established by colonialism.

This tension reveals an essential inquiry within decolonial work in outdoor spaces: How do power players within the industry, such as athletes with broad influence, understand and address colonial legacies compared to scholars and activists like Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, who explicitly foreground the need for dismantling colonial structures? Tuck and Yang call for a decolonization that does not merely reform but fundamentally shifts power and recognizes Indigenous self-determination and land relations. By comparison, the approaches of figures like Honnold or organizations like Patagonia may reflect an environmentalism that, while progressive, often remains within the framework of settler ideologies of conservation. Hence, there is a need for further, more "radical" counterstories that engage with this gap, resisting colonial structures and exploring the potential for a truly decolonial outdoor practice that upholds Indigenous sovereignty, governance, and epistemologies rather than simply endorsing sustainability within existing paradigms.

By embracing decolonial outdoor counternarrative, we can work towards rectifying the historical injustices that continue to shape our interactions with the natural world and Indigenous peoples, promoting a more inclusive and ecologically mindful future that is urgently needed in the time of climate change. This narrative underscores the importance of acknowledging past harms while advocating for a shift toward a more respectful, inclusive, and sustainable engagement with nature through the outdoor sports – one that recognizes the rights, values, and voices of Indigenous peoples and other minoritized practitioners. In doing so, we can redefine the culture of outdoor sports, creating spaces where all individuals can experience the connection, joy, and empowerment that these activities offer.

REVIEWS

Marieluise Beck, ed., **Ukraine verstehen: Auf den Spuren von Terror und Gewalt**. Stuttgart: ibidem, 2021. 148 pages. ISBN 978-3-8382-1773-4.

The book *Ukraine verstehen: Auf den Spuren von Terror und Gewalt* [Understanding Ukraine: Tracing the Roots of Terror and Violence] was published in 2021 as a German-language edited volume by the ibidem publishers. It was edited by Marieluise Beck and curated by her and her colleagues at LibMod – the Zentrum Liberale Moderne, a Berlin-based political think-tank and debating platform that focuses on topics of liberal democracy in Eastern Europe. It was published as part of the series *Ukrainian Voices*, which is a series of books that aims to introduce Western and other audiences to Ukrainian debates, interpretations, and explorations of historical and current Ukrainian and international affairs. The series' goal is to familiarize non-Ukrainian readers with how select prominent Ukrainians approach, assess, and view Ukraine's development and position on the global stage. *Ukraine verstehen* follows this pattern. It is designed to enrich the current German discourse on Ukraine and add necessary context and a Ukrainian perspective to it.

In the book's prologue, Dmytro Kuleba, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, states that the book is intended to "provide an authentic look at the history of the Ukrainian people, which are an important part of the historical mosaic of Europe. Ukrainian tragedies should be seen as part of the common pain" (p. 11). Kuleba argues that with its independence in 1991, Ukraine deserves a right accorded to every other sovereign nation, namely the right to what he calls its own "historical memory." Throughout the book, the reader is made aware that Ukraine's history is one of colonization, and that with colonization came not only a loss of sovereignty over its territory, people and national heritage, but also over its own voice and historical narrative. Several of the contributing authors note that especially from a German perspective, Ukraine is often to this day perceived not as an equal partner among global actors like the United States of America or Russia, but merely as a geopolitical stage on which those players interact. This book attempts to recenter the global narrative about Ukraine by amplifying Ukrainian voices, perspectives and topics, and making them part of a bigger process in which Ukrainians are fighting for the right to speak for themselves.

The book is composed of contributions by 26 authors, the majority of whom are Ukrainians; however, it also has several German authors who contribute to the discussion by providing a different perspective, especially in the chapters that concern the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. Some noted international scholars, such as Timothy Snyder and Anne Applebaum, also contributed to the volume. Almost all of the authors are historians or journalists. They work either as academics at institutions of higher education or at leading newspapers and think-tanks.

The book is split into three main parts. The first is entitled "Stalinist Repressions" and provides historical context for the repression of Ukrainians during the years of the early Soviet Union under Stalin. It especially shines light on the genocidal aspect of Soviet

Russian colonialism at the time. It explains the interaction of different repressive strategies, such as the artificially created famine known as the Holodomor (Anne Applebaum, Serhii Plokhii), targeted oppression of Ukrainian intellectual elites aimed at eradicating Ukraine as a nation (Volodymyr Yermolenko), and persecution and deportation of specific ethnic groups from Ukraine, such as its ethnic German population and the Crimean Tatars (Oksana Grytsenko, Viktoria Savchuk). The book showcases a multitude of interconnected traumas perpetrated in the first half of the twentieth century at the hands of the Soviet leadership. These traumas still reverberate to this day, for example in the political discourse surrounding the attempted annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014.

The second part of the book is “Occupying Powers in World War II.” Although this part mainly focuses on the Nazi German occupation of modern-day Ukrainian territory, it begins by highlighting the historical themes of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and of Ukraine as a pawn in the hands of the powerful (Jan Claas Behrends). The authors debunk some common modern-day Russian propaganda myths about World War II that understate the multiethnic composition of the Red Army, downplay the early alliance between Nazi Germany and the USSR, and exaggerate the collaboration of Ukrainians and Poles with the Wehrmacht. The contributions in this part carefully reconstruct some of the gravest atrocities committed by the Nazis and their local proxies, and the cooperation in them of the Romanian regime under Ion Antonescu in Ukraine. Remembrances of the “forgotten massacre” of Koryukivka and the involvement of Romanian troops in the Holocaust are important contributions to this book (Christoph Brumme, Ottmar Trașcă). Furthermore, the involvement of “regular” German police officers who participated in the “Holocaust by bullets” in Ukraine, but never faced any legal consequences for it, is exemplified by a case study of the Bremen police force (Klaus Wolschner). Finally, the longest contribution in the book is a comprehensive reconstruction and, most importantly, debunking, of myths surrounding the leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), Stepan Bandera, addressing both historical fact and modern symbolism (Wilfried Jilge).

Lastly, the third part of the book is entitled “Remembrance and Responsibility.” Whereas the first two parts were relatively separate discussions of the relationship between Ukraine and Germany and between Ukraine and the USSR and Russia, this last part discusses both issues. It advances the argument that Ukraine was colonized by both Nazi Germany and Russia at different points in its history. Heretofore, the concept of *Binnenkolonialismus*, a type of colonialism that did not take place overseas but by expanding an empire’s borders into neighboring territories, has received little to no attention in German public discourse. Therefore, this book’s perspective is an interesting contribution to German understanding of Ukraine’s history. The concept of Russia and the USSR as colonial powers, let alone the notion of the Third Reich as yet another colonizer, is relatively new to German public discourse (Gerhard Simon, Timothy Snyder). The first four essays examine the current *Erinnerungskultur* in Germany when it comes to Ukrainian suffering during the Second World War, not only in terms of the Holocaust, but also the abduction of Ukrainian women and children as forced laborers. The authors criticize that in

Germany not enough emphasis is put on Ukraine, or Belarus for that matter, as victims of Nazi violence. Most sympathy in that regard, be it symbolic or political, is shown towards Russia (Nikolai Klimeniouk, Gelinada Grinchenko, Sebastian Christ). In the remaining contributions, the authors focus on the *Erinnerungskultur* in Russia, and conclude that in Russia as well as in Germany, Ukraine's sacrifices are consistently ignored in public discourse. Even a historical revisionism regarding the Holocaust that was first observed in the USSR is making a comeback in Putin's Russia, along with the rehabilitation of Joseph Stalin (Irina Scherbakova). The book grapples with the trauma of Chernobyl and touches upon the disorientation and political turmoil that followed the fall of the USSR (Anna Veronika Wendland, Rebecca Harms, Eduard Klein). Finally, the authors discuss the Euromaidan and its consequences, such as efforts at decommunizing Ukraine (Kateryna Mishchenko, Sébastien Gobert, Yevhen Hlibovtsky).

In conclusion, throughout its chapters, *Ukraine verstehen* follows the belief that it is impossible to understand modern Ukraine without understanding its tragic past, especially its collective and individual traumas of the twentieth century. It emphasizes that the history of Ukraine is not only shaped by the repeated exertions of influence by Russia over the centuries, but that Ukraine also has a prominent connection to Germany, which is, however, barely known or taught in Germany. This is why the content of the book is broadly separated into two "histories of oppression": oppression under the USSR and oppression under Nazi Germany. In Germany, a flawed notion of "historical responsibility" toward Russia is often overemphasized in political discourse, due to past atrocities committed by the Nazis on the territory of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. On the other hand, the discourse largely neglects other nations of the former Soviet Union that suffered no less under Nazism, especially the Ukrainians. This new perspective on Germany's "historical responsibility" is intended to create an open dialogue and better understanding of the past. Furthermore, by exploring the oppression of the Ukrainians under communism, the book helps reveal the historical trauma many Ukrainians suffered at the hands of the Soviets and facilitates better understanding of the historical context of current political events.

Ukraine verstehen is a book that is not primarily aimed at academics. Rather, it is intended as an effort at scientific communication, introducing a wider German audience to current academic and political debates surrounding Ukraine's past and present from a Ukrainian perspective. *Ukraine verstehen* contributes significantly to counteract and debunk Russian propaganda that has been running rampant, especially in Germany, since long before Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Russia's most recent war on Ukraine has made this volume even more important, as Russia continually seeks to justify its actions by rewriting and weaponizing history. Not surprisingly, this book was reprinted by the German government's Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung in July 2022 following Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine. It has since been treated as a standard reading for the larger German public. It not only educates its German audience on Soviet atrocities committed in Ukraine in the twentieth century, but also reckons with German violence perpetrated on the Ukrainian people under the Third Reich.

Overall, the book deserves praise, because it strikes an extraordinary balance between conveying complex historical events and political processes and presenting that information in a concise manner and accessible language. The formats of the essays are varied. They include more complex conceptual works, autobiographical contributions from contemporary witnesses, opinion essays on different topics, and case studies of groups of actors and specific regions. While most of the contributions in the book are original articles written for this volume, some are excerpts from already existing pieces that were licensed for use in it. Many of the essays are clearly based on state-of-the-art original research. Without the space here to discuss each original article and its context in the current research landscape, let it be said that all the authors paid great attention to valuable source material that was consulted in the research process.

To sum up, this volume makes an incredibly valuable contribution to German discourse on Ukraine, today more than ever, and is succeeding in its aim of introducing the German public to Ukrainian perspectives. In a public and political discourse where the mainstream perspective is often deliberately distorted by Russia, this book offers a direly needed Ukrainian view on events of the past and thereby increases understanding of the present. It is a comprehensive introduction to the history of the Russification of Ukraine and reckons with a plethora of Russian propaganda myths. Its exploration of Stepan Bander and the OUN, by Wilfried Jilge, might be the most prominent chapter for its German audience. However, this book was long overdue, not simply because of its perspective on Russian narratives, but also because it illuminates a blind spot that perseveres in the German *Erinnerungskultur* of the Holocaust and the atrocities committed by the Nazis in Ukraine. This volume fills a gap in the German literary landscape with which no other similar contribution can compare. As such, *Ukraine verstehen* is a must-read for all those who are new to the topic, who want to know more about the history of Ukraine, and who desire to understand the context of today's events. It is a fantastic piece of introductory reading, and I wholeheartedly recommend it.

Nina Steffen

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Jindřiška Bláhová, ed., **Proplétání světů. Mezinárodní filmový festival Karlovy Vary v období studené války**. Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2023. 523 pages. ISBN 978-80-7004-201-4.

While the film festivals in Cannes or Venice belong to the world's most iconic cultural events, their Czech (respectively Czechoslovak) counterpart – Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF) – stands on the peripheries of both film history and the contemporary film world, despite holding the same “A” category awarded by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF). Until the film historian Jindřiška Bláhová published the compelling anthology *Proplétání světů: Mezinárodní filmový festival Karlovy Vary v období studené války* [Intertwining Worlds. Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in the Cold War Era], the history of the socialist festival did not seem very interesting. Founded already in 1946, after communism the festival started to be portrayed as a politically discredited institution that obstructed the development of an actually progressive and internationally relevant film forum. Bláhová and her colleagues, who come from a diverse range of fields, made an enormous effort to scrape the extremely reductive sticker off. Not only did they succeed, but they also managed to replace it with an inclusive transnational picture, which invites further exploration.

The anthology comprises of seventeen studies that are divided into four thematic blocks – I. Between nations: European festival culture, vision of internationalism and looking for audience; II. Inside the Eastern bloc: Progressive film, zone of contact and socialist modernity; III. East-West/West-East: Festival politics, cultural transfer and socialist consumerist culture; and IV. World: Socialist internationalism, Hollywood and Global South. The decision not to follow chronological order – the studies cover the period between 1946–90 – is easily defensible as it would be much harder if not impossible to capture different types of festival's periodizations and different functions it served for various actors. Yet the introductory and final chapters hold the book together. Bláhová opens it with a study dedicated to the first two pre-communist festival editions of 1946 and 1947. Vítězslav Sommer's closes it with a one on the transition period of late 1980s and early 1990s. Hence, even if not all seams between the thematic blocks are perfect and one needs a moment to get back to realities of Stalinism (p. 306) after some hundred pages dominantly focused on 1960s, the pleasure from discovering new conceptual prisms compensates the effort.

An issue harder to overlook concerns the fluctuating quality of individual studies. Those with a clear thesis and well-arranged structure, such as the ones of Jindřiška Bláhová, Lukáš Skupa, Martin Franc, Richard Nowell, or Elena Razlogova, stand next to those that clearly suffer from a lack of editing. Their informative and interpretative value is not necessarily lower, though. Yet the overall approachability of the book relies on the exceptional story-telling abilities of Bláhová, who also works as a journalist, and on a few other studies that, apart from being well-researched, are also well-written. Editorial changes would be needed for the book to resonate with an international academic audience.

How is it possible that KVIFF witnessed neither the rise of the Polish Film School (Andrzej Munk, Andrzej Wajda, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, and others) nor of the Czechoslovak New Wave (Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel, Ivan Passer, and others)? Studies by Jaromír Blažejovský, who inspects the fate of individual national cinematographies at the festival, and Jakub Jiříšťa and Lukáš Skupa, who shed light on KVIFF in the late 1960s, meet to make one of the most interesting points of the book. The problem the festival struggled with from the very beginning – a lack of best-quality movies that both Western and Eastern European countries were sending to more prestigious competitions in Cannes or Venice instead – caught up with the organizers when movies by Forman or Menzel ended up in the West as well. The reasons were political, economic, and strategic. The symbolic value of the victory in Western European competitions was much higher, as it qualitatively equalized the often-underestimated production of socialist countries. The different pace of regimes' easing after Stalin's death played its role as well. Little praise for Andrzej Munk's *Man on the Tracks* at the festival in 1957 sent a clear sign that for the Czechoslovak establishment, Poles were too progressive too soon. New important titles travelled to the West in the future.

Also, the Western trophies went hand in hand with substantial financial rewards; those were obviously appreciated both by socialist states and artists. The last factor concerned KVIFF's ongoing effort to maintain the "A" category awarded by FIAPF and eventually to permanently keep it (study by David Čeněk). Apart from other demands (such as distancing from politics), this was conditioned by the festival's profile as a prestigious international film forum as opposed to a parade of domestic production. Despite much anticipation by foreign filmmakers, the best Czechoslovak films of the twentieth century were mostly not part of the main competition program at KVIFF, and their screenings took place in small, insufficient screening rooms.

While KVIFF had no interest and, at the same time, could not set itself apart from the rival competitions by building its reputation on the quality of Czechoslovak New Wave (and possibly other Eastern European cinematographies), it became unique and successful in a different area. Bláhová focuses on the alternative festival model during the Stalinist era, which was closely linked to the World Peace Movement, and shows that the straitjacket of socialist ideology might in many ways have limited the festival, but it also provided it with a coherent social and political course (p. 325). Starting the Free Platform in 1958 and the Symposium of Young and New Cinemas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in 1962 were part of the festival's progressive heading. Elena Razlogova takes up Bláhová's story and captures KVIFF as the first festival that provided a thorough discussion platform for filmmakers of the Global South. KVIFF helped discover Indian films and Brazilian Cinema Novo and gave a space to Chinese, Cuban, and North Vietnamese films that were banned from all Western competitions for political reasons. It is Razlogova's study that brings a completely new chronology into the festival's history. What were dark hours of Soviet domination for Eastern Europeans was a period of awakening and hope of liberation from Western imperialism and colonialism for nations of the Global South.

On the other hand, the late 1960s were a turning point in the North but mattered little in the South.

The rest of the studies provide more individualized findings. Martin Franc focuses on guest care and the organization of hosts' free time. Modest post-war conditions at the once lavish spa resort, which was now located in an economically deprived borderland, improved only slowly. The attempts to match Western standards were often met with ridicule. An American journalist, who regularly reported from Karlovy Vary to the American cultural magazine *Variety*, described his festival experience as "painful" (p. 298). Yet even the American approach to the festival was not unified. Richard Nowell shows both the stereotypical framing of the festival on the pages of *Variety* and Hollywood's pragmatic strategy of choosing internationally oriented, progressive, middlebrow, and feminist films for KVIFF. Thus, he can conclude that Hollywood was not as unwaveringly anti-communist during the Cold War as it is understood to be. Similar ideological flexibility is described by Bláhová and Ewa Ciszewska, who explore the socialist appropriation of the concept of stardom. By drawing attention to actresses' artistic performance, approachability, and lack of cheaply displayed sexuality, socialists distanced themselves from the capitalist usage of the concept. Yet, the festival magazines were still full of sexualized images of visiting female artists, as their physical beauty mediated Western modernity.

Even though a few editing decisions can be criticized, Bláhová's anthology is thought-provoking, and its core theses are refreshingly bold. In the past, many interesting phenomena linked to pre-1990 KVIFF fell into regretful oblivion due to the blanket condemnation of everything that was tied to state socialism. Bláhová and her colleagues revisit the first twenty-seven editions of the festival and look at them through the eyes of a myriad of actors: Czech organizers, foreign directors, actors and producers, Hollywood, the Eastern Bloc, and, importantly, the Global South. It is a great example of transnational approach to history Czech academia only recently started to flirt with.

Johana Khusek

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

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Citations should always include a DOI (Digital Object Identifier), if the cited material has one.

Electronic sources should be cited including the date of last access, if appropriate.

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