

“Western contacts” inspired an outsized spike in the MfS’s information-collection operations. Simply having a Westerner visit one’s home became sufficient grounds for an individual to be entered into the GDR’s card registry. The rising backlog of data to be processed through the *Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe* (ZAIG), the MfS division responsible for information analysis, hastened the implementation of more sophisticated tools. By the 1980s, individual data points were more differentiated, searchable, and of higher quality, eased by the expanding digitization project and electronic database. As a result, the systematic analysis of data through ZAIG as well as the *Auswertungs- und Kontrollgruppe* (AKG) came to play a dominant role in determining secret police tactics in the 1980s.

Yet the system continued to falter. Why? Booß cites the limited storage capacity on MfS computers, long delays in populating the database with new data, the failure of personnel to integrate information from earlier storage formats and to share data between regional units, as well as a lack of flexibility in establishing new search criteria and characteristics in response to the changing times. Furthermore, the exaggerated fixation on surveillance operations related to Western contacts from the 1970s onwards prevented the Stasi from devoting commensurate resources to other sites of vulnerability, like the nascent political opposition groups that played a significant role in accelerating the GDR’s demise. As a result, Booß concludes: “the history of information processing by the MfS appears to offer a lesson that the collection of ever-increasing information in no way corresponds with the achievement of security goals, in this case the stability of the GDR under the leadership of the SED” (10).

Like Schönrich in his study of the *Bildschirmtext*, Christian Booß is also writing with specialists in mind. The level of detail devoted to the succession of card systems, directories, and information databases stands to greatly illuminate understandings of the inner workings of the MfS and offers fresh insight into the reasons for its surprising level of dysfunction in its final decades. Yet the painstaking detail afforded to the discussion of data storage systems could also be vexing for those looking for the big picture and interested in understanding how the book’s findings fit within the broader history of the Stasi or the history of technology in the GDR. This, perhaps, points toward the need for synthetic histories (particularly English-language works) of Germany’s computerization, to make the knowledge accumulated in works like these two fine monographs more accessible to researchers and readers outside the field of German studies. We can also look forward to future studies exploring points of intersection and divergence between the GDR and the FRG as part of Germany’s idiosyncratic path to digitization, while continuing to attend to the bumps, U-turns, and dead ends along the way.

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After Auschwitz: The Difficult Legacies of the GDR

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Marcus Colla

Pembroke College, University of Cambridge

One may justly raise an eyebrow when told that questions of memory and commemoration in the German Democratic Republic have been understudied. After all, the period since 1989

has witnessed tranches of works concerned with the new challenges posed by memory of the Nazi and communist pasts for the society of reunified Germany. In the face of this avalanche, can there *really* be any more to say on the relationship of past and present in East Germany – still less a “paradigm shift” in GDR studies, as Enrico Heitzer, Martin Jander, Anetta Kahane, and Patrice G. Poutrus claim in their new edited volume, *After Auschwitz?*

Yes, as a matter of fact. The twenty-one essays that appear in the volume – an English translation of the original German released in 2018 as *Nach Auschwitz* – pose a number of intriguing and highly relevant big-picture questions about the place of the GDR within the longer continuities of twentieth-century German history. In short, the book is an appeal to understand the GDR through its origins as a post-fascist state born in conditions of war and occupation, and to read the history of that state as much through the lens of 1945 as through that of 1989. *After Auschwitz* makes a timely plea not to neglect the centrality of continuity to our understanding of East German politics and society after 1945.

The book’s first section deals with continuities between National Socialism and the German Democratic Republic. By and large, these essays are not interested in the kind of totalitarian theory that designates the GDR as Germany’s “second dictatorship.” Instead, they are concerned with the complex ways in which the pre-1945 inheritance seeped into East German social structures, cultural products, and political activities. The “antifascist” narrative to which the SED sought to hitch the legitimacy of its state features prominently here, usually in its historical role as an ideological alibi with which to displace all guilt and responsibility for the Third Reich solely onto the Federal Republic, but – more commonly – for the way it distorted historical impressions of Nazi crimes and the Holocaust at home. Pleasingly, though, the stale story of “antifascism” in the GDR is reinvigorated through a number of insightful new approaches and research questions. Invoking Mary Fulbrook’s observation that “the manner in which the Nazi past persisted in postwar Germany” is something of an “elephant” in the “ivory tower of GDR research” (64), Enrico Heitzer puts forward a compelling plea to understand better the presence of residual right-wing sentiments within the GDR by looking closely at the (often violent) oppositional activities that took place there. Other essays explore some significant blind spots produced by the GDR’s specific political-cultural constellations. Jeffrey Herf, for example, interrogates how the GDR’s anti-imperial and “antifascist” agendas conspired to impel an antagonistic policy towards the state of Israel that, in turn, “contributed greatly to the persistence of an antisemitism of consequences, and at times of intentions” (133). And Martin Jander argues that the GDR parliament’s 1990 declaration on the “commitment to the responsibility and complicity for the past and future” revealed “a historic conscience that was especially lacking in previous declarations by East German dissident groups” (192).

The book’s second section concerns itself with the post-1989 period. Running with the core theme of the book, Raiko Hannemann offers a fresh reflection on the distorting power of the totalitarianism paradigm over our understanding of oppositional activities in the GDR, emphasizing, for example, the value of viewing the June 1953 uprising through the context of *prior* conditions rather than as an anti-totalitarian forerunner of the Prague Spring, Solidarność, and 1989. Contributions by the memorial experts Günter Morsch and Carola S. Rudnik very helpfully relate scholarly debates to ongoing memorial practices both in Germany and abroad. Morsch advances a plea for a “pluralist culture of remembrance” in Europe that avoids the pitfalls of synthesizing diverse experiences of persecution and suffering under any one post-1989 “master narrative” (227, 218). The section concludes with a timely essay by Daniela Blei on the Monument to Freedom and Unity now under construction in front of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. The remarkable degree of indifference that this monument has met, Blei shows, captures in a number of important ways the mass of ambiguities that the collapse of the GDR and the reunification of Germany have injected into contemporary German memory culture.

While it is certainly a strength of this volume that it draws together analyses from a range of disciplinary perspectives and that it deals relatively equally with the political, social, and

cultural dimensions of its subject matter, there is nevertheless an unavoidable sense of disjointedness. Some of the contributions are drily academic, others deeply personal and autobiographical. There is also a somewhat frustrating variation in length between the essays as well as some incoherence in terms of content. The editors advance the argument that while some critical attention has been given to “the aftereffects of National Socialism and other chapters in Germany’s past” within the GDR, the subject has not been addressed “in the depth and breadth presented in this book” (2). Indeed, one might justifiably state that the book has breadth: it contains twenty-one chapters on topics ranging from the sociology of East German intelligence officers (Helmut Müller-Enbergs) to the presence of the Holocaust in the fiction of Christa Wolf and Fred Wander (Agnes C. Mueller). But depth is a different matter. Notwithstanding footnotes, the essays have an average length of only about ten pages, meaning they serve better as small “tasters” for the new research directions taken by their authors.

But this is not to deny the overall value of *After Auschwitz* as an original set of explorations of some pivotal yet overlooked social and political themes of East German history. Indeed, in the course of reading this volume, my initial skepticism as to the novelty of its claims was tamed considerably. There is an impressive range of perspectives on offer here, and the book’s promise to reinvigorate some of the big-picture questions about the GDR seems well-placed. In particular, some of the more thought-provoking contributions concern the fates of marginalized groups within the GDR, such as Sinti and Roma (Ingrid Bettwieser and Tobias von Brocke), homosexuals (Christiane Leidinger and Heike Radvan), “asocials” (Katharina Lenski), and returning “strangers” (Patrice G. Poutrus), which offer some genuinely productive lines of enquiry for further research and reflection. Though at times a touch disjointed, *After Auschwitz* provides much stimulation for scholars interested in both the particularities of the GDR and its place in the longer-term continuities of modern German history.

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