Punks in the Church: The Relationship Between the Punk Subculture and Church in East Germany

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A punk subculture emerged in East Germany during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was an expression of their disillusionment with life, their frustrations with the government, and their pessimistic view of a future that seemed pre-planned. The subculture refused to conform, disengaged from the established system, and expressed their views through song lyrics and other acts of defiance. In the eyes of the state, punks were a threat. The subculture turned to the East German Protestant churches for shelter. The churches occupied a unique place within East German society because the government had granted the churches limited free space for religious purposes. Although the churches felt it was their duty to engage society and politics, the churches did not agree on the extent or nature of this involvement.

After a government crackdown on the subculture began in 1983, punks became more politically active. The churches had provided shelter for other dissident groups, such as pacifists and environmentalists, and the punk subculture began to become involved with some of these groups. When a segment of the churches broke off to form a more politically activist church, the *Kirche von Unten*, the punk subculture gravitated towards this group. Because of the experiences the punk subculture had in the church, and because of the government crackdown, punks took a more active political role than before, and they contributed to the opposition movement that developed in East Germany.
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Ruth A. Aardsma Benton
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ABBREVIATIONS

BK…………..Bekennende Kirche
BEK…………Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen
DC…………..Deutsche Christen
DDR…………Deutsche Demokratische Republik
EKD…………Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland
ELAB………Evangelisches Landeskirchliches Archiv
EZA…………Evangelisches Zentralarchiv
FDJ…………Freie Deutsche Jugend
GDR…………German Democratic Republic
JG………….Junge Gemeinde
KvU…………Kirche von Unten
OA…………Offene Arbeit
SED…………Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
INTRODUCTION

When people ask me about my thesis topic, I often get a strange look or slight chuckle at my response. While some of it might be because I do not look like someone familiar with punk music, I think these reactions have more to do with the odd combination of my topic. Punks are not normally associated with Christian churches. In fact, the image many people have of punks seems antithetical to Christian religious beliefs. Although it may sound strange at first, there was an important relationship that developed between the punk subculture and the Protestant churches in East Germany.1 This relationship was complicated, and there were tensions between the groups at times. There is no simple answer that describes their relationship because the punk subculture and different groups within these churches had different points of view. Often punks describe how they felt rejected by church affiliated groups. Some of the leadership within the churches wanted to minister to East German youth, but they feared that working with punks might create a situation where the churches in East Germany would be restricted by the state and become unable to minister to anyone. Some people felt the churches were going beyond their proper role in engaging East German society, while others felt it had not gone far enough. Yet, despite these varying views, it is clear that the punk subculture did seek shelter within the free space that the churches had been granted by the party in charge of East Germany, the

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1 In some of the scholarship I have read about the churches within the Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen, or BEK, I have seen the use of word “church” used to refer to multiple churches as well as individual churches. Because there were differences between the individual churches, I will use the term “churches.” Similarly, the terms “Evangelical” and “Protestant” are both used in scholarship when referring to the churches within the BEK. Because these churches were predominantly Lutheran, along with some Calvinist congregations, I will use the term “Protestant” when describing the churches. I elected to do this in part because within American culture, the terms “Evangelical” and “Protestant” have slightly different connotations. However, in quotations, I will retain the terminology used by the author.
Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands or SED, and it is within this free space that the subculture interacted with other dissidents and became more politically active. I believe studying this relationship can provide a different perspective for understanding youth culture, marginalized groups, and the churches within East German society, and the events that led to the collapse of the East German state. I hope that my work can contribute to the development of a more nuanced understanding of East Germany and its citizens by adding another piece to the overall history.

The task of understanding East Germany and its history is a complicated endeavor because of competing narratives used to explain its existence and collapse. During the first decade or so after the fall of the Berlin Wall, many historical studies of East Germany seemed to take a triumphalist stance by focusing on those whose agitated for change and challenged the government. As described by Eli Rubin, “these early histories by Western historians advanced the Cold War view that East Germany was an inauthentic state, a puppet state, held in place only by the support of the USSR and by the terror imposed on its unwitting citizens by the Ministry of State Security, the Stasi.” According to this view, East Germany was never a legitimate, true nation. As Konrad Jarausch describes it, this interpretation sees the GDR “as a kind of occupation regime,” supported by the Soviet Union. Without Soviet tanks to quell the June 1953 uprising, the Wall to keep its citizens in, or the creation of the secret police, East Germany would not have been able to exist. This position was shaped by the legacy of the Cold War and its historiography.

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accompanying beliefs. According to Jarausch, this “moralizing view appeals especially to former Eastern dissidents and to Western champions of the Cold War.”

However, a different narrative began to emerge. Some scholars challenged the idea of East Germany being a totalitarian state and described it as an attempt to create a utopian society that failed. Focusing on the efforts to create an egalitarian society, the ways the state tried to care for its citizens, and other positive aspects of this attempt to rebuild German society in the wake of World War II as an alternative to capitalism are emphasized, the nation is seen nostalgically. Those who stand at this end of the spectrum however, can also take on moralistic element. As Jarausch argues, “both of these views are couched in highly moral terms and use the GDR [German Democratic Republic] merely as evidence in what amounts to an ideological contest for the soul of the country, without being particularly interested in what [East Germany] was really like.”

Neither perspective fully explains a key question in East German historiography: how was it possible for East Germany to remain stable for so long yet also collapse as quickly as it did.

In the years since the Wall fell, some scholars shifted to a “bottom-up” approach to explore what life was like for East German citizens, with an emphasis on cultural and social history. Known as Alltagsgeschichte, this approach examines what “everyday life” was like, and it has used a variety of topics, such as the role of women, sexuality, or private life, to create a more nuanced and complete picture of East Germany. This has led to debates about the nature and structure of power within East Germany as these scholars attempt to explore society and

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culture without forgetting the political issues involved. As mentioned above, one important issue needs to be addressed is the question of how East Germany remained stable for so long yet collapsed so suddenly. As Rubin describes it, this has led to a “search to understand what Thomas Lindenberger, Alf Lüdtke, and others have called Herrschaft—domination—in ways more social and cultural than purely political.” Often utilizing a “bottom-up” approach, these scholars have attempted to answer questions about the more subtle ways the SED managed to “maintain and build upon its power” and its ability to “manufacture stability, consent, or even legitimacy.” In seeking these answers, scholars have examined how East Germans experienced life, how they navigated through state bureaucracy, and how they exercised agency within the system. Often, this has focused on how the average person was able to carve out a life within the parameters provided by the state. Rubin explains that while “East German society and culture differed substantially from the Cold War stereotypes of a drab and depraved existence,” it needs to be acknowledged that “everything in East Germany . . . was in some way altered and shaped by the ruling ideology of socialism.” Likewise, as Sandrine Kott argues, GDR citizens “integrated and internalized the behavior, values, and rules imposed by a strong state.” From education to employment, from leisure time to pop culture, everything was supposed to help East German citizens develop what the SED believed was the appropriate mindset and values.

While it is important to recognize that people could find a way to live a relatively normal life within the confines of the state, this fact should not preclude the recognition of those who did challenge the government. According to Kott, “the steps people took to reclaim ownership of

their own lives were possible only when not liable to be viewed as overtly subversive.”  

Although one could raise complaints about the government, all expressions of discontent had to fall within the range the SED deemed appropriate. Additionally, there were those who chaffed under the SED and ran into trouble with the Stasi. Unlike one dissident who compared the Stasi to a “scratchy undershirt,” uncomfortable but not threatening, some individuals, including those in the punk subculture, refused to conform. For punks, their experiences with the SED and the Stasi were not merely annoyances. Life for those within marginalized groups was not the same as it was for the average citizen, thus it is essential to understand both experiences in order to develop a more complex and deeper understanding of life in East Germany. Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte have argued that “how minorities . . . are treated and acknowledged, and how they themselves seek to shape their own lives, are pivotal for understanding any social and political system.”  

As they go on to point out, studying the experience of minority groups enables an examination of “the intersecting and shifting layers of complicity, accommodation, retreat, cooperation, idealism and human agency” that made up East German society. These various layers can be seen, to at least some extent, in the relationship between the punk subculture and the churches and how they both interacted with the SED. It also allows us to better understand how those involved in dissident groups came together during the late 1980s to challenge the SED’s version of “real existing socialism” and how they helped contribute to the end of East Germany.

14 Kott, 8.  
15 Rubin, Amnesiopolis, 132. Rubin is quoting Jens Reich.  
A secondary benefit to studying the punk subculture is that it helps scholarship understand the decades that are often overlooked: the 1970s and most of the 1980s. Scholarship tends to focus on specific times periods in East German history, principally the first two decades and the final year or so. In his dissertation, Jeff Hayton points out that there tends to be an emphasis on 1950s-1960s in East German historiography.\textsuperscript{18} Kate Gerrard expounds on this trend, stating that “markedly less historiographical attention has been paid to East German music subcultures in the 1970s and 1980s” which she links it to “a lack of momentum in alternative music culture in the 1970s, a decade which saw the continuation of subcultures from the 1960s such as hippies and blues freaks, and the absorption of rock music into official culture.”\textsuperscript{19} Her argument may explain why I observed that scholarship on East German music pop culture tends to focus on the 1950s through 1960s during my research. While it is important to understand the first two decades, the last two are equally important. The youth of the 1970s and 1980s were the children who grew up entirely within the socialist state. Those who had been youths in the 1950s and 1960s may have remembered life before the GDR, and if they didn’t, their parents would have. However, their children, those who would have been young people during the 1970s and 1980s, would have less of a connection to life before East Germany existed. As Saunders notes, young people growing up in the 1980s had not experienced the war or immediate post-war periods, and had played no part in the building of socialism in the 1950s; thus they had few clear reasons to feel indebted to the party, and were in danger of holding a more distanced attitude towards the state than previous generations.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} Jeff Patrick Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 25-31.


There were concerns that this generation, which had not experienced the war or a different form of government in their native country, would not value the GDR the same way that previous generations did. Thus, the SED made it a priority to instill in them the proper mindset and values, often referred to as a “socialist personality.”

Another distinct feature of the GDR that this group faced was a lack of mobility within society. During the first two decades, there was a lot of social mobility within the GDR, however this started to change in the 1970s, and it only worsened over time. Policies such as détente and Ostpolitik had an impact on life in the GDR. The escalating tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, and their nuclear arsenals, greatly affected East Germans, not to mention West Germans. This illustrates the point that East Germany was not a monolithic entity that never changed. To fully understand East Germany, scholars cannot focus on the first two decades and the last years of a nation that existed for about 40 years. The complete story of East Germany cannot be told if large segments of it are not understood because the changes, trends and events of these years have their roots in the first two decades and were influential on the last years.

I contend that examining the punk subculture can provide insight into these discussions surrounding East Germany. Punks were citizens who did not conform and would not have fit into the category of the “average East German.” Yet, while they were not average citizens, they faced many similar issues. While their overall approach to life in East Germany may have been different, the punk subculture had to navigate the systems put in place by the SED, interact with

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21 For example, please see Saunders, 11-15; and Gerrard, 156. Because the “socialist personality” will be examined in Chapter 1, please see this section for more information and sources.

22 For example, please see Detlef Pollack, “Modernization and Modernization Blockages in GDR Society,” in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, trans. by Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 27-45; and Ralph Jessen, “Mobility and Blockage During the 1970s,” in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. by Konrad H. Jarausch, trans. by Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 341-360. Because this change in mobility will be examined in Chapter 1, please see this section for more information and sources.
the Stasi, and find ways to work within the system. After all, they lived in the GDR and experienced many of the same things other citizens did. Because there are similarities but also core differences, a study of punks can illuminate some of the contours and complexities in East German society and culture. A study of punk subculture can contribute to the discussion about the nature and structure of power within East Germany as well. While some punks may have chosen to join the subculture as an act of rebellion, their actions had political implications, which will be explored in more depth later.

An examination of the ways that the punk subculture challenged the government and Stasi can also provide a different lens through which to study broader concepts in East German historiography such as issues of the SED’s legitimacy, its success for approximately forty years, and its sudden end. The East German punk subculture rejected the way that socialism was being carried out by the SED, yet they did not reject socialism or East Germany itself. Gerrard contends that one of the unique features of the punk subculture was the fact that “despite its arrival from the West, it did not facilitate lionizing Western culture and society.” She continues, “in contrast to its subcultural predecessors, punk did not aspire to emulate an economically or culturally ‘superior’ Western culture” but was “disillusioned” with Western culture, as well as its own. As will be discussed, this dissatisfaction was expressed through their nonconformity. Whether or not individual punks were intending to make political statements through their refusal to conform, their behavior was seen as political by the SED and Stasi. It is important to note, though, that the political aspect of the punk subculture changed throughout the 1980s. During the early 1980s, the subculture took a more passive or, in some cases, passive-aggressive, approach to politics. However, by the late 1980s, the subculture was

23 Gerrard, 165.
24 Gerrard, 166.
more actively political due to both the state’s crackdown on punk and the subculture’s increased interaction with the churches and the dissidents also gathering there. In this respect, studying the punk subculture can illuminate aspects of the sudden collapse of East Germany.

The punk subculture and the Protestant churches in East Germany had a complex and multifaceted relationship that is difficult to boil down into a simple sentence. The relationship was seen differently by the various groups involved. Yet this relationship is an important component in understanding the punk subculture and how it changed over the course of the 1980s. Over the course of three chapters, I hope to at least scratch the surface of this relationship. Chapter 1 primarily focuses on the punk subculture: its origins, its culture and beliefs, and how it rejected the “socialist personality” that the SED sought to instill in the nation’s young people. It is because of the subculture’s refusal to conform, and the state’s reaction to them, that punks became political, even if they did not see themselves that way at first. When the government decided to crack down on the subculture, punks sought refuge within the Protestant churches, the focus of Chapter 2. In order to understand the role of the Protestant churches in the GDR, it is necessary to explore some church history. In particular, the legacy of the Confessing Church’s opposition to Hitler during World War II was very influential to Protestant churches in the GDR. It shaped the discussion within the churches about their role in society and its duties to be the “church for others.”25 These debates affected how the churches interacted with different groups, including the punk subculture. While Chapter 2 begins to examine the relationship between the churches and the punk subculture, the interactions between the churches and the punk subculture, and the consequences of them, will be explored in more depth in Chapter 3. This chapter begins

25 For example, please see Heino Falcke, “What Did the Barmen Declaration Have to Say to the Churches of the German Democratic Republic?” *The Ecumenical Review* 61, no. 1 (March 2009): 72-80. This topic will be discussed more in Chapter 2.
by examining the government’s attempt to eliminate the punk subculture which led to the
subculture becoming more reliant on the free space provided by the Protestant churches. As the
subculture’s relationship with the churches changed as a result of the government crackdown,
punks began to interact with other dissident groups and became more clearly politically active.
Rather than being political primarily through nonconformity and expressing themselves through
lyrics, elements within the subculture became more actively involved in oppositional activities.
At the same time, as punks became more dependent on the shelter provided by the churches,
there were growing tensions and divisions within the churches about the role of Protestant
churches within East German society and their interactions with dissident groups who were
gathering within the churches. By the mid to late 1980s, these tensions and disagreements led
those who believed that the churches were not going far enough in their efforts to engage society
to break off and form a group known as the *Kirche von Unten* (Church from Below, or KvU).
Some within the punk subculture, in particular those who formed a group known as AlösA, were
involved with the KvU and its work with various dissident and oppositional movements.
Through their work with the KvU, the punk subculture continued to participate in political
activities rather than ending their dialogue with those in power. Thus, through their involvement
with other dissidents and with the KvU, punks contributed to the events that led to the end of the
GDR.

The East German punk subculture has not been studied in much depth at this point,
although there has been more scholarship on East German churches. Although I make use of
existing scholarship, especially Jeff Hayton’s PhD dissertation, many of my sources include
recollections of those involved. Because of the personal nature of these sources, I have attempted
to respect the individuals involved and to listen to their stories as they are recalled. Even though
it is necessary to hear what these individuals have to say, it is also necessary to remember that
these recollections may be imperfect or biased. After all, these recollections are part of an
individual’s identity or legacy. Just as witnesses to the same event may have differing accounts
of it, those involved in both the churches and punk subculture have differing accounts of what
happened and different interpretations of what these events meant. My intent is not to prove one
perspective as correct, but to use the various accounts to form a more complete picture. This is
also shaped by primary sources, including newspaper articles, recordings, and items from church
archives. There is much that can still be unearthed and explored regarding the relationship
between the punk subculture and the churches. I hope that this examination can add to our
understanding of East German history and society.
CHAPTER 1
REFUSING TO CONFORM

The punk subculture made its way to East Germany primarily through the United Kingdom and West Germany starting in the late 1970s. As one punk put it, East German punk “took its inspiration from the English scene before turning to the scene in West Germany or West Berlin.” While it is helpful to understand the context in which the punk movement originated, it is essential to remember that the punk subculture in East Germany was different from its Western international neighbors because of its socialist context. Being a punk in East Germany meant that one rejected the social norms and values established by the SED. Because of this, punks were considered a threat by the East German government and became a marginalized group within East German society.

Roots of East German Punk

During the 1970s, punk developed in both the United States and the United Kingdom as a critique of Western society and consumerism. It is difficult to pinpoint when exactly it was born, and there is debate about whether it began in the United States or the United Kingdom. However, it is clear that punk developed out of a discontent that came from high unemployment,

consumerism, and middle-class culture within these capitalist countries. Economic factors, de-industrialization, and social struggles in each country led some youths to believe the future was bleak. In the United States, society was dealing with the consequences of the Vietnam War, the failure of President Johnson’s Great Society, and the economic problems that plagued the 1970s. British punk was connected to working-class movements protesting “the growing economic downswing caused by the oil crisis and de-industrialization.” At the same time, British and American punk was also a reaction to rock’n’roll music which seemed decadent and no longer reflective of these experiences of these young people. It is in this context that punks came to believe they had “no future.” They envisioned a future that seemed to have little to offer them. Their music and subculture reflected this.

Punk music tended to be rebellious, loud, fast, and raw sounding, yet the subculture tapped into something deeper for many. When recalling how they were first introduced to punk, many describe a visceral connection. There was something about the music and subculture that resonated with them. For them, punk was more than a musical genre; it was a philosophy and

30 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 83.
31 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 83.
32 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 83.
34 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 371-373. For additional examples of this, see Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk (New York: Grove Press, 2014), Kindle edition; and Michael Boehlke and Henryk Gericke, eds. too much future—Punk in der DDR (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2007).
35 For examples of this, see McNeil and McCain, Please Kill Me; and Boehlke and Gericke, too much future.
way of life. Penelope Spheeris, who documented the punk scene, writes in the foreword to *The Encyclopedia of Punk*:

punk saturated the very fabric of our existence and gave rise to a new way of thinking. Even though it is in your face and defiant, at its core it is really about honesty and integrity. The music spawned a new lifestyle, an evolved philosophy, a way of being. Corporate greed, ego-driven commerciality, and a society that did not care about its needy had all helped give birth to this generation of morality warriors.36

Punk meant different things to different people, but for many, the punk subculture spoke to them on a deep level. Punk was not a monolithic, uniform subculture, but there were some common traits. It is often described as having a DIY (Do It Yourself) aesthetic, challenging authority, resisting mainstream culture, and having an emphasis on being authentic.37

Although the political, social, and economic situation in East Germany was very different from the situation in the West, many of these ideas and values resonated with East German youths in the late 1970s and 1980s. In contrast to Western punks who felt they had “no future,” East German punks often felt they had “too much future.” In fact, according to one East Berlin resident, “time was about the only commodity that wasn’t in short supply in the GDR.”38 As Henryk Gericke describes it, “I didn’t care that the social background of the English punks didn’t apply in my case. . . . I sensed that the No Future of the West punks and my own experiences corresponded in a weird way.”39 Because of the structure of East German society, including its emphasis on work and conformity, young East Germans felt that their lives were predetermined

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and that the future stretched out unendingly. In *too much future—Punk in der DDR*, Gericke states, “the future had started on the first day of school and consisted of an eternal present.”

One’s life began with school and youth organizations, followed by work meant to benefit the state, until one’s retirement. The SED was very involved in structuring the experiences of its youth. As Gerrard observes, young people “were subject to a comprehensive system of education, youth organizations, and organized leisure. The emphasis on collectivism was to encourage young people to subordinate their individual wishes to the collective good through organizations such as the FDJ [Freie Deutsche Jugend, or Free German Youth].” Not only did life come pre-planned, but punks, along with other youths, felt that they were working for a state that did nothing for them in return. The SED was unable to live up to the utopia they had promised its citizens, including the youth. Hayton describes it as follows: “on a very basic level, in claiming total control over its charges and then failing to provide for their needs, SED youth policy was often in bitter opposition to the actual desires of youths themselves.” Furthermore, it came at the cost of their “youth and individuality,” something punks did not want to sacrifice.

Participating in the punk subculture was a way to address these issues and to express oneself. As Gerrard explains, it could be an outlet for feelings of “resentment, anger, and frustration” with East German society, and it provided “a psychological escape from the GDR.” It also provided “very real freedom from parents, school, youth organizations, military training and work.” It could help to relieve boredom and discontent with a life that seemed to come pre-

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41 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 379.
42 Gerrard, 156-157.
43 Saunders, 78 and 89; and Gerrard, 162.
44 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 421
45 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 386
46 Gerrard, 164.
47 Gerrard, 164.
planned. By rejecting conformity, those in the punk subculture could express their own identity. According to Hayton, “by engineering an alternative space to live life authentically, individuals sought in punk cultural, social and ideological emancipation from the levers of oppression and socialist conformity that dominated the GDR under Honecker.”

Punks were not necessarily rejecting socialism itself. Rather they were protesting the way that the SED was carrying out socialism within the GDR. Various aspects of the subculture, such as how punks lived, what they wore, and the lyrics they sang, were their means of protest.

**East German Punk Subculture**

With an emphasis on nonconformity, the punk subculture stood out from the rest of society in its fashion and music. However, this rejection of mainstream culture came at a price, and punks had struggles with work, troubles at school and at home, and often confrontations with authorities. While there are general characteristics and trends that can be used to characterize the punk subculture, it is important to note that there was a lot of variation within the subculture and that it continued to change and evolve. When writing about his experiences during the early years of the scene, Michael “Pankow” Boehlke states that, “punks themselves separated into political, connoisseur and boozers. Furthermore, there were ‘Plastiks’ or wannabe punks.” This diversity increased over time. There was also a difference between those who were truly dedicated to punk and those who were sympathetic to punks. According to Saunders, it is

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48 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 375.
49 Saunders, 73-74; and Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 10 and 419.
50 Saunders, 74; and Gerrard 166-172.
estimated that in 1981 there were about 1,000 punks with up to 10,000 sympathizers.\textsuperscript{53} Despite these caveats, there are characteristics that often describe the subculture.

Perhaps because many young people first learned about punk through reporting about the subculture, fashion became an important part of the subculture. Although trends often associated with the punk subculture came to prominence in the early 1980s, Hayton points out that the first punks appear to have been focused on breaking “from the clean-cut look of the FDJ youth, the denim world of workers, and the long hair of the hippie generation.”\textsuperscript{54} To distinguish themselves, punks would turn to “dressing in out-of-date clothes, mixing and matching different clothing styles . . . tight suits, outrageous shirts that mixed gender sensibilities” and other fashion choices meant to “shock the observer.”\textsuperscript{55} Over time, trends such as military boots, ripped clothes, leather jackets, and mohawks began to dominate. In a document from the Evangelisches Zentralarchiv in Berlin (EZA), punks are described as having “shorn, greasy, or colorful hairstyles,” clothes that were “torn, dirty, and written on with zippers, chains, rivets, [and] safety pins.”\textsuperscript{56} Unlike punks in the West, who could buy punk fashion, East German punks embraced the DIY mentality of punk and created their own clothes and accessories, such as buttons.\textsuperscript{57} There was also the option of stealing clothing and other items from a visiting Western punk.\textsuperscript{58}

Fashion was an important part of the subculture because it was a visible expression of their refusal to conform and their views on East German society. In photographs collected in anthologies such as \textit{Wir wollen immer artig sein…: Punk, New Wave, HipHop und Independent-}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Saunders, 73.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 391.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 391.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Evangelisches Zentralarchiv, Berlin, EZA 101/3493, Vorlage für die KL am 1. Juli 1983 betr.: Punk-Arbeit, page 1. All translations are my own unless notated otherwise. „Sie tragen geschorene, fettige oder bunte Frisuren, zerrissene, beschmutzte oder beschriebene Kleidung mit Reißverschlüssen, Ketten, Nieten, Sicherheitsnadeln.“
\item \textsuperscript{57} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 412.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 392, 406.
\end{itemize}
Szene in der DDR 1980-1990, punks are often identifiable by many of these fashion choices. However, there are also many photographs in which punks seem to look relatively normal, except for shaggy or spiked hair.\(^{59}\) For “real” punks, fashion and the dedication to wear it publicly indicated how committed someone was to the punk subculture.\(^{60}\) Punk fashion was not only a rebellion against conformity, it was also commentary on society. By making themselves look ugly, they were pointing out “the superficiality of GDR society” and “outwardly expressed society’s deep-seated ugliness.”\(^{61}\) Punks’ fashion aesthetics, thus, expressed their individuality, their loyalty to their subculture, and was a commentary on society.

Punk music has been described as “booming, aggressive, melodically simple music,” but the music was more than just that.\(^{62}\) It was raw and at times belligerent, but it also honestly addressed issues punks faced in their lives.\(^{63}\) The mainstream music being produced in the East during the late 1970s, according to Hayton, “was alienating to these youths precisely because the music reproduced illusions about society which the punks sought to tear down.”\(^{64}\) In addition to speaking to their lives, the musical style was such that anyone could join in.\(^{65}\) In recollections by punks, there are often comments about how some members did not know how to play when they first formed a band.\(^{66}\) As Gerrard points out, “not only was the lack of musical virtuosity not a barrier for being in a punk band, but also being in a band at all was not a prerequisite for being a

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\(^{60}\) Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 389-390.

\(^{61}\) Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 390.


\(^{63}\) Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 376.

\(^{64}\) Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 377.

\(^{65}\) Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 378.

\(^{66}\) For example, see Bodo Mrozek, “Irgendwas muß geschehen/Interview mit der Band Planlos,” in too much future—Punk in der DDR, ed. by Michael Boehlke and Henryke Gericke (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2007), 49.
Anyone who wanted to join the punk subculture had the option to do so. Because musical instruments and equipment were scarce, punks used the DIY mentality to build their own instruments or to create amplifiers. They made music with what they had access to or could create. This did affect the sound quality, as well as the reliability of the instruments and equipment. In fact, concerts could come to a quick end if some of the equipment broke.

The punk subculture valued its social and communal interactions. Face-to-face interactions, including concerts and rehearsals, became an important part of the subculture. As Hayton notes, it “asserted the idea that Eastern punk was a movement, was an alternative community, and was a unified whole.” Boehlke describes the punk community as “a village” where “everyone knew everyone.” In addition to being able to identify other punks by their behavior and gestures, Boehlke states that “those unaware of the codes soon became a victim.” From Boehlke’s description of the early East Berlin punk subculture, it seems that it was important to keep up to date with what was going on in the subculture. Gatherings were an opportunity to share music, build relationships, and participate within the punk community. The line between performer and audience could be blurred as audience members, or even other bands, might join in on the performance. In a July 2005 interview, members of the band *Planlos* described their first concert which had an impromptu, unstructured element to it. According to Daniel Kaiser, “You gathered and made music and had a party. It wasn’t about creating stars. It didn’t really matter who was on stage. There was no distance between audience

67 Gerrard, 161.
68 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 374 and 414.
69 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 414.
70 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 413.
71 Boehlke, “Punk Stunde Null,” 35.
72 Boehlke, “Punk Stunde Null,” 43.
73 Boehlke, “Punk Stunde Null,” 43.
74 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 413.
75 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 414.
and band.” It was an opportunity to have fun and interact with peers in a way that was not dictated by the state. These communal events were important to the development of the subculture.

With their pessimistic view of the future, their anger and frustration with the government’s unfulfilled promises, and their rejection of conformity, East German punks questioned how the government was implementing socialism, and through such challenging, the subculture broke with cultural expectations. As mentioned before, punks believed their futures were dictated for them and lacked meaning. In *Punk in the DDR: too much future*, Gericke states how he felt about his future:

> I felt like a decreed future was putting me into a vice. My edges were filed down on a daily basis—leaving me as a pile of metal flakes to be collected and melted into something new. I decided to save myself up for the world in one piece.77

For Gericke, and likely others, it felt like the future trapped them and ground them down, stripping them of what made them who they were. Part of the reason the future felt meaningless was the lack of social mobility that set in during the 1970s.78 Opportunities young people had previously were no longer available. Hayton writes that during the 1950s and 1960s, “the ‘building of socialism’ . . . had opened . . . so many new positions and produced a young and educated social class.”79 The hope of getting a better education or job could motivate some young people to conform to the SED’s vision for society.80 Similarly, Ralph Jessen argues that during the 1940s and 1950s, “the best chance of upward mobility was enjoyed by young adults

76 Mrozek, 54.
79 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 383.
80 Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 128.
from the working class, who were willing to conform to the party’s demands for loyalty.”

Previous generations had filled these better jobs so that by the 1970s and 1980s, many youths felt like they were trapped in meaningless or lower level jobs. A punk who was interviewed by Gilbert Furian in the summer of 1982 vividly describes his beliefs about working your whole life until retirement:

> I don’t really want that. One has to work somehow, but I don’t go there with desire or love [for the job]. I have no desire, with 65 [years of work] . . . then you can’t go out anywhere, can’t fuck the old lady anymore perhaps, so I sit on the bench and feed the pigeons.

This apathy towards work, which went against a core value in GDR society, could show up in other ways. There are descriptions of youths breaking fingers with iron rods which would inhibit them from working. Of course, as Boehlke explains, this could lead to “charges of self-mutilation and asocial behaviour [which] meant eight to twelve months in prison.” An archival source, when identifying the challenges punks faced, indicates that punks were often accused of dilly-dallying at work (Arbeitsbummelei). However, Gericke explains that choosing to not work and to live “on the margins of society” was not an option because “it meant prosecution for being an ‘asocial element’ and in many cases imprisonment.” Work did not offer a promising future, nor did it provide meaning for their lives. Yet refusing to work meant rejecting a key trait that

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82 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 382-383.


84 For example, Boehlke, “Punk Stunde Null,” 39.


was valued in society. Related to this was a lack of mobility within society. According to Detlef Pollack, this had an impact on all of East German society and not just the punk subculture. He contends that “what had kept the GDR stable for decades, the promise of relative prosperity and chances of promotion, eventually contributed to the erosion of GDR society, once this promise could no longer be kept.”

By the time the punk subculture was developing, Pollack claims, GDR society was already becoming destabilized because the SED was not able to fulfill its promises to the citizens. There was a breach in the social contract between the SED and the citizens of East Germany.

If one were to assess the issues punks had in school and with their families using today’s parlance, they might be labeled as “at-risk” youth. Many of those drawn to the punk subculture first encountered punk when they were about 14 to 17 and they tended to be students attending *Polytechnische Oberschule* (POS). Because these students were not on a university-track, Hayton proposes, it could mean that youths drawn to punk “were either not excelling in schools or having disciplinary problems (often a result of their involvement with punk).” A church document describes punks as having “difficulty in school and vocational training” and that indicates they “often drop out” of these. This could also cause tension at home. According to Gilbert Furian and Nikolaus Becker, one of the punks interviewed received an ultimatum from her parents that she had to attend school wearing “normal” clothes rather than the clothing that got her in trouble. She said that attending school like that was giving too much of herself away.

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89 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 396-397.
90 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 396.
92 Furian and Becker, Introduction to N. „Wenn ich so in die Schule gehe, dann gebe ich zu viel von mir weg. “
If a young person joined the punk subculture, it created difficulties and hardships for the rest of his or her family. Not only did punks see the family structure as another means of oppression, but the choices punks made to express themselves could cause tension within the family. Because the subculture emerged at a time when the Stasi were stepping up their efforts to monitor the private sphere, this increased surveillance may have generated extra pressure on parents to raise children who conformed. The SED believed punk to be a Western phenomenon that was corrupting their youth, and the SED often claimed that youths became punks due to personal deficiencies and due to their home environment. In essence, the family or an individual had to have done something because the government believed the subculture could not have developed organically within the nation. This likely increased tension at home.

The punk subculture was a threat to the government, and punks often had issues with the police. During the early years, the subculture met in public spaces, and locations where people knew punks often hung out. One location was Alexanderplatz, and according to Boehlke, fights often occurred there. This visibility was a problem for the government, even more so when the punk subculture was observed by foreigners. According to Lutz Heyler, punks in Weimar “were a thorn in the authorities’ flesh since their adventurous appearance was likely to scare away tourists whose foreign currency the GDR badly needed.” The visibility of the punk subculture concerned the government during the early 1980s, and the subculture was forced indoors.

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94 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 379, and 397.
96 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 422 and 424.
97 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 402.
100 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 402 and 428.
Punks “suffered harassment by East German police—identification verifications, interrogations, and orders to leave public spaces.”\textsuperscript{101} As time went on, the government had a more difficult time explaining why youths would turn to the punk subculture, and the conflict between punks and the state increased during 1982 and 1983.\textsuperscript{102} Ultimately this led to a crackdown on the punk subculture by the Stasi in 1983, known as “Härte gegen Punk,” which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

From the stories told by those who were involved in the subculture during the early 1980s, it seems clear that they knew they were being political. As has been pointed out by both punks and scholars, the punk subculture protested how socialism was being carried out by the SED. It expressed anger and frustration with a system that held no future for them and left its promises unfulfilled. In their rejection of conformity, punks resisted fitting into the mold of what the government believed its citizens ought to be. However, this did not always translate into political action. As Gericke explains, part of being “punk meant an end to a dialogue with the powerful.”\textsuperscript{103} He explains that he did not see a difference between the “the hardliners of the opposition” and “the hardliners of the system they claimed to be fighting against.”\textsuperscript{104} In fact, he continues, “expecting no hope from an opposition that sought dialogue with those in charge, I not only found myself in opposition against the senile leaders of the country but in opposition against the opposition itself.”\textsuperscript{105} Rather than work towards change, Saunders notes, punks tended “opt out of the system.”\textsuperscript{106} Generally speaking, punks were skeptical about politics.\textsuperscript{107} This is an important element to note when examining the development of the punk subculture’s political

\textsuperscript{101} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 427.  
\textsuperscript{102} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 437.  
\textsuperscript{103} Henryk Gericke, “Too Much Future,” 25.  
\textsuperscript{104} Henryk Gericke, “Too Much Future,” 25.  
\textsuperscript{105} Henryk Gericke, “Too Much Future,” 27.  
\textsuperscript{106} Saunders, 66.  
\textsuperscript{107} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 388.
involvement over the course of the 1980s. During these first years, the punk subculture was political, primarily through refusing to conform and through subversive lyrics. As will be explored in Chapter 3, the subculture became more politically active with the dissident opposition, for example by participating in demonstrations or working with environmentalists or those in the peace movement, after the government cracked down on the subculture and punks became more reliant on the church communities for protection. Thus, while the subculture was political from the start, the subculture grew to engage with politics in a way that they did not in the early 1980s. Regardless of the form the subculture’s political activity took, the government clearly saw it as a threat. At first, the SED did not acknowledge the existence of an East German punk subculture in the GDR because it saw punk as being a corrupting influence from the West meant to weaken East Germany. Before the SED officially recognized the existence of the punk subculture within the GDR, punks were often lumped in with rowdies and asocial personalities. Like other asocials before them, punks did not fit what Mark Fenemore has described as the one acceptable model for working class behavior: “solidly sober and respectable, shorn of reckless and unruly features, pasteurised [sic] and homogenized to fit with the requirements of socialism.” Those, such as punks, who did not fit this model were seen as politically dangerous and in need of cultural education. Even if they did not see themselves as being political, the SED did, and thus, punk was political.

109 While “asocial” and “rowdy” are often used in the same context, these terms may not be interchangeable. Thomas Lindenberger, in his essay “‘Asociality’ and Modernity: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” refers to both “rowdiness” and “asocial behavior” as separate terms, although he states that he “cannot elaborate [on rowdiness] further here.” Lindenberger, “‘Asociality’ and Modernity,” 215.
Formation of a Socialist Personality

The SED always knew that the future of the nation required that the next generation continue its work, which meant that the SED needed to guard and guide its youth.\textsuperscript{111} To accomplish this, the SED worked to develop a certain set of traits and characteristics, known as a “socialist personality,” in its youth. It was believed that if youth were properly educated and protected from negative influences, they would naturally develop the characteristics and values desired in East German society as they grew up. These values included hard work, a sense of duty to the state, discipline, and cooperation. This would also lead to them being involved with social and political endeavors.\textsuperscript{112} Although these efforts to mold the next generation were not new, efforts were intensified during several key points in the development of the generation that would include punks. However, it appears that the government’s policies were not effective and in some cases, “counter-productive.”\textsuperscript{113}

From early childhood, East German youth were trained on how to be proper socialist citizens. In fact, there was an intensification of some of these policies during the formative years of those who would join the punk subculture. Between 1965 and 1975, the effort to develop the proper socialist personality was intensified.\textsuperscript{114} Additionally, efforts to build an emotional connection to the state and to increase patriotism became a core part of education during the late 1970s through the 1980s.\textsuperscript{115} The efforts to instill these values utilized teaching methods that “[ensured] uniformity and tight control, and [allowed] minimal time for free discussion. When

\textsuperscript{111} Saunders, 11.
\textsuperscript{113} Saunders uses this phrase, and I have found this phrasing useful. Saunders, 66.
\textsuperscript{114} Eghigian, 51.
\textsuperscript{115} Saunders, 31.
pupils’ opinions were sought, they were expected to produce the correct answers according to socialist ideology.”

Efforts were made to guarantee that students stayed within the acceptable bounds of behavior. This occurred not only at school, but also in the various youth activities and groups students were expected to participate in. According to one punk:

the personality evolution typical for the GDR went through the following stages: being initiated as Jungepionier, the consecration as Thälmannpionier, being called into the FDJ (Free German Youth). And the sons of creation put on the honorable uniform of the NVA for at least one and a half years—but three or more were better—to ultimately be let out into the mills of socialist enterprise as an “all-rounded educated socialist personality.”

As indicated by this disparaging description, this was one more way punks saw their futures as set in stone. Saunders explains that the SED attempted to use “the education system, mass organisations [sic], national holidays and ritual ceremonies . . . [with the aim] to create one youth, loyal and committed” that shared the state’s ideology.

While most youth would outwardly conform, studies indicate that they did not necessarily internalize and accept the ideology that accompanied it. According to Saunders, most of the youth in the 1980s “could be described as apathetic conformists, who cooperated with the system to the bare minimum in order to assure for themselves a relatively comfortable and hassle-free future.” For example, membership in the FDJ increased during the 1980s, yet a survey asking youths about their feelings of loyalty to the SED and FDJ shows a large decrease in the percent of students who felt “strongly attached” to these groups from 1977 to 1989. In

116 Saunders, 32.
117 Saunders, 32.
119 Saunders, 44. Emphasis hers.
121 Saunders, 103.
122 Saunders, 94-95.
her analysis of why this system was unsuccessful, Saunders explains the failure as a result of ineffective, boring teaching in school, the rigid nature of the FDJ, its inability to adapt to changes in youth culture, SED censorship which could generate interest in those forbidden things, and the growing disconnect between SED leadership and youth.\footnote{Saunders, 104.} Although Saunders is examining the youth population in general, the reasons she identified seem to reflect important aspects of the punk subculture: the tendency of punks to struggle in school and vocational training, their resistance and refusal to conform to society, and their complaints about the way the SED applied socialism. The key difference is that punks were part of the minority of East German youths who openly challenged the system.

Another component of developing the socialist personality was watching out for signs of asocial behavior and influence from the West. In an essay discussing asocialism, Lindenberger identifies examples of this behavior: “work shirking, alcoholism, undereducation, criminal recidivism, theft, lack of disciple and spontaneity.”\footnote{Lindenberger, “ʻAsociality’ and Modernity,” 221. Interestingly, many of the behaviors that Lindenberger points out are also behaviors punks were often accused of.} Asocial behavior was taken seriously as it was “the midpoint on a continuum of social danger between the two extreme poles of petty offenses to be punished mildly… and the small minority of serious crimes, including those that were political.”\footnote{Lindenberger, “ʻAsociality’ and Modernity,” 220.} During East Germany’s early years, lingering Western influence and corruption could explain asocial or rowdy behavior, as these generations had experienced life before the establishment of East Germany or they had grown up during its early years. However, those who were part of the punk subculture were born and raised in East Germany. They were “the grandchildren generation of the GDR, a collective fully socialized under communism with
almost no memory of the pre-Honecker era.”

Because the socialist personality was supposed to naturally emerge as children were raised in the socialist system, the SED was vigilant for signs of asocial or rowdy behavior. The hope was that by identifying these tendencies as soon as possible, the government could keep it from spreading and perhaps reeducate the individuals involved. “As prevention assumed a greater importance, ever more mundane forms of deviance could be seen as politically dangerous.”

Behavior that was deemed rowdy or asocial was taken seriously by the government. It also became important to identify punk, along with other asocial influences, as corrupting factors from the West. In fact, Gerrard argues that “from the SED’s perspective there was no need for [its] young people to become punks” and that it “assumed socialist young people implicitly knew that such activity was nefarious and should not be engaged in.”

By locating the source outside of East Germany, Hayton points out, the government “deflected attention away from any hint of socialist inadequacies or state failings. In so doing, the state convinced itself that socialist institutions were blameless, a rationalization which helps partly account for the refusal to reform during the 1980s.”

Punk, like other asocial groups, could be explained as “alien” to East Germany and seen as draining to society because of their lack of contribution to society through work.

Conclusion

Many of the SED’s youth policies attempted to increase loyalty in the nation’s youth and to help these citizens internalize the proper “socialist personality.” Although the SED had been

127 Eghigian, 54
128 Gerrard, 162.
129 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 430.
able to encourage conformity by linking it to opportunities in education and employment in the past, this was not the case by the 1980s. During the 1970s, due to economic situations and other factors, the opportunities for upward social mobility decreased. The promise of social mobility may or may not have prompted potential punks to conform to social norms, however the lack of it led to a pessimistic view of the future and a feeling that the future was unending and written for them. For some, the punk subculture resonated with their experience and provided an avenue for them to create a meaningful community and to express their individuality. Through their refusal to conform to the social norms laid out by the SED, punks presented a challenge to the government. The punk subculture did not embody the socialist personality that the SED had worked so hard to instill in this generation. In fact, the government had been working harder than ever to educate youths about how to be proper citizens. Rather than adapt the education system and reform youth organizations to reach youth, the SED attempted to double down on their policies. Not only did this alienate youths in general, but it also aggravated the disconnect punks felt with the SED and society. The effect of all of this was intensified by the increased presence of the state in the private sphere. For young people, life was structured and controlled so that they would develop into the ideal socialist citizen. Because the home environment was sometimes blamed for the development of nonconformists, relationship between punks and their families may have become further strained.

Whether or not those in punk subculture always meant to challenge the SED, their refusal to conform to the socialist personality the government expected of them meant that they were seen as a political threat. Punks were considered asocial elements that needed to be dealt with. This included being pushed out of public spaces, conflicts with the police, or imprisonment. During the 1980s, the clashes between punks and the authorities increased, leading to the
decision to crack down on the subculture in 1983. Because of the state’s efforts to eliminate the punk subculture, punks turned to what may seem to be an unlikely ally for shelter: the Protestant churches.
CHAPTER 2

“A CHURCH FOR OTHERS”

The Protestant churches in East Germany occupied a unique spot within society. Although the state promoted an atheistic worldview, the SED allowed the churches to remain a part of society. This did not mean that the SED accepted the churches, but rather that they recognized that the churches offered benefits to society as the socialist character of the nation was being established. Yet there were limits to what the state allowed, and Christianity was still seen as incompatible with true socialism. Once a truly socialist nation was in place, the SED anticipated that the churches would wither away and die. After all, the churches were considered a holdover from Germany’s capitalist and imperialist heritage. The government would never wholeheartedly accept the churches, but it could utilize them to meet its own goals while working to undermine it. Because of this relationship, the East German Protestant churches held a place within East German society that was different than the role churches held in other socialist states. The unique role of these churches allowed it some leeway to create a free space that people could participate in, and in the case of the punk subculture, a safe haven after the government cracked down on the punk subculture. Although churches believed that part of their religious duties meant engaging in society and in politics, the form and extent of this involvement was contested within the churches. Even as the questions surrounding the role of the churches was being debated, punks sought shelter within churches and it was here that the subculture became more active politically. The roots of this change come from the experiences that the punk subculture had with the church during the early 1980s.
Church History

It was the role of some of the Protestant churches in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s in resisting and fighting fascism that explained the unique position of East German Protestant churches within society. After World War II, there was a complex and thorny relationship between the churches and the socialist government in charge of what became East Germany. Although the churches and other confessional groups were not supposed to be an element of a true socialist society, their role in society was too vital for the government to openly confront them at first. According to Paul Betts, “Soviet leaders were well aware that their support in war-torn Germany was shallow and unreliable, and they hardly wished to risk further alienation by offending local beliefs and sensibilities regarding religion.”

Because a group of churches had opposed fascism, the churches were held in high regard in German society after the war. Additionally, the way that these churches and leaders resisted Hitler and his government became essential to how the East German Protestant churches understood themselves and their role in society. It became a source of inspiration to them.

During the 1930s, there was a split among Protestant churches in Germany between those who supported Hitler and the Third Reich and those who were opposed. The churches who supported Hitler and his ideology became known as the Deutsche Christen (DC), or German Christians. According to Alison Furlong, these churches sought “unity between the German Protestant Church and the Nazi state” and thus, they blended religious doctrine with the racial

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ideology of the Nazis. The partnership between the state and Protestant churches was not a new phenomenon in Germany, and it can be traced to a combination of the theology of Martin Luther with the philosophy of G.W. F. Hegel. Luther had argued that there were two kingdoms: the sacred and the secular. As John A. Moses explains, Luther argued that “the secular realm was ruled over by an appointed prince, presumed to be the agent of Almighty God specifically to maintain law and order because the world” was filled with wicked, sinful people. This concept was blended with Hegel’s argument that “world peace . . . presumed the evolution of a superior state that would subdue or absorb all life-unworthy, weak, decadent, and declining states, and impose on them in the name of the God of history, the benefits of a superior Kultur.” Together, this meant that God appointed a ruler to govern a nation which would become God’s agent in the world to fight against ungodliness and sinfulness. Not only did these beliefs mean that expansionist efforts were “justified and necessary,” but they also blended the concepts of religious duty with patriotism. In the wake of World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, this philosophy was called into question. As Betts notes, the end of the World War I “signaled the historic end of ‘throne and altar’ rule in Germany.” Still this ideology, at least in certain spheres such as education, was not completely eliminated.

The group of churches that broke away from the Deutsche Christen became known as the Bekennende Kirche (BK), or the Confessing Church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a leader in the

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132 Alison M. Furlong, “Resistance Rooms: Sound and Sociability in the East German Church” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2015), 21.
134 Moses, 335.
135 Moses, 356.
136 Moses, 357.
137 Moses, 360.
138 Betts, 56
139 Betts, 56; and Moses, 360.
140 Furlong, 20.
Confessing Church, and the theologian Karl Barth, were among those who believed that the church was called to engage society and politics. The church had a duty to society that extended beyond the traditional sacred realm. In July 1933, Bonhoeffer wrote, and 106 other Berlin pastors signed, the “Declaration of the Pastors of Greater Berlin” which argued that the church needed to be free from political interference. The declaration called for “full freedom for the church’s message in the public sphere, including the press and broadcasting, and complete freedom to decide on the form [Gestaltung] for rebuilding the church” and argued against “the hindering of our general superintendents from speaking to their church congregations as their conscience dictates.” The 1934 Barmen Declaration consisted of six theses which addressed the role of the church in society. It stated that the church should only follow Jesus’ teachings and engage society in order “to set people free and strengthen them for the Christian life within that reality.” The Confessing Church argued that when the ideology of the state and church disagreed, the church needed to stay true to its beliefs rather than conform to state. Part of this involvement in society meant that the church was not only for Christians, but it was to “become a ‘church for others’ and would speak openly in the public sphere about questions of social justice,” as Furlong phrases it. Moses describes it as a church that was “a serving, indeed suffering community, acting in the world to reconcile all humanity together with” God. John P. Burgess states that Bonhoeffer believed that the church should be “open to cooperation with

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141 Furlong, 20.
142 Furlong, 132-133. In Appendix A, Furlong includes a copy of the “Declaration of the Pastors of Greater Berlin” that comes from a collection of Bonhoeffer’s works. The brackets are in Furlong’s appendix, but the German word “Gestaltung” was not italicized in Furlong’s appendix. Furlong cites her source as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works: Berlin 1932-1933*, ed. Carsten Nicolaisen, Ernst-Albert Scharffenorth, and Larry Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best, Daniel Higgins, and Douglas Scott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 137-139.
144 Furlong, 10.
145 Moses, 361
non-Christians on matters of common moral concerns” as the church worked to be “responsibly involved in the world.”  

This was a church concerned for Christians and non-Christians alike and worked with others to bring about social justice. It was this stance against the German Christians and the Nazi regime that would later become an inspiration for the East German Protestant churches. In addition to inspiring later church leaders, it was this role in German society during World War II that made these churches essential to post-war German society.  

When East Germany was founded, the government recognized that it could not outright confront the churches because they held a powerful position within East German society compared to the new government. As Alexander Mirescu puts it, the government’s main goal “was to win over the populace without antagonizing the church, which had emerged as the only institution trusted by a majority of the East German population.” However, while the churches were seen as a necessary part of society at that moment, the government believed that it would become obsolete as society embraced socialism and progressed beyond religion. Thus, the churches were tolerated as long they did not hinder the SED achieve in achieving its social goals and did not challenge publicly the state’s ideology. In fact, the “right to free conscience” was included in the East German constitution, and, according to Betts, this is what “the Evangelical Church in the GDR forged its identity around.” Yet, the fact that the churches were separate from the state meant that they posed a threat to the state. The churches retained ties to West

148 Mirescu, 61.
149 Mirescu, 58-59.
150 Burgess, *The East German Church and the End of Communism*, 14-15.
151 Betts, 17.
German churches and held beliefs that did not align with those of the SED. Therefore, SED worked to dislodge the churches from its current position in society and to move society past this leftover element of capitalist society.152

Starting as soon as the late 1940s, the SED worked to diminish the role of the churches and became more hostile to it.153 As the SED built its foundation, they sought to diminish and eventually eliminate the role of the churches in East German society. Churches were closely monitored by the SED and the Stasi.154 Christians faced restrictions when it came to party membership, job advancement, and educational opportunities.155 Pastor’s homes in particular were seen as dangerous places to such an extent that it was thought that a pastor’s children were too corrupted by religion to develop the ideal socialist personality.156 To use a phrase from Betts, the churches were seen as “the Stasi’s rival secret society.”157 According to Burgess, the efforts of the state to rid society of the churches reached its height during the 1950s.158

In addition to continuing to discourage church membership and participation by placing limits on educational and employment opportunities, Burgess contends that “the state conducted a campaign to discredit churches. It accused the church youth groups of operating as fronts for Western sabotage and espionage, and banned them. It arrested pastors and raided church properties.”159 One direct attack on churches came with the banning of church youth groups, known as Junge Gemeinden, or JG, in 1952.160 The SED also appears to have become more suspicious of churches after the June 1953 Uprising, which according to Betts, “was in part

152 Burgess, The East German Church and the End of Communism.
153 Betts, 55.
154 Betts, 55-56.
155 Betts, 51-87.
156 Betts, 65-66 and 72.
157 Betts 17.
158 Burgess, 46.
159 Burgess, 46.
160 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 468.
blamed on Christians as unreliable ‘enemies of the state.’”

Efforts were made to replace the traditional role of the churches with state approved secular options. A prime example of this is the SED’s emphasis on Jugendweihe, which Betts describes as a secular youth dedication ceremony that had “roots [that] extended back to the mid-nineteenth century.” Betts explains that after World War II, efforts were made to “reinvent the socialist tradition,” which was inspired by the Soviet Union’s earlier endeavor to “[replace] Christian traditions with newly minted communist ones.” The SED took this previous ceremony, “retooled” it to help young people become good citizens of the GDR, and used the June 1953 Uprising to promote the ceremony and undermine the influence of the churches. Although there were other ceremonies promoted by the SED to replace Christian ones, the Jugendweihe has an additional significance because the ceremony became part of the SED’s attempts to instill a socialist personality in its young citizens.

The relationship between the churches and SED improved to a degree as international affairs changed. Initially, the fact that the Protestant churches in East and West Germany were part of one pan-German Protestant church organization, the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), raised suspicions for the SED. The EKD was seen as a potential threat and a way for the West to undermine the SED. Mircescu argues that after the Berlin Wall was built in 1961, the SED “began to undertake serious efforts to sever ties between the Eastern and Western church.” When the churches in East Germany decided to recognize that Germany was divided and subsequently separated from West German churches in 1969, the SED allowed the churches

161 Betts, 59.
162 Betts, 58.
163 Betts, 58.
164 Betts, 59.
165 Betts, 60-63.
166 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 468.
167 Mircescu, 66.
a bit more freedom than before. Rather than pressing for a united German church, these churches accepted the reality that there was an East Germany and a West Germany. As part of this, the East German churches separated from the West German churches to form the *Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen* (BEK). Because the BEK had severed some of its ties to the West, the government felt it could work with the churches a bit more.\textsuperscript{168} At the same time, socialist leaders were also realizing that the Protestant churches were not going to disappear as quickly as hoped.\textsuperscript{169}

By the late 1970s, high-level dialogues were carried out between the BEK leadership and the SED. These dialogues would continue into the 1980s, but an important moment came in 1978 with a Church-State Agreement. According to Hayton, this agreement meant that

> Honecker and the church leadership agreed to a limited partnership recognizing the Protestant Churches within socialist society and guaranteeing religious activity free from political interference. . . . Secular authorities believed that the Churches would become a stabilizing institution within socialism while church officials hoped that the agreement would fortify space within society for increased religious activity.\textsuperscript{170}

Although the SED believed this move would be advantageous for the party and encourage the churches to better censor themselves and the critics within their walls, this decision ultimately worked against the state.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{168} Burgess, *The East German Church and the End of Communism*, 46.
\textsuperscript{170} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 469.
\textsuperscript{171} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 469-470.
The Role of the Church within Society

The BEK was able to create a safe harbor for punks and other dissident groups under its arrangement with the SED, which allowed the churches some freedom from state interference with respect to religious matters. Even though there was debate about how far the churches should extend themselves into society, they believed part of their religious duty was to engage society around them. In spite of debate about the level of involvement the church should have in political and social matters, churches did not see a clear division between what was a religious issue and what was a secular issue. As Reverend Heino Falcke, the moderator of the Committee on Church and Society of the Union of Evangelical Churches in the GDR and who was involved with international ecumenical efforts, put it, “in the Protestant churches of the GDR, East European state socialism encountered for the first time a church which considered itself bound to fulfil its responsibility for the whole of society on the basis of its faith,” which he notes is a different approach than that of the Russian Orthodox tradition.172 Falcke continues by describing it as “a church which spoke up critically in matters such as land reform, tolerance in the education system, peace policy and conscientious objection to military service, the Wall, [and] environmental responsibility,” among other issues.173 Yet, he notes that “there was considerable controversy within the church about how far the church should go and how clearly it should speak in public.”174 Thus, while they agreed that there was an overlap between religious matters and social and political issues, the churches debated to what extent the they should engage

172 This is the title that Furlong’s dissertation provides for Falcke. His involvement in ecumenical work is shown in his article “The Ecumenical Assembly for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.” Furlong, 26; Heino Falcke, “The Ecumenical Assembly for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation,” The Ecumenical Review 56, no.2 (April 2004): 184-191; and Falcke, “What did the Barmen Declaration,” 74.
society and how this should be carried out. For some churches, carrying out what they perceived as their mission meant welcoming groups such as punks, environmentalists, those involved with the peace movement, and in some cases, gay rights advocates. Others contended that these churches were going too far or were allowing church space to be misused. These tensions ultimately culminated with a group breaking off from the mainstream East German church to form a more radical and politically involved group known as the *Kirche von Unten*. These developments also had an impact on the relationship between the punk subculture and the churches.

The legacy of the Confessing Church formed a foundation for the Protestant Churches in East Germany as it sought to identify its role in society. According to Falcke, the Barmen Declaration was an important influence guiding the churches in East Germany. In his essay, “What did the Barmen Declaration Have to Say to the Churches of the German Democratic Republic?” Falcke examines each of the theses and explains how they influenced the churches in East Germany. For example, the first thesis stated that “the church lives by Jesus Christ alone, the *one* Word of God” rather than the ideology of the state. Quoting Halle’s student chaplain, Johannes Hamel, Falcke explains that the churches were “not to let themselves succumb to the fascination of power and the fixation on ‘totalitarian rule,’ but to ‘watch out day by day for opportunities where we can cooperate responsibly and with inner conviction under the dictatorship.’” The Barmen Declaration, which was a statement of how the church should engage Hitler and the ideology of fascism, was used to form the foundation of how the churches

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178 Falcke, “What Did the Barmen Declaration,” 74
in East Germany should engage with the SED. Falcke explains that the fifth thesis which addressed the relationship between church and state, “resisted the idea that the state could become ‘the single and totalitarian order of human life.’”179 He continues by stating that

After the Second World War this also had to be affirmed in opposition to an ideologically-based socialist state. Together with the monopoly of power, this claimed to hold the ideological monopoly of truth, thus laying claim to the whole person. The church consistently resisted this claim. In education and in other areas of life it fought for tolerance, freedom of conscience, and opinion, admittedly with only limited success.180

Just as the Confessing Church believed the church must speak up on social issues and be a “church for others,” the churches in East Germany believed they were called upon to speak up on social issues and to stand up for the marginalized. Falcke explains that the churches needed to be willing to critique the state’s policies from a religious perspective if necessary to carry out their responsibilities to all of society.181

This emphasis on the marginalized was, in some ways, new. The Confessing Church had done the same, but, as discussed earlier in this chapter, there had tended to be an alliance between the churches and the state. Not only did the churches often have ties to the government, there was some link between the upper classes and the churches during Germany’s industrialization. In Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State, Weitz states that “employers were often motivated by the traditional Christian values of paterfamilias and charity, in which they took responsibility for the well-being of their charges.”182 Weitz demonstrates a clearer link between churches and employers in his discussion of textile towns in Rhineland-Westphalia where “in some instances, mill owners subsidized

homes supervised by religious personnel.”

Sometimes the “religious personnel” taught courses designed to teach female workers how to be “competent housewives.” These connections indicate a closer tie between churches and the middle to upper class compared to their relationship to the working class. Thus, the BEK churches, in their efforts to minister to those marginalized in society, was breaking with a legacy linking the churches to those in power. Yet, the disagreement over how to engage society and state was a source of contention within the churches, and it influenced how the churches interacted with marginalized groups, including the punk subculture.

The main position taken by the churches was known as *Kirche im Sozialismus* (Church in Socialism). As Mirescu describes it, this stance argued that “by accepting the status quo, it [the churches] hoped to improve the system from within, acting both loyally and, where it saw fit, critically.” This position tried to maintain the free space the churches had been granted while continuing to address important issues such as environmentalism and human rights. Mirescu contends that “the Church’s position” was “one of steady criticism, rather than demonstrative, revolutionary opposition, for a better and truer Socialism.” Thus the churches, while they did critique the SED and socialism, avoided a full-out confrontation. Burgess provides an example of this in his comparison of how the SED and the churches discussed Germany’s liberation on May 8. While the government argued that East Germany was not responsible for the crimes of fascism and praised the Soviets as liberators, the churches spoke about how all of Germany was at least partially guilty of the Holocaust and called for confession and repentance. While this is only

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183 Weitz, 22.
184 Weitz, 26.
185 Mirescu, 67.
186 Mirescu, 67.
187 Mirescu, 71.
188 Burgess, *The East German Church and the End of Communism*, 19-41.
one example of how churches pressed public dialogue further than the official language the SED used, it shows how churches attempted to nudge the state in a way that called for change while avoiding direct confrontation. For some, however, this was not enough. Some argued that the churches were bending to the will of the SED too much. This is one factor that led to a group splitting off to form the \textit{Kirche von Unten}, which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3.

\textbf{Free Space and the Church}

This tension between working within the system and yet engaging society is reflected in the way the churches worked with marginalized groups, including punks. Generally speaking, those higher up in the church hierarchy were more focused on preserving the freedom the churches had been granted and wanted to address social issues in a way that did not directly antagonize the SED. Furlong contends that they made an effort to “walk a tightrope between taking political action as dictated by their religious beliefs and preserving their ability to function at all.”\textsuperscript{189} As the example of the May 8 discussion shows, this balancing act meant that these leaders believed that churches needed to be faithful to their beliefs, but they were careful to avoid pressing the SED too far. However, local pastors and church leaders, those on the “front lines” as it were, tended to believe that the churches needed to do more to expand church activities and its influence in society further. The differences between those at the local parish level and those in the BEK hierarchy may also have been a result of the structure of the BEK itself. Rauhut, along with Tyndale and McLellan, discuss how local religious officials had some leeway in deciding what happened within their parishes. According to Rauhut, “reform-minded

\textsuperscript{189} Furlong, 27.
protestant ministers had more latitude in decision-making.”\textsuperscript{190} Tyndale notes something similar, pointing to “the relative independence of each regional church as well as the widely differing views found among the pastors and lay members.”\textsuperscript{191} When discussing the variety of opinions expressed by different theologians and church leaders, Tyndale states that between the position taken by Bishop Otto Dibelius, who took a more radical stand against the government, and that of Bishop Moritz Mitzenheim of Thuringia, who tended to use more of a “Two Kingdoms” approach to the SED, there “were innumerable theological and political positions that would often merge and divide, change and reshape according to the situation in which the Protestant Church as a whole or single congregations and individual Christians found themselves.”\textsuperscript{192} McLellan shows how there was variation between pastors and parishes when she discusses how gay rights groups found space within some churches. She explains that “would-be activists in Berlin had to go from parish to parish to find one that was willing to accommodate them.”\textsuperscript{193} Local parishes could make decisions about which groups to “accommodate,” which means that there could be disagreements between a parish and the church hierarchy. It also shows that there was variation among the parishes themselves, which could have been another source of a variety of tension if there were disagreements between parishes or between members of the same parish.

Related to this was a tension about whether or not the churches were still functioning as a “church” as it provided free space to marginalized and dissident groups. While many different groups and individuals made use of the free space within churches, they were not turning to the churches for religious reasons. According to Burgess, “the church offered a sense of freedom and acceptance that people did not find elsewhere” and which allowed them a way to escape the

\textsuperscript{190} Rauhut, 294. Protestant was not capitalized in this instance in Rauhut’s article.
\textsuperscript{191} Tyndale, 21.
\textsuperscript{192} Tyndale, 21-26. The quote is from page 25.
\textsuperscript{193} McLellan, 123.
state’s pressure to conform.\textsuperscript{194} He continues by explaining that, “though [these people and groups] were open to the insights that religion could bring to their lives, they turned to the church primarily in search of a special communal experience characterized by intimate fellowship and open conversation.”\textsuperscript{195} Because people were turning to the churches for social and political reasons, rather than for religious reasons, the traditional role of the church as a religious organization seems to have diminished.\textsuperscript{196} For some, this was acceptable as the churches were meant to be a “church for others,” to minister to those marginalized by the state, and to provide a safe place for alternative communities to develop. However, for others, this meant that the churches were compromising themselves in terms of their beliefs. This disagreement about the use of churches for nonreligious purposes reflects the interesting place the churches filled in East German society. It was a liminal space between what constituted “public” and what was “private.” The churches were a private institution, yet it also functioned like a “counter-public,” which Furlong describes as “a public outside the official public sphere that, while lacking official political power, nonetheless exercises agency.”\textsuperscript{197} To better understand how these conflicting visions affected the relationship between the churches and the punk subculture, it is helpful to examine two of the main programs that punks were involved with: events involving music such as the Blues Masses and other youth worship services and a youth program called \textit{Offene Arbeit} (Open Work).

Music was one of the avenues through which the punk subculture began interacting with the churches. According to Hayton, “already by 1981, Protestant Churches had begun opening their doors to punk, providing spaces for youths to gather, share ideas, listen to music, and even

\textsuperscript{194} Burgess, \textit{The East German Church and the End of Communism}, 50.
\textsuperscript{195} Burgess, \textit{The East German Church and the End of Communism}, 50.
\textsuperscript{196} Burgess, \textit{The East German Church and the End of Communism}, 51.
\textsuperscript{197} Furlong, 43.
stage (rare) concerts.” Although the SED controlled who was legally allowed to perform concerts or record music, churches could offer punks and other musicians who did not have state approval an opportunity to play as long as it was incorporated into part of a church’s religious activities. One of the types of services that punks participated in was known as youth services. These services, which appear to be referred to as youth masses in Rauhut’s article, began in 1971 and continued after the fall of the Berlin Wall. When Theo Lehmann was pastor at Karl-Marx-Stadt, he held monthly youth masses at Schlosskirche. Rauhut states that “through their vitality, these special services celebrated actual tidings of joy and attracted as many as 3,000 believers and non-believers from all over the GDR.” Punks also participated in the Blues Masses, religious services that were created in the late 1970s when a blues musician, Günter “Holly” Holwas, approached Rainer Eppelmann, a youth pastor at Samariterkirche, about performing at the church. According to Furlong, Eppelmann recalled in an interview that he told Holwas that the church was only allowed to hold “church concerts, but then, those are normally just sacred music. But if [Holwas] could imagine making [his] music part of the church service [they] could talk further.” According to Dirk Moldt, before holding a Blues Mass on June 1, 1979, Pastor Eppelmann consulted with Deacon Hans-Otto Seidenschnur who “encouraged”

199 Furlong, 44-45; and Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 417.
200 In my research, I have found that it is not always clear if the service being discussed is a Blues Mass, youth service, or youth mass. I have attempted to use the terminology as it is used in the source, whether primary or secondary. Generally, the difference between these types of services is not emphasized. In fact, there were a few additional types of services that blended musical genres or tried to modernize Church music, which Rauhut discusses in his article. Pertinent for this discussion, this article makes it clear that there are some differences between youth masses/services and Blues Masses. Unfortunately, he does not provide much of a comparison between the two. Furlong provides a list of the Blues Masses that she compiled from archival sources. See Rauhut; and Furlong, 138-139.
201 Rauhut, 297. Emphasis his.
202 Furlong, 44. For the quote, she used a transcribed interview between Eppelmann and Dirk Moldt. However, she notes that Eppelmann “described this meeting almost identically” in her interview with him in 2013. See footnote 71 on page 44.
Eppelmann about having a concert. Pastor Eppelmann wanted this service to have a theological basis. There was also a diaconal aspect to the Blues Masses. On one hand, as Rauhut summarizes it, the Blues Masses were supposed to help “young people who had been pushed to the margins of society or even criminalized due to their attitude to life and political stance” to find a community. Rauhut continues by noting that on the other hand, it was also supposed to introduce these youths to the Christian faith as “an alternative form of finding meaning and truthfulness in life, a way of being that the atheistic worldview of socialism had erased.” Furlong explains that in order to achieve this, the Blues Masses “took advantage of increased religious freedom by combining popular music, skits about social and political concerns, and religious content, all within the protected context of a Protestant worship service.” Moldt describes the first Blues Mass as drawing a large crowd, which included “230 long-haired freaks.” Youth attendance at these events grew. The July 13, 1979, service at Samariterkirche included 500-600 youths, and the September 14 service had 1,000 youths. Eventually the concerts had to be moved because Samariterkirche could not hold all of those who tried to attend the concert. The services, with their blend of music, skits, and religious elements, attracted a wide range of people, including punks.

205 Rauhut, 297
206 Furlong, 42-43.
207 Furlong, 43-44.
210 Furlong, 43.
Another church affiliated program that the punk subculture participated in was Offene Arbeit, also known as OA. This was a youth program that began in the late 1960s in Thuringia, and by the 1980s had spread across East Germany.\footnote{Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 470 and 471.} In an EZA archival document, the OA is described as a branch of the church’s work for young people that provided a space where the youth could be themselves.\footnote{EZA 528/61, “Offene Arbeit”/Sozialdiakonische Jugendarbeit, page 1. “Es handelt sich um einen relativ jungen Arbeitszweig der Kirche.” It provided „Ein Raum, in dem man sein kann wie man ist.“} Although OA did not work exclusively with the punk subculture, several of the descriptions of those it worked with could apply to punks: young people including individuals who were and wanted to be different in how they dressed and spoke, people with “dissocial or asocial” behavior, those addicted to alcohol, or people who were dealing with “some unsolved question or problem” in society.\footnote{EZA 528/61, “Offene Arbeit”/Sozialdiakonische Jugendarbeit, page 1. “Mit auffälligen jungen Menschen, die anders sind und sein wollen...in Kleidung und Sprache,” „die dissoziale oder asoziale Verhaltensweisen zeigen,” „die alkoholabhängig sind,” and „daß auch in unserer Gesellschaft ungeklärte Fragen und Probleme bestehen.”} Hayton explains that although the program was “not guided by religious instruction per se,” it was intended to be a ministry to youths, especially those who did not fit into society.\footnote{Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,”471.} According to the EZA document, one of the objectives was to help these youths find their place within society, and not just adapt to it.\footnote{EZA 528/61, “Offene Arbeit”/Sozialdiakonische Jugendarbeit, page 3. „Hilfe, den Platz in der Gesellschaft zu finden (was nicht gleichbedeutend ist mit Anpassung!)“} These views about OA are also present in another document from the EZA, although this one focuses more specifically on working with the punk subculture. After describing the punk subculture and the problems punks faced, the document argues that the church should be working with punks because it was the church’s duty to minister to all people regardless of the social group to which they belonged. As part of its diaconal and outreach work, the church should be guiding and mentoring these young people to help them improve their lives. This
requires people to witness to punks primarily through caring for them, being understanding of
them, and accepting them without prejudice. It also recommends teaching others about the punk
subculture in order to explain why punks behaved as they did. The document asserts that the
subculture’s first need was to have a place where they could gather without fear, not be judged
by how they looked, and address the issues that they were upset about.\textsuperscript{216} As both the Blues
Masses and OA show, there were those within the church who wanted to minister to
marginalized groups and to provide an alternative community for them.

However, archive documents also reflect the reality that there were tensions within the
churches over what their role should be in engaging society and whether or not church space was
being used appropriately. According to Moldt, one of the Blues Masses led to a report from the
city hall of Berlin-Friedrichshain that stated that some remarks that were made at the service
were hostile to the state and met with applause from the youth in attendance.\textsuperscript{217} For some, this
service went too far into the political realm. Moldt also provides an account of incident where
the religious nature of the Blues Masses was questioned. In this case, a deacon or other church
official was questioning whether or not a specific youth service was in fact religious. In
response, Superintendent Ingrid Laudien, who worked with pastors and other youth leaders,
contended that the service was religious even if it did run longer than it was supposed to and no
Biblical texts were used in the last 45 minutes of the service.\textsuperscript{218} The question of whether or not
the service was religious was important because if the service was not religious, the church was
running the risk of overstepping the boundaries set by the state. From Laudien’s perspective, the
service did not overstep boundaries because it was a religious activity. The person questioning

\textsuperscript{216} Evangelisches Zentralarchiv, Berlin, EZA 101/3493, Vorlage für die KL am 1. Juli 1983 betr.: Punk-
Arbeit, pages 2-3.
the religious nature of the service also claimed to Laudien that youths were only coming to the service for the music rather than for religious reasons. To answer this, Laudien referenced her own life experiences. She responded that her original motivation for attending the Kantatengottesdienst, or Cantata service, was the service’s music, in this case, Cantatas. Laudien implies that it was acceptable for people to attend a religious service, even if their primary reason for attending was the music rather than religious belief. There is also an archive document that provides an account of a service held at Galiläa-Kirche, with the theme “Traum und Wirklichkeit” (Dream and Reality), which illustrates related questions about the use of space in churches. During the service, a punk band performed and sang nihilistic lyrics that challenged church doctrine. The author, Peter Wensierski, records their lyrics as: Laßt Euch nicht verführen, es gibt kein höheres Wesen, laßt Euch nicht vertrösten, denn hinterher kommt nichts,” which can be roughly translated as “Stop being seduced, there is no higher being, stop being misled, because nothing comes after this.” In response to their performance, the worship pastor gave a “spontaneous sermon” that explained the problems with the philosophy the punks expressed.

The punks stormed off. In the description of these events, the document sums up the “mixed feelings” of those who remained as wanting to have dialogue with non-Christian youth but not to superficially attract them to the church. There was a desire to include non-Christians such as punks but not at the cost of compromising its core beliefs and values.

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221 EZA 101/1871, epd ZA Nr. 141 vom 28. Juli 1981, “Punker in Ost-Berlin” by epd-Redakteur Peter Wensierski, page 5. The phrase in German is „eine spontane Predigt.“
With respect to OA, these tensions can be seen in an archive document about working with punks.\textsuperscript{223} In the document, there is an attempt to address issues of concern related to the punk subculture. For example, the document states that there should be a religious sponsor for Punk-Arbeit, or “Punk Work.” The fact that document specifies that the sponsor be a religious sponsor indicates an effort to ensure a religious component to the OA meetings being held in the church. The document also shows an effort to deal with the church and community’s complaints about the behavior of those attending this OA program. Specifically, it is decided that Laudien, because of her previous work with the Punk committee (“Punk-Ausschuß”), and an “active layperson” should represent the community base. The document also offered practical advice for working with punks. In a way, the document reads like educational pedagogy literature which explains a student’s behavior and gives recommendations for effective teaching. By expressing the needs and struggles of punks, it provides insight into why punks behave the way they do and perhaps motivate people to address these needs rather than complain about bad behavior. The document also notes the need to have sufficient personnel, finances, and facilities in order for these activities to take place. To better understand the context of this document, it is necessary to look at the OA program at one of churches: Pfingstkirche.

Punks at Pfingstkirche

The OA program at Pfingstkirche during the early 1980s demonstrates the complicated relationship between the churches and the punk subculture, and these events were influential in shaping the political activities of the punk subculture later in the decade. Starting in 1979, the

\textsuperscript{223} The document is discussing work with punks at Pfingstkirche where the punk subculture had come to dominate the OA program. Thus, although the document is specifically addressing working with punks, it is related to OA work.
church allowed the OA program to use part of the building, “the three-room Turmwohnung (tower-room).”

According to Hayton, punks began attending the meetings in 1981, and “by the end of 1982,” punks “dominated” the meetings. Those working with punks, including Lorenz Postler and Uwe Kulisch, wanted to create a space where punks would feel safe to express themselves and to address questions that mattered to punks, such as relationships with parents, trouble with alcoholism, problems with school and work, and interactions with police. They tried to hold discussions on issues that mattered to punks, to foster a sense of community, and to engage punks in ways that mattered to them.

The program, however, caused issues with the community and within the church itself. One issue was the way that punks behaved. They trashed places where they gathered, left broken bottles, littered, drank alcohol, and in some cases urinated in public. According to Hayton,
as punks arrived for their evening meetings, they would pick up beer and schnapps at the nearby Kaufhalle where employees complained about their rudeness and the heated exchanges they had with citizens. In the morning, empty and broken bottles would litter the Petersbergerplatz. Nearby residents complained about the noise levels and public urination while the punks waited outside for the evening sessions to begin.

The square where punks gathered before the meetings is rather small, only 210 by 50 meters, and it is located right in front of the church and surrounding community. Hayton points out that “by the end of 1982, 100-150 punks were meeting every Monday and Friday, including youths.

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224 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 472.
226 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 473. Although EZA 101/3493 was written after these events, it described how work with the punk subculture should happen in very similar terms. EZA 101/3493, Vorlage für die KL am 1. Juli 1983 betr.: Punk-Arbeit, page 1-2.
228 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 475
229 I observed that the platz was small when I visited it in January 2017. However, the measurements provided are from a German Wikipedia page. Petersburger Platz,” Wikipedia, accessed March 16, 2018, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petersburger_Platz.
coming as far away as Magdeburg to participate."\textsuperscript{230} Considering the size of the square and the number of those attending the meetings, it is not hard to understand why the community was frustrated by these behaviors. There were also complaints that punks were responsible for fascist graffiti and anti-government slogans.\textsuperscript{231} Several attempts were made to end the OA program at Pfingstkirche, the first being on December 17, 1981. In 1982, there were again plans to terminate the use of the Turmwohnung by the OA, but Laudien was successful in convincing officials to allow punks to continue to meet in the facilities after some renovations. However, by 1983, things had changed. Once more, the Turmwohnung was cited as being a fire hazard, which Hayton states was a common way to close church spaces.

\begin{quote}
Again summoned to the Stadtrat (municipal council), Superintendent Laudien was accused of supporting a “melting-pot of anti-state youths.” Responding that she “as a Christian…is committed to helping people who have difficulties in their lives, people like punks, alcoholics, etc.,” Superintendent Laudien reluctantly capitulated when faced with the abundant fire code violations.\textsuperscript{232}
\end{quote}

Although Laudien was not able to allow the OA and punks to continue to use this space, she defended this ministry to punks. After “Laudien reluctantly capitulated” to authorities and ended the agreement with the OA for use of the Pfingstkirche’s Turmwohnung, there was concern about how the punks who had gathered for the next meeting would take the news.\textsuperscript{233}

\begin{quote}
From the perspective of the punks involved, the church was kicking them out because it no longer wanted to work with them. According to one punk, the church leadership at Pfingstkirche claimed problems with their chimneys was the reason why the OA could no longer use their facilities. From this punk’s perspective, the chimney issue was just a convenient
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{230} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 473.
\textsuperscript{232} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 476.
\textsuperscript{233} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 476.
This is supported by a female parish priest quoted by Moldt. According to her September 1987 statement, “we were happy that years ago the authorities helped us to get the punks out of our house.” Although it was the OA who were allowed to use the Turmwohnung, punks had become an important, core element of this particular OA program. This space became important to the youths who gathered there, as illustrated by the name punks gave this evening: the “Evening of Tears,” or „der Tränenabend.” According to an essay in Wunder gibt es immer wieder— das Chaos ist aufgebracht, es war die schönste Zeit or There are Always Miracles—The Chaos is Exhausted, It was the Best of Times, a volume put together by the Kirche von Unten, prior to the punks gathering at the church that evening, the message, “Do not fulfill the expectations of the police!” had been spread. In fact, there was such a large number of police and Stasi in the area that evening that Kulisch and Postler expressed concern that this presence was provocative. Yet, the punks gathered were not aggressive but rather resigned. According to Hayton, there was still some hope “that the Turmwohnung would somehow be restored to them.” The community that had developed at Pfingstkirche through OA was meaningful to the punk subculture, and the fact that it was forced to leave the church left had an impact on these punks.

235 Dirk Moldt, “Punks in der Kirche,” 103. This quote opens the section on punks in the church that expresses skepticism as the reason punks were expelled from the church.
237 Kirche von Unten, 94; Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 476.
238 Kirche von Unten, 92. „Die Begleiter legten sich auf ein Motto fest, mit welchem die jungen Leute vor den verschlossenen Pfingst-Räumen vertraut gemacht werden sollten Es hieß: Erwartungen der Polizei nicht erfüllen! Die Polizei sollte keinen Grund zum Eingreifen bekommen."
The punk subculture continued to be involved with Protestant churches, but there is a sense that they did not truly feel welcomed that runs through many of the narratives told by former East German punks. According to Moldt, very few real relationships were developed between punks and parish priests.\textsuperscript{242} He writes,

Christians in the GDR were citizens of the GDR after all and thereby no less narrow-minded, intolerant or arrogant than their atheist co-inhabitants. Maybe they’d subconsciously developed a heightened sensitivity for marginal groups. Mostly this sensitivity—if it existed at all—did not show. If it showed it mainly did because supporting such people could help [in] gaining mercy from the lord.\textsuperscript{243}

He continues his critique by claiming that the minority who did reach out to punks did so for reasons “ranging from guilt complexes and helper syndromes, through attempts at reintegration to the rational realization that juveniles needed sheltered areas.”\textsuperscript{244} Rather than being a meaningful ministry to reach out to groups marginalized by the state, some saw the work that the churches were doing as being motivated by wanting to earn points with God. The way those in the punk subculture understood the closing of Pfingstkirche to them supports this. Rather than being true allies and friends of the punk subculture, Pfingstkirche found a way to be rid itself of punks. Additionally, the closing seems to have deeply affected the two youth pastors who worked with the OA program, Postler and Kulisch. Hayton states that they viewed the closing of this space as a “bitter defeat” because it threatened the work they were doing.\textsuperscript{245} Although Hayton recounts ways that people like Laudien attempted to make the relationship between the church and the youth work, in the end, both Postler and Kulisch learned “about the unreliability of the upper-church hierarchy in supporting the OA and the need to circumvent church leaders to

\textsuperscript{242} Dirk Moldt, “Punks in der Kirche,” 104.
\textsuperscript{243} Dirk Moldt, “Punks in der Kirche,” 107.
\textsuperscript{244} Dirk Moldt, “Punks in der Kirche,” 107.
\textsuperscript{245} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 477.
continue their efforts at helping troubled youths. In spite of this, Postler did continue to work on behalf of punks, including writing a document describing a presentation about working with punks approximately four months after Tanenbaum.

These events are significant because it provides insight into how the relationship between punks and the church contributed to the changing nature of the punk subculture’s political activity. When the differing views on the role that churches should play in society and politics are considered, along with the issues surrounding the use of space within churches, it becomes noticeable that the punk subculture tended to be welcomed by the individuals and groups in the churches who wanted the churches to engage society more. Because of the greater acceptance by this section of the churches, the punk subculture developed closer connections to this more politically and socially active element within the church. This relationship became even more essential to the subculture when the Stasi began a crackdown on the punk subculture with the intent to eliminate it.

Conclusion

The Protestant Churches in East Germany held a unique spot in society, which meant that it could provide shelter for dissident and marginalized groups. Believing that it was part of the mission of the churches to minister to these groups, some within the churches allowed these groups to make use of the free space the churches had been granted. Because the churches did not have a unified vision of what this should look like in practice, conflicts developed within the

246 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 478.
churches which had an impact on those who used the churches’ free space, including the punk
subculture.

For punks, the combined actions of both the state and the churches appears to have led
them to become more radical and politically engaged. When the government cracked down on
the punk subculture in 1983, it forced the subculture to find refuge inside the churches, where
other dissidents were also gathering. Even though punks had been interacting with churches prior
to 1983, the state’s efforts to eliminate the subculture made the shelter of the churches a matter
of survival. Because other dissident groups had also sought protection within the church, punks
interacted with these groups more frequently as they relied more on the safety the churches
provided. This increased contact with other dissidents was one reason for the subculture’s
growing politicization. However, the actions and reactions of the churches towards punks may
have also contributed to their radicalization. Although some in the churches welcomed punks and
argued that it was part of the churches’ mission to work with this segment of society, other parts
of the churches did not share the same vision. The upper levels of church hierarchy tended to
focus on preserving the freedoms that the churches had gained over the years, and this required
them to work with the SED. This led some in the churches to question the mainstream church’s
commitment to social justice, which would lead to the formation of a more activist church group
known as the Kirche von Unten, or KvU.
CHAPTER 3
GROWING ACTIVISM

As discussed in Chapter 1, the punk subculture in East Germany had a political component to it and was seen as a threat by the SED. Punks refused to conform to the socialist personality that the government sought to instill in its youth, and they were not content with what the socialist system had to offer them. At first, the SED did not distinguish the punk subculture from other groups who also displayed behavior that the government deemed asocial. However, in 1983, the government decided to crack down specifically on the punk subculture in a more aggressive way. Initially, it appeared that the Stasi’s attempt to crush the subculture was working. However, in the long run, it backfired. As a result of the crackdown, the punk subculture increasingly needed the shelter provided by churches and came into contact with more dissident groups. This led to increased political involvement. While some punks were more active than others, the subculture played a role in the growing opposition movement. Additionally, the tensions within the churches about the role they should play in East German society seem to have encouraged punks to align with the Kirche von Unten and other more activist elements within the East German churches. By the late 1980s, the alternative community that formed in the churches ended up challenging the government and calling for change.
Punks, Police, and the Stasi

In August 1983, Minister for State Security Erich Mielke gave orders to the Stasi to target the punk subculture more aggressively with the intent of destroying it.\(^{248}\) According to Jeff Hayton, these orders, referred to as “Härte gegen Punk,” marked a change in official policy towards punks.\(^{249}\) The punk subculture had always been seen as a threat due to its rejection of the socialist personality and its refusal to conform to societal norms, however, by 1983, the Stasi began to note differences between the punk subculture and other asocial groups. According to William Seth Howes, “by 1983 and 1984 [Stasi] reports began to be filed which theorized punk more concretely.”\(^{250}\) By identifying the punk subculture more specifically, rather than lumping them into broader asocial groups, the Stasi began to distinguish the punk subculture from other groups, tried to understand it and targeted it specifically. For approximately the next year, the Stasi used a variety of strategies to crush the punk subculture.\(^{251}\) These strategies were part of a Stasi tactic known as Zersetzung. According to Hubertus Knabe, Zersetzung “is difficult to translate because it means originally bio-degradation, but actually it’s a quite accurate description. The goal was to destroy secretly the self-confidence [sic] of people . . . by destroying their personal relationships.”\(^{252}\) Robert Galenza and Heinz Havemeister support this when they write that the Stasi turned to tactics that were unconditional and personally destroying.\(^{253}\)

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Several actions taken by the Stasi seem to center around one of the reasons they decided to crush the punk subculture: its visibility. As Chapter 1 noted, the punk subculture did not blend into East German society. Howes notes that the punks’ appearance and chosen locations meant that individuals “had no choice but to see them.” The visibility of the punk subculture, especially as the West took notice of it, was extremely problematic for the SED because punk was not supposed to be a natural part of the socialist system. Although the SED claimed that punk was foreign to the GDR’s socialist society, the fact remained that there were punks who lived in the GDR. The SED had tried to blame outside corruption, and some viewed the existence of the punk subculture in the GDR as being similar to a breach into its sovereign territory. With the eased travel restrictions that developed during the era of détente, it became harder to hide the punk subculture from tourists, journalists, and other visitors from the West.

According to Hayton, “as Western reports made unequivocally clear, the emergence of alternative lifestyles in the GDR was not a result of Western influence or diversion as the SED claimed, but due to the political, economic, social and psychological want found in ‘real-existing socialism.’” Punks were a product of the GDR; the subculture developed because of the way the SED implemented socialism. This is echoed in a statement by Galenza and Havemeister, in the book *too much future—Punk in der DDR*. In their discussion of East German punk bands after the Stasi crackdown, Galenza and Havemeister state that “none of the bands were denying their specific GDR roots.” The punk subculture saw itself as East German and different from the punk subculture in West Germany. For example, East German youth used Western media and

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255 Howes, “Punk Avant-Gardes,” 186-187
256 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 419 and 421; and Hayton, “Härte gegen Punk,” 535.
Western fanzines in order to describe what their lives were like in East Germany.\textsuperscript{259} Reporting on events in the subculture and providing the scoop on the punk scene, East German punks could show their Western counterparts what punk culture was like inside the GDR.\textsuperscript{260} Michael Horschig points out that because there was not an opportunity to correct false stories or misunderstanding about the punk subculture in East German media, some would try to address these issues using Western media sources.\textsuperscript{261} Because a punk subculture existed in East Germany, Hayton argues, punks came to be seen as “living embodiments of the bankruptcy of the regime and the grass-roots opposition that had begun forming the GDR.”\textsuperscript{262} For those in the West, the fact that the punk subculture existed in the GDR was taken as confirmation that East Germany was unable to meet the needs of its people. After all, the punk subculture at its heart was a rejection of the values and characteristics that the SED believed its citizens should have.

Several of the strategies the Stasi used as part of \textit{Härte gegen Punk} can be viewed as methods to reduce the visibility of the punk subculture and to prevent its spread within the GDR. As Michael Kobs, a member of the punk subculture, put it, “the state wanted to get punks off the streets.”\textsuperscript{263} According to Daniel Kaiser, another member, “everyone involved with punk had to show up at least twice a week at the local police station.”\textsuperscript{264} Hayton contends that “arrest and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{} Hayton, “\textit{Härte gegen Punk},” 540.
\bibitem{} Horschig, 60. „Kennzeichnend für diese Jahre war, daß die Punks immer wieder versuchten, sich über westliche Medien zu artikulieren und dazustellen. Es waren Jahre der Selbstdarstellung und Selbstfindung. In der DDR hatten sie keine Möglichkeit, dies zu tun, und irgendwie wollten sie massenwirksam erklären und zurechttrücken, was bewußt falsch behauptet wurde. Es gab Veröffentlichungen in mehreren West-Zeitungen, denen jedoch Verhaftungen und Verurteilungen folgten. Leute, denen nichts nachgewiesen werden konnte, die aber auf den Fotos zu sehen waren, wurden spezielle Kandidaten des Staatsicherheitsdienstes, der nichts verzieh und ungesühnt ließ.“
\bibitem{} Hayton, “\textit{Härte gegen Punk},” 536.
\bibitem{} Mrozek, 60.
\bibitem{} Mrozek, 56.
\end{thebibliography}
prosecution were generally the first and most effective steps in combating punk.”

In an interview included in *too much future—Punk in der DDR*, Michael “Pankow” Boehlke described a time that he was arrested for the clothes he had worn. He states that he performed in Karl-Marx-Stadt wearing a DIY t-shirt on which he “had written, ‘When justice becomes injustice resistance becomes a duty,’” and “on the back was the RAF logo with the machine gun.” He also says that he “wore a yellow star armband on Alexanderplatz.” After being arrested, the Stasi gave him a sentence of “two years and eight months for outrage, subversive propaganda and resisting authorities.” He recalled that

[the Stasi] kept me for three days. During questionings they said: you either cooperate or you go to prison. And then you are in the cell at night and any second the steel door slams open—the guy beats you with a stick and screams: Get up. I cried when I was on my own, in the cell. But one thing was clear: I’d rather go to jail than cooperate with these jerks.

Boehlke’s description shows that both violence and coercion were used to get him to cooperate. In some cases, as will be discussed below, punks were pressured into becoming unofficial collaborators, or *Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* (IMs), for the Stasi. In general, those who were identified as punks were arrested, put in prison, conscripted into the National People’s Army, or had their requests for emigration to the West approved in order to get them out of the country.

According to some involved in the punk subculture, most punks were in jail or had been drafted

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265 Hayton, “*Härte gegen Punk*,” 545.
266 Mrozek, 57.
267 Mrozek, 57.
268 Mrozek, 57.
269 Mrozek, 57.
into the Army between 1983 and 1984.\textsuperscript{271} Boehlke, when describing the situation he found himself in after being allowed to return to Berlin in 1984, states that “two thirds of my circle of friends had disappeared almost without a trace. They’d left the country for good, were in prison or in the army.”\textsuperscript{272} The visibility of the punk subculture was further reduced because “ punks were forbidden to associate with one another publicly, banned from restaurants, refused entry to youth clubs, and even prohibited from entering certain city districts.”\textsuperscript{273} By decreasing the visibility of the punk subculture and removing many from the scene, the Stasi hoped to crush and eliminate the punk subculture.

Another important part of \textit{Härte gegen Punk} involved damaging relationships within the subculture and sowing seeds of mistrust. According to Mike Dennis, one of strategies the Stasi used to deal with groups that posed a threat was “to undermine the effectiveness of the groups by, for example, inciting divisive internal discussions and conflicts and by encouraging radical activities in order to provoke counteraction by the state authorities.”\textsuperscript{274} Although Dennis is not specifically referring to the punk subculture here, he describes how they worked to corrode the subculture. As shown in Chapter 1, relationships and connections had an important place within the subculture. Thus, the Stasi were able to crackdown on the subculture by undermining relationships and causing suspicion between members of the subculture. Ultimately this meant that the Stasi infiltrated some bands while prompting others to disband.\textsuperscript{275} Although Denis is referring to the many groups that were targeted by the Stasi, his statement that “many groups collapsed because members suspected that the Stasi was ‘among them’” is applicable to the punk

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{271} Herne, Mecy, und Micha, 108.
  \item \textsuperscript{273} Hayton, “Härte gegen Punk,” 524.
  \item \textsuperscript{274} Mike Dennis, \textit{The Stasi: Myth and Reality} (London: Pearson, 2003), 159.
  \item \textsuperscript{275} Hayton, “Härte gegen Punk,” 524.
\end{itemize}
subculture as well. According to Hayton, the “anxiety about infiltration was so extreme that fears the Stasi was listening often meant that punk gatherings amounted to little more than sullen silence as youths sat around not talking, fearful of incriminating themselves.” The sense of community that was so important to the punk subculture was shattered by suspicion of one another.

The Stasi used IMs within the punk subculture for a variety of activities, from working to sabotage events and equipment to disrupting the peace by practicing too loudly or smashing bottles and drinking, from reporting on their band members to keeping the Stasi up to date with what was going on. According to Dennis and LaPorte, the Stasi wanted to have punks work for them as IMs because they could give insider information on the subculture as well as report on other groups that were also meeting within the churches. While some in the punk subculture did so for ideological reasons or because of relationships the Stasi handlers had been cultivating, Hayton contends that it was more common for punks to agree to work as IMs out of fear or for some sort of personal gain or privilege. Galenza and Havemeister write that one method to pressure a punk into being an informant, included “visiting the concentration camp Buchenwald accompanied by remarks about all the things that could happen if one wasn’t alert enough.” Another example of how fear could motivate someone to become an IM can be seen in Boehlke’s account of his arrest, which was referred to earlier. In the interview, he said that he “found out that [the Stasi] had blackmailed my girlfriend [Sabine Bading]: Either you cooperate

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276 Dennis, 159.
278 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 480 and 507.
279 Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte, State and Minorities in Communist East Germany (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 166.
280 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 505-508; Dennis and LaPorte make a similar argument. See Dennis and LaPorte, 165-167.
or your boyfriend is going to prison.” According to Boehlke, Bading agreed to work with the 
Stasi, although she only pretended to do so. Boehlke states that he would probably have gone 
to prison, where “it’s likely they would have broken me,” had Bading not agreed to their 
terms. While Bading may only have agreed but did not actually inform, others did. In 
describing reasons why a punk might collaborate for personal gain, Dennis and LaPorte write 
that “the Stasi often dangled the bait of a lighter sentence, concert tickets and records from the 
West in return for collaboration.” Hayton provides examples of an IM who “used subversion 
to destroy” a punk band in order to gain “support from the Stasi in acquiring a better apartment” 
and another who collaborated with the hope the Stasi would help him emigrate. Although 
members of the subculture would work with the Stasi for a variety of reasons, punks did not 
always make the best IMs. Because they did not tend to be devoted to the cause, punk IMs 
sometimes put off carrying out their assignments, reported about events after they occurred, or 
just barely carried out their tasks. According to Hayton, the relationship between the Stasi and 
the IMs was not an easy one, as punk IMs were “continually missing their appointments, 
reporting concerts well after the fact, concealing their Western contacts, and talking about their 
Stasi status to innumerable individuals.” Dennis and LaPorte recount a time where “punks 
from Dresden outwitted the Stasi by spreading false information about a forthcoming party for 
over 200 punks; the police on alert at the main station were left to idle away the time.” In 
“THX, Gerhard, You Bloody Bastard,” the author, chAOs, recalls a time when he was beaten 
and told to bring in a Wutanfall tape to an interrogator. According to chAOs, after he had been 

282 Mrozek, 57 and 61. 
283 Mrozek, 57. 
284 Mrozek, 57. 
285 Dennis and LaPorte, 166. 
286 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 507. 
288 Dennis and LaPorte, 25.
beaten, his interrogator threatened that chAOs would “get a summons next week, and [he’ll] bring the tape along with [him]…” 289 chAOs did bring a tape, but the tape he brought in was a “bad quality copy” he made with interference from the radio. As he put it, “a Wutanfall [sic] tape got damaged by awful songs like ‘Kinderland’ and other crap by the top zombie east zone songwriter Gerhard Schöne.” 290 Although it is unclear from this account if chAOs was an IM or simply bringing in this one tape, it does illustrate how punks could comply without being truly helpful. Although motivation for being an IM varied, and in spite of the fact that IMs were not always reliable, the subculture knew that the Stasi were watching them, and it spread suspicion. 291

Although Härte gegen Punk only lasted about a year, the damage to the punk subculture was immense. According to Hayton, “the first punk generation was dead, the scene disorganized and directionless, and the remaining members increasingly sought protection within the Evangelical churches.” 292 Härte gegen Punk seemed successful when it was assessed in May 1984, but the report also noted that some within the punk subculture had found shelter within the churches. 293 Because the Stasi deemed the crackdown successful when it was assessed in the mid-1980s, Dennis and LaPorte contend that the Stasi switched their focus towards what they saw as a greater threat—skinheads. 294 Although Dennis and LaPorte never make this connection, perhaps the fact that the Stasi began to focus more on skinheads may have allowed a bit of space for the punk subculture to reorganize as it did in the mid-1980s. Additionally, the

289 chAOs, “THX, Gerhard, You Bloody Bastard/Blutkunst,” in too much future—Punk in der DDR, ed. by Michael Boehlke and Henryke Gericke (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2007), 65. Ellipses in the original text.
290 chAOs, 65-68. His original intent was to censor certain words by replacing them with farts, however he lacked the equipment to do so.
293 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 461-462.
294 Dennis and LaPorte, 167; and Dennis, 163.
Stasi’s assessment that *Härte gegen Punk* was successful was, to use Hayton’s word, “premature” as parts of the punk subculture became more politically active after the crackdown.295 As Hayton points out, “five years [later], the SED leadership was forced to concede that repression, instead of destroying the subculture, had instead made punk *more* dangerous by pushing youths into the arms of the political opposition.”296 Thus when the crackdown was assessed in the short-term it appears to have been successful, yet in the long run, the crackdown led to the subculture becoming more political and contributed to the growing dissident movement. In a way, the Stasi created the very threat that they feared.

**Punk Subculture and Activism**

Because the punk subculture was forced into the churches by *Härte gegen Punk*, the Stasi had contributed to one of its biggest concerns— that dissident groups would work together. According to Mary Fulbrook, part of the reason that dissidents in the 1980s were able to chip away at the power and authority of the SED was that these groups were able organize together in a way that they had not before.297 Similarly, Hayton contends that “since détente began in the early 1970s, the [Stasi] had been plagued with nightmare scenarios of small groups uniting to form a large opposition movement.”298 Because various dissidents, including punks, were able to find shelter under the auspices of the churches, they were able to interact and mobilize together in a way that had not happened before. Through the combination of the SED’s policies which granted the churches some free space and the policies that pushed groups like punks further into

295 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 462
298 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 462.
the churches for shelter, the government was making this “nightmare scenario” a reality. The punk subculture may have appeared threatening to the SED and Stasi prior to Härte gegen Punk, but the end result was a more political and engaged subculture. The threat the punk subculture posed increased rather than decreased because of the more active way that the subculture protested and objected to the SED.

Before examining the changes in the punk subculture’s political activity, it is useful to take a moment to look at the dissident groups who were gathering in the churches as well as to see how there were multiple connections between these groups. By the 1980s, several different dissident groups could be found within the churches: pacifists and those in the peace movement, environmentalist groups, groups advocating for human rights, women’s rights groups, and, in some churches, gay and lesbian rights supporters. Although each group is worthy of examining, this paper will focus primarily on two causes: the peace movement and environmentalism. The peace movement had a long history within the GDR, and some portions of the movement had strong ties to the churches. For example, in 1964, the SED created an option that allowed some who had objections to military service to spend their required


300 One of the reasons for selecting these two causes specifically is that these movements were also part of the conciliar process, the BEK saw these topics as falling within the religious sphere, and these topics were brought up as part of ecumenical discussions. For example, see Heino Flacke, “The Ecumenical Assembly for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation,” The Ecumenical Review 56, no. 2 (April 2004).
service time as *Bausoldaten* or building soldiers. Scott Moranda writes that historian Nathan Stoltzfus has argued that “these *Bausoldaten* formed the core of the emerging peace movement in East Germany.”

Tobias Huff notes that the state’s increased focus on military education starting in the late 1970s also lead to a reinvigoration of the independent peace movement. For example, in 1982, the “Berlin Appeal,” which “called for disarmament, an end to military instruction in schools, and the creation of a community peace service” was written by Robert Havemann, a Marxist dissident, and Rainer Eppelmann, who was the pastor who helped to start the Blues Masses. 

Ozawa-de Silva notes that during the 1980s, “there were also younger pacifists who wore a “Swords into Ploughshares” patch which referred to a biblical image in Micah 4. This passage in Micah refers to the peace that there will be between nations when the Lord establishes his kingdom on earth. “[The nations] will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” Not only did this draw from biblical imagery, but it was also “borrowed from the subject of a sculpture of a prominent Soviet artist” that was a gift to the United Nations from Khrushchev. Because of this connection to the Soviet Union, the image’s use was “to the great annoyance of state authorities, who could not ban it for fear of offending the Soviet Union.”

Neither the church nor the state could really object to the image. According to a Deutsche Welle article, “young people in particular wore the round patch [with the image],

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301 Moranda, 168.
302 Huff, 319.
304 Ozawa-de Silva, 515
305 Micah 4:3 (New International Version).
306 Deutsche Welle, “From hope, a movement: The role of the churches in the fall of the GDR”, 5th paragraph
307 Deutsche Welle, “From hope, a movement: The role of the churches in the fall of the GDR”, 5th paragraph
which was sometimes ripped off of their sleeves by angry comrades.”

The environmental movement also had strong links to the Protestant churches. In fact, both Huff and Moranda connect the environmental movement to the peace movement. Although the movement has roots that go back earlier, during the 1980s a group of young environmentalists became active and advocated for a different type of environmentalism. According to Moranda, this “new environmentalism” focused more on trying to conserve and preserve the environment than to find ways to balance human use with environmental concerns. In 1986, some of those involved with environmentalism worked to create the Umweltbibliothek, or Environmental Library, at Zionskirche in Berlin. Later, works about peace and human rights began to be included within the library. The inclusion of these topics shows once more how dissident movements were interconnected.

As punks became more dependent on the protection provided by the churches due to the crackdown, they began to interact with more dissident groups, such as the peace and environmental movements, with whom they shared common interests. Different interest groups formed among the punk subculture, and it appears to have included a wide range of issues depending on the individuals involved. According to Horschig, one important starting point for many punks was the Umweltbibliothek. There were also those within the subculture who connected well with the peace movement. Horschig explains that the peace movement had to deal with treatment by the Stasi similar to that of the punk subculture including being arrested.

308 Deutsche Welle, “From hope, a movement: The role of the churches in the fall of the GDR”, 5th paragraph
309 Huff, 316-322; and Moranda. This is a repeated theme throughout Moranda’s book.
310 Moranda, 157 and 168-175.
311 Moranda, 157-159 and 168-175.
312 Moranda, 169.
313 Horschig, 52.
interrogated, and sometimes were beaten. These common experiences meant that they had some similar views of the world. Through the protection of the churches and these connections to dissident groups, some in the punk subculture were able to find purpose and direction once more after the loss of the first generation of punks during *Härte gegen Punk*. As Hayton puts it, “church protection and union with oppositional groups allowed punks to channel their at-times limited politics of resistance—their ideas, their bodies and their scenes—into the public arena and to translate their personal forms of opposition into political action.” Over time, as punks worked with other dissident groups, they became “firmly integrated and socialized into the oppositional politics,” to use Hayton’s phrasing, and would “participate in the protest culture formed by the various groups that would coalesce into the opposition movement.” Prior to *Härte gegen Punk*, the punk subculture’s political activity had tended to focus on refusing to conform to the social norms the SED expected and was expressed through subversive lyrics. The subculture was not engaged with dissident groups. Rather than being political through more passive means as they had before, the punk subculture began to actively participate in the opposition movement.

The active political aspect of the punk subculture also increased as the punks who had returned home from prison or the military and rejoined the punk subculture. Some of those who came back saw that some of the current punk scene was “in chaos” and was “self-

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314 Horschig, 53-54. „Aufgrund unserer Erfahrung mit Gesellschaft und Staat sahen wir die Welt oft anders als andere Leute, die davon nicht betroffen waren. Die Leute der Friedensbewegung machten jedoch in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Staat oft die gleichen Erfahrungen wie wir, auch sie wurden wegen Tragens des Aufnähers „Schwerter zu Pflugscharen“ von der Straße weg verhaftet, verhört, beraubt und in extremen Fällen auch geschlagen. Sie waren dadurch die ersten, die begannen, die Welt ähnlich zu sehen wie wir.“
315 Horschig, 53.
316 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 487.
318 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 466.
destructive” due to the crackdown. Finding others who shared their values and wanted to do something other than be self-destructive, some punks formed a group that became known as Alösa, which used the anarchy symbol for both the first and last “A” in the name. According to Herne, Mecy and Mischa, in their entry about Alösa in the anthology Wir wollen immer artig sein...: Punk, New Wave, Hiphop, und Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980-1990, individuals would come and go from this group from 1984 until 1990, although a core group was included the “Reihe Köpenicker, Friedrichs-hagener, [and] Spindlersfelder Punks.” There was also affiliation with some individuals connected to the churches, specifically the “social deacon and Erich Mühsam fan Lore.” There were also several punk bands that were connected to this group including Namenlos, Planlos, Fatale, and Kein Talent. This section of the punk subculture shared interests and concerns with groups including those fighting for human rights, pacifists, environmentalists, and those opposed to nuclear power. There were also members of this group who tried to teach others about anarchist beliefs. In their essay, Herne, Mecy, and Micha illustrate the ways that members in Alösa were often linked to other causes. For example, many from Alösa became involved with the Kirche von Unten (KvU), or Church from Below, which will be discussed in the next section. This again reflects the shift in the nature of the punk subculture’s political activity. Rather than dropping out and refusing to conform, punks became more engaged in the wake of the government crackdown.

319 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 110-111.
320 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 110-111; and Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 481-482.
321 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 111.
322 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 111-112. On page 111, Lore is described as „der Sozialdiakon und Erich-Mühsam-Fan."
325 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 110 and 114.
The punk subculture’s involvement with the various dissident groups, including the peace and environmentalist movements, varied by individual and group. In general, many punks who remained politically active often did not take on leadership positions, in part due to their anarchist and anti-authoritarian views.\textsuperscript{326} However, many contributed by being what Hayton calls the “foot soldiers” of the opposition movement and helped by “populating the opposition.”\textsuperscript{327} As “foot soldiers,” it seems that punks often helped with the leg work for a variety of causes. They handed out leaflets, participated in marches, attended meetings, and protested on the streets.\textsuperscript{328} Horschig writes that there were punks involved with bicycle demonstrations, candle demonstrations, and even a human chain from the Soviet to US embassy, among other activities.\textsuperscript{329} Other punks took a more active role in specific areas that held importance to them, in part due to their own experiences. For some, military policies were an important cause. “Affected personally by the militaristic policies of the regime, punks became directly involved in the conflict over military service, and in the burgeoning peace movement.”\textsuperscript{330} This could include taking on personal risk by refusing to serve in the military or by being conscientious objectors.\textsuperscript{331} Personal experiences seem to have motivated some to be more active, and as mentioned above, some in the punk subculture felt a connection to those in the peace movement due to fact that they both had similar experiences with the Stasi.\textsuperscript{332} Not only did punks distribute

\textsuperscript{327} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 508
\textsuperscript{328} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 482-483; Horschig, 52; Fulbrook calls the “distribution of leaflets” as a “major form of protest.” Fulbrook, “Popular Discontent;” 275.
\textsuperscript{329} Horschig, 53. „Es gab erste Fahrraddemos, Kerzendemos, die Bemalung des Tunnels Storkower Straße, eine Menschenkette von sowjetischer zur US-Botschaft und vieles andere mehr, um Möglichkeiten, aber auch Toleranzen des Staates auszutesten.“ The bicycle demonstrations may be related to the ones Moranda states that environmentalists held. Moranda, 169.
\textsuperscript{330} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 483.
\textsuperscript{331} Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 483.
\textsuperscript{332} Horschig, 53-54. See footnote 314 for full quote.
literature for the dissident groups they worked with, but some helped to write samizdat materials and papers, including the *Umweltblätter* and *mOAning star*. Others helped to get signatures for petitions asking the state to re-examine its nuclear policies. Some in the subculture, such as members of AlösA, were very active politically. According to Hayton, “the AlösA punks were a central organizational hub in the political struggle against the SED.” Hayton also mentions an attempt by “two members of the punk band Vitamin A” to “organize a counter-demonstration that would disrupt” a worker’s festival being held in Magdeburg to protest the “construction of a power plant in Stendal.” While some groups and individuals participated more than others, many punks furthered the opposition movement by filling the rank and file and completing the grunt work that needed to be done. Punks helped to provide the work necessary for the dissident movements to spread and work for change.

Perhaps more important than their work as “foot soldiers” was the subculture’s ability to gather crowds and use its connections to disseminate information and build networks. As mentioned in the discussion of the peace and environmental movements earlier, there were some links and connections between the punk subculture and different movements, including overlap in group membership and shared goals. Sometimes the overlap came from the multiple groups that individual punks worked with. For example, Molti (Dirk Moldt) and Silvio (Silvio Meier)

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333 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 484; and Herne, Mecy, and Mischa, 118. Although I cannot conclusively prove this, it is possible that some editions of the OA paper *mOAning star* may have been printed with the same equipment as the *Umweltblätter* due to similarities in the typing and printing. There seem to be similar characteristics that would suggest they used the same typewriters. For comparison see, Dirk Moldt, ed., *mOAning star: eine Ostberliner Untergrundpublikation 1985-1989; eine Dokumentation*, (Berlin: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft e.V. Archiv der DDR-Opposition, 2005), 41-232; and Alison M. Furlong, “Resistance Rooms: Sounds and Sociability in -the East German Church” (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2015), 74. Moldt’s volume includes copies of *mOAning star* papers while Furlong provides an example from the Umweltblätter.

334 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 484.

335 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 482.

336 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 484.
were involved with AlösA and *moAning star*, a *Kirche von Unten* and OA paper. Although some connections between these dissident groups existed prior to the punk subculture’s involvement, Dennis contends that the dissident groups had a “relatively underdeveloped institutional and communication networks” which began to be improved during the 1980s.

Given the time frame Dennis provides, then the punk subculture’s networks which had built over the years and subculture’s ability to draw large crowds with their concerts were two vital ways that the punk subculture would have been able to contribute to the dissident movements. Through their concerts and networks, punks were able to publicize their political messages and draw the attention of Western media. The large crowds that came to hear punk music included people from across the GDR and from other countries, and this meant that activists could spread their messages to a larger and more international audience.

Through its connections, AlösA was able to work out an arrangement where “touring punk bands . . . would first play in West Berlin and then cross the Berlin Wall to play using Eastern equipment in the Profihaus, [a church building East German punks were allowed to use] thus linking the East and West concert scenes for the first time.”

AlösA also made use of its contacts to connect to punks in Poland, and according to Herne, Mecy, and Mischa, this was a “fruitful” collaboration that included concerts in both Poland and East Germany. Herne, Mecy, and Mischa also state that AlösA held

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337 To get the full names of these individuals, I cross-referenced the names provided by Herne, Mecy, and Micha in *Wir wollen immer* on page 118 with the names Dirk Moldt provides of those who contributed to *moAning star*. See Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 118; and Moldt, *moAning star*, 235-280.

338 Dennis, 159.

339 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 486-488; and Herne, Mecy, and Mischa, 114-118.

340 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 481. Herne, Mecy, and Mischa also make reference to concerts held at the Profihaus. For example, see Herne, Mecy, and Mischa, 116.

concerts which would include East German, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, Polish, West German, Italian, British, American and Canadian bands. These international connections meant that the messages expressed by dissidents at these concerts could be heard beyond the borders of East Germany. Due to the illegal and underground nature of punk, the subculture had developed networks and contacts which were later used to spread political messages.

Although punks would integrate and work with dissident groups, this was not always a smooth process. The philosophy, mindset, and culture of the punk subculture could make it difficult for them to collaborate with others. According to Herne, Mecy and Micha, who were involved with AlösA, the punk subculture expressed itself using cynicism, black humor, and “bad language of the Berlin alleyway dialect.” Apparently those who were not part of the subculture, including the Stasi and police, found this way of speaking difficult to endure. Horschig states that “the wild and impetuous temperament of the punks, their coarse behavior,” how they “never [took] anything or anyone seriously, [were] constantly joking” and, for some, their alcoholism made it difficult to work with others. Writing about his own experiences, Horschig states that although he met and befriended many “sincere Christians, pacifists, anarchists, [environmentalists,] and civil rights activists,” he also experienced a lot “misunderstanding, mistrust, and slander by those in these groups.” Additionally, the punk

342 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 115-116.
343 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 112. „Eine eigene Art des sprachlichen Ausdrucks gab es bei den Punks schon immer, hier wurde er aber weiterentwickelt in eine Art Negativsprache im Berliner Gassendialekt, geprägt durch sehr starken Zynismus und schwarzen Humor.“
344 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 112. „Außenstehende, wie auch MfS und Polizei, konnten diese Sprache oft weder verstehen noch aushalten.“
345 Horschig, 53. In Horschig’s discussion of the relationship between punks and other groups, he describes punks using the following phrase: „das wilde und ungestüme Temperament der Punks, ihr rüdes Auftreten, nichts und niemanden ernstnehmend, ständig witzelnd und social Schwache wie Alkoholiker mitschliefend.“ From the context of the passage, it seems that Horschig is not referring to a specific group but rather explaining why the subculture did not get along with others in general terms.
346 Horschig, 53. „Ich habe in diesen Jahren viele aufrichtige Christen, Pazifisten, Anarchos, Ökos und Bürgerrechtlern kennengelernt und zum Freund gehabt, aber ich habe auch sehr viel Unverständnis, Mistrauen und Verleumdungen aus diesen Gruppen erlebt.“
subculture was not always associated with behavior other dissidents wanted to be around. For example, there were some punks who known as “Suff-Punks, or “drunk punks,” who were known by other dissidents because of their “disorderliness and drunkenness.” As stated above, even some within the punk subculture described other punks as being self-destructive. At times, punks would become frustrated with dissident groups for all of the “senseless debates” that went on as the groups strove for consensus. As Herne, Mecy, and Micha put it,

it was soon shown that punks didn’t rightly belong [with] church people. As a consequence, punks very quickly identified that never-ending discussions for the sake of consensus or because people like to hear themselves, was very time consuming and did not lead to an end. They said, “FUCK THIS!”

The punk subculture in general appears to have lacked some of the patience to put up with the discussions carried out by others. Similarly, the influence of anarchist ideology on the subculture appears to have caused some issues when the subculture worked with others because they felt the establishment and state should be done away with and that compromise was not an option. Dennis and LaPorte contend that “ punks, unlike sections of the alternative political culture, disdained any form of dialog with the state” which meant that “relations between punks and the peace and ecological groups which found shelter in the churches also ran far from smoothly.” Punks also brought attention to other opposition groups that they did not want both because of

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347 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 480.
348 Horschig, 53.
349 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 114. „Es zeigte sich aber schnell, daß die Punks nicht so richtig zu den Kirchenleuten gehörten. In der Folge haben die Punks sehr schnell festgestellt, daß das ewige Zerreden um des Konsens willen oder weil Leute sich gerne reden hörten, sehr zeitaufwendig war und am Ende zu gar nichts führte. Sie sagten: ‘FUCK THIS!’“ Emphasis in the original.
350 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 112. „Die Mitglieder dieser Gruppe waren von anarchistischer Ideologie geprägt- oder sie versuchten diese zumindest zu verstehen. Sie waren daher nur sehr schwer zu Kompromissen mit dem Staat und Etabliertem bereit. Der Staat und die alte Ordnung mußten weg, waren überflüssig und veraltet, wie überall in der Welt.“
351 Dennis and LaPorte, 165.
their behavior and the fact that there were many IMs within the subculture. Dennis and LaPorte provides the example of a punk band in Jena that consisted mainly of IMs. It took advantage of the good offices of Ulrich Kasparick, the minister responsible for youth work (*Jugendpfarrer*), in allowing it to use church rooms in order to undermine his work on behalf of the peace and human rights groups in the city. The band’s loud noise, drunkenness and damage to property led to so many complaints from the public that an exhausted Kasparick gave up his post.  

The difficulties that came from working with members of the punk subculture meant that the subculture worked more with some groups rather than others. When the tensions within the church about appropriate use of church space and debates about how far the churches should engage society caused a segment of the church to form the KvU, the punk subculture tended to work more closely with this portion of the church.

The *Kirche von Unten*

As was examined in Chapter 2, there were tensions within the churches about what the proper role of the church in society should be. Often those who tended to be higher up in the church hierarchy, and who probably had more frequent contact with the SED, were concerned that the churches were straying too far from their religious purposes and needed to rein in the activities taking place in the churches in order to preserve the freedoms already won by the churches.  

In fact, as was discussed in Chapter 2, a key reason the SED had given the churches some of the freedom they had was because the state assumed that the churches would be able to police and maintain order of the groups located within the churches. According to Ozawa-de Silva, “church leaders were instructed by their state interlocutors to ‘discipline’ and ‘integrate’

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352 Dennis and LaPorte. 166. Parenthetical statement in original.
353 Ozawa-de Silva, 513 and 516-518.
their rank-and-file. They were to deal with outspoken pastors internally.”\textsuperscript{354} However, the loose structure of the Protestant churches made this difficult. Ozawa-de Silva explains that within the BEK, “the primary role of superintendents and bishops was to provide spiritual care, or \textit{Seelsorge}, for pastors, not to tell them what to do.”\textsuperscript{355} While they could try to find ways to prevent pastors from doing certain things, they did not have complete authority to end these activities. Ozawa-de Silva cites a passage from Pastor Eppelmann’s memoirs that describes how this worked regarding the Blues Masses:

Bishop Schönherr … hindered us by bring up the question of maintaining order. He said he couldn’t condone any service in which people could potentially be trampled to death. Even the danger that such a thing could happen was sufficient to cancel the events. Once again it took solidarity, above all from the church youth workers in Berlin, to save the blues masses.\textsuperscript{356}

Bishop Schönherr, who worked closely with Klaus Gysi, the GDR State Secretary for Church Affairs, was a proponent of the “\textit{Kirche im Sozialismus}” stance, but he was not able to prevent the Blues Masses.\textsuperscript{357} Because of the way the church was structured, Schönherr could not dictate that the Blues Masses be canceled because he disapproved of them. Rather, he used a safety concern as the reason a service could not be held. Similarly, when Berlin’s General Superintendent Günter Krusche was tasked by the state with ending the Blues Masses, he was unable to do so due to church structure, even though he did not believe the Blues Masses were religious services.\textsuperscript{358} According to Ozawa-de Silva, Krusche believed that churches needed to restrict its work with non-Christian groups. While he might have supported the stance of these groups, he argued that in any work of the of the churches it “must be clear that this is the activity

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{354} Ozawa-de Silva, 515.
\item \textsuperscript{355} Ozawa-de Silva, 515.
\item \textsuperscript{356} Ozawa-de Silva, 515.
\item \textsuperscript{358} Ozawa -de Silva, 516-517.
\end{itemize}
of Christians who are convicted by their faith to make this witness.”

In his opinion, some of the groups the churches had been working with were misusing church space because they had no interest in the Christian faith.

Some within the churches disagreed. Local pastors and social deacons, many of whom were also younger and who had been born and raised in the GDR, often worked with these groups. According to Horschig, social deacons “often preferred to sweep away the fragments rather throw people away.” They helped with legal issues and worked with the parents of those arrested. In fact, according to Horschig, after Namenlos was arrested, Postler and Kulisch worked with some punks to help get rid of some of the evidence at the apartments, and Bishop Forck and Pastor Katzorke were tossed from the courtroom. In an essay in the volume collected by the KvU, the churches are referred to as being „duckmäuserisch“ (groveling), compromising too much with the state, and not really living out the concept of being the “church for others.” Another essay raises the point that rather than addressing the reasons that some of the youth had become marginalized, churches instead were focusing on rehabilitating them.

From the perspective of the KvU, churches were not ministering to the needs of the youth and

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359 Ozawa-de Silva, 516. Ozawa-de Silva is quoting from a 1997 interview. Please see footnote 33 in this article.

360 Ozawa-de Silva 516.

361 Horschig, 54. „Sie fegten oft lieber die Scherben weg, als die Leute rauszuschmeißen.“

362 Horschig, 54. „Es gab aber immer welche, die da schützend ihre Hand drüberhielten, und oft waren es die Sozialdiakone, die der Meinung waren, daß OA offen für jeden sei. Sie fegten oft lieber die Scherben weg, als die Leute rauszuschmeißen. Von den Sozialdiakonen wurden Leute beraten, die Vorladungen hatten, ihrer Meldepflicht nachkommen mußten und sonstwie in Konflikt mit dem Gesetz, der Stasi oder den Bullen gekommen waren. Auch standen Sozialdiakone den Eltern der Verhafteten zur Seite und haben Unglaubliches in dieser Zeit geleistet. Hier wurden die Neuinhaftierten bekanntgegeben, so daß sie nicht in der Versenkung verschwanden, von hier aus kümmerte man sich um sie, wurden Verwandte ausfindig gemacht, Rechtsanwälte vermittelt, Gelder für die Prozesse gesammelte und später durch die evangelische Kirche bereitgestellt.“

363 Horschig, 59. „Der Bischof Forck und Pfarrer Katzorke wurden nach sehr mutigem Auftreten aus dem Gerichtssaal geworfen. Nach der Hausdurchsuchung hatten die Sozialdiakone Postler und Kulisch sowie Punks die Wohnungen durchsucht und Tapes mit Aufnahmen der Band vor dem Zugriff der Stasi sichergestellt.“

364 Kirche von Unten, 7-12.

365 Kirche von Unten, 18.
were not addressing the underlying social issues. As noted in Chapter 2, this was the exact problem that document on OA work pointed out: an attempt to rehabilitate these young people would only alienate them. 366 In another essay in the volume edited by the KvU argued that dissident groups were not misusing space in the churches. Rather, these groups, which did incorporate religious elements and liberation theology, were a place for the unwanted, societal outcasts to gather together. 367 This book often takes a harsh, and sometimes condemning, stance against the mainstream of the Protestant churches. For them, the churches were not living up to what it was supposed to.

These divisions, which had been brewing within the church, led to two major events in the mid to late 1980s. The first came in June with the dissident group event Kirchentages von Unten (Church Days from Below), which took place during the Kirchentages der evangelischen Kirche (Church Days of the Evangelical Churches). 368 While the Kirchentages von Unten event was specifically held in response to a cancelled Peace Workshop, those behind this event were also concerned about the “cozy relationship between church leaders and the SED.” 369 This is supported by Furlong who points out that this “Kirchentag von Unten was held June 24-26, 1987, opposite the official Church Day for the 750th anniversary of Berlin’s founding.” 370 Furlong states that some have place attendance at this event at 6,000 people. 371 According to Hayton, this event was a blend of “religious sermons, public information forums, art installations and performances by a number of punk bands” and that it also drew the attention of Western media. 372 The event was successful, and in September the activist Kirche von Unten was

367 Kirche von Unten, 10.
368 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 490.
369 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 490.
370 Furlong, 74. Furlong did not italicize Kirchentag von Unten.
371 Furlong, 74.
founded. Shortly after, the second major event, the 1987 Church Synod in Görlitz was held. According to Ozawa-de Silva, this synod was a “turning point” because it included the debate of a controversial proposal from a grassroots group. “The idea that a controversial proposal could be made, debated, and then voted on, despite the fact that it stemmed from the grassroots and not the church leadership” convinced Honecker that the churches were unable to police themselves. In response to the synod meeting, and probably also in response to the KvU’s alternative church days festival and its founding, the state made an attempt to force the grassroots groups to fall into line. It is during this crackdown that the Umweltbibliothek was raided and some of its members were arrested. Rather than quieting unrest, however, it appears that this policy change only made the situation worse. It seems that grassroots groups and local pastors only became more frustrated with the government as the result of the new crackdown.

The KvU was founded by individuals and groups that had a long history of involvement with dissident groups or had important roles within the dissident movement. According to Hayton, it was founded by a number of religious and youth outreach figures from the Offene Arbeit programs such as Uwe Kulisch, Thomas ‘Kaktus’ Grund and Lorenz Postler, long-time activists such as Vera Wollenberger, opposition groups such as the Friedrichsfelder Friedenskreis, the Umweltbibliothek, and Third World groups, as well as numerous punks such as Michael Horschig.

Furlong links the founding to “some of the strongest political voices, including ‘Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte (IFM)’ (Initiative for Peace and Human Rights), several area

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373 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 492.
374 Ozawa-de Silva, 518.
375 Ozawa-de Silva, 521.
376 Ozawa-de Silva, 521.
377 Ozawa-de Silva, 522. Ozawa-de Silva does not discuss the KvU, but it seems reasonable to assume the state was not happy with this development either.
378 Ozawa-de Silva, 522.
379 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 492. Offene Arbeit was not italicized in the original excerpt.
‘Peace Circles,’ and the Umweltbibliothek,” and she states that it was “a direct challenge to the church hierarchy.”

In fact, Furlong says that the KvU was a way for “these groups to advance their agenda without going through a church hierarchy that they increasingly viewed as corrupt.” This separation of the KvU from the BEK and their disagreements over political engagement is important to consider when examining the relationship between the punk subculture and the churches because the punk subculture gravitated toward the more politically active KvU rather than remaining in the portion of the church willing to work with the SED. Not only did some members of the punk subculture help to establish the KvU, but AlösA was involved in its founding and often worked closely with it. The punk subculture and the KvU held some similar values as well. As was noted before, social justice was an important topic of discussion for the punks who were part of the Pfingstkirche OA meetings. Similarly, the KvU was founded because it thought that the churches in general were failing at its social justice mission. Another similarity is that punks wanted to act and not endlessly debate, and the Kirche von Unten also called for action. It makes sense that the punk subculture would be drawn to this group. Punks seem to have been primarily participating with the churches because of the shelter it provided and also because of its political work rather than for religious purposes. The subculture seems to be more in line with ideology of the KvU than the rank and file church. It also seems likely that the punk subculture would feel more comfortable with the KvU than with the main church. While some in the churches complained about behaviors such as drinking or the lyrics to punk songs, people like Uwe Kulisch advocated for them and tried to help Namenlos when they were arrested.

380 Furlong, 74.
381 Furlong, 74-75.
382 Hayton, “Culture from the Slums,” 473.
One important connection between the punk subculture and the KvU can also be seen by examining the OA paper, *mOAning star*. Starting with the issue numbered as “mOAning star OA/KvU 4711 08,” the paper begins to include the description „Infoblatt der Offenen Arbeit, Teil der Kirche von Unten.” which states that the OA is affiliated with the KvU. In addition to the legacy of the OA as welcoming punks, there were punks who contributed to this paper. In fact, AlösA, the KvU, and the *mOAning star* involved some of the same individuals. If one compares the list of AlösA members that Herne, Mecy and Micha provide with the list of people who Dirk Moldt identifies as contributors, there appears to be many names in common. Because Herne, Mecy and Micha only provide first names or the nicknames people went by rather than the full names that Moldt lists, this cannot be said with absolute certainty. However, knowing that there are some individuals like Moldt and Silvio Meier who were involved with both groups and knowing that AlösA often worked with the KvU, it seems quite likely that at least some of the authors are the same. The *mOAning star* also seems to reflect the growing political involvement of the punk subculture. Glancing through it, one can see how the paper became more political over time and touched on more international issues. Herne, Mecy and Micha note that while it became more politically angry, it retained its humor.

Conclusion

Although the punk subculture could be found in East German Protestant churches prior to the 1983 crackdown on the subculture, *Härte gegen Punk* led to the punk subculture becoming

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384 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 118; and Moldt, *mOAning star*, 235-280.
385 Herne, Mecy, and Micha, 118. „Sie war am Anfang vorsichtig lustig und verarschend, später sehr politisch böse, aber immer voll gutem Humor.“
more reliant on the protection of the church. Not only did these policies fail to destroy the punk subculture, they backfired in the long run. They lead more resentment and anger towards the SED, and punks became more actively political, were socialized into other dissident groups such as the peace and environmental movements, and became more involved with them as a result of the subculture needing the protection that churches could offer. Additionally, those in the punk subculture who went to jail or served in the army came back more political than they left.

The SED’s policies appear to have made the situation worse for itself. Not only did Härte gegen Punk alienate the subculture from the SED, but other policies worked to concentrate marginalized groups and dissidents within the churches. In this way, the SED created the “nightmare scenario” the Stasi had been trying to prevent. Because the SED was no longer able to keep dissidents isolated from one another, it was possible for an opposition movement capable of challenging the SED to form. The punk subculture was able to contribute to these efforts. The connections and networks that punks had developed as an illegal, alternative culture were able to help spread the message of different dissident groups, both nationally and internationally. The SED’s church policies may have also worked against them because the churches were not able to keep dissident groups in check to the degree the SED wanted. Although the SED had granted churches more leeway with the hope that they could control the dissident groups who used church space, this policy also seemed to hurt the SED in the long run. Because of the structure of the churches and the fact that dissident groups were making use of church space, an opposition movement that could challenge the SED formed.

Not only did the SED and Stasi contribute to the changing political involvement of the punk subculture, but the tensions within the churches and the formation of the KvU encouraged the punk subculture in its growing political activism. The pressures within the churches
prompted the more politically active dissidents to form the KvU, and the connections between punk, AlösA, and the KvU show that the subculture was involved with this more politically active group. Not only did the subculture seem to gravitate towards the KvU, but they were an active participant in the KvU’s endeavors. Thus, the pressures within the churches led not just to the formation of the KvU but also contributed to the growing political activism of the punk subculture.
CONCLUSION

In early January 2017, I had the privilege to visit Berlin for the first time. It was a bitterly cold day with moments of sleet that pelted through the layers of winter clothing. After having seen Checkpoint Charlie, which seemed somewhat ironically commercialistic, and having conducted some research, I was headed to my hotel for the night. But, I wanted to squeeze in one more thing; I wanted to see one of the remaining Berlin Wall watchtowers. All day I had been marveling that I was walking where the Wall had been and had been trying to imagine what life might have been like for a young punk in the 1980s. When I got to the tower, I was a bit shocked by what I saw. On the top of the tower was a large Santa hat, sitting atop the tower as if it were on someone’s head. As much as I wished that I could have taken a picture, my cell phone battery had died earlier in the day.

That image has stuck with me. It seemed so strange to me at the time. The tower, something that could be seen as a sign of oppression or of death for someone trying to cross the border to West Berlin, was adorned with a cheerful, jolly hat. The more I have worked on this topic, however, I have begun to see that the watchtower with its hat is symbolic of the punk subculture in the GDR. The watchtower is part of the landscape of the city and part of daily life just as the GDR was a lived reality for those I have been reading and researching about. Regardless of what one thought about it, both were part of the fabric of life in Berlin. The Santa hat, which appeared so out of place, reminds me of how dissidents, such as the punk subculture, could be subversive and challenge what they saw as repressive. It may not be a perfect analogy,
but in a way the punk subculture was a bit like that Santa hat. Both were colorful, hard to ignore, and rebellious.

It seems unlikely that a punk subculture might have had any sort of relationship with a church, however that is what happened in East Germany. This relationship is difficult to succinctly sum up because the relationship was very complicated. Various individuals and groups involved understood the situation differently. For the punk subculture, at least at first, the churches offered a safe haven from the Stasi and a place where they could gather and share their music. For some clergy and church members, opening church space to groups such as punks provided a ministry opportunity. Although some may have seen this as an opportunity to proselytize, there were individuals who were genuinely concerned about marginalized people, including punks. However, not everyone within the churches warmly accepted the punk subculture. For some, welcoming the subculture into the churches was dangerous because it could threaten other aspects of church life. These differing views, along with the increased pressure place on the subculture during *Härte gegen Punk*, shaped the political development of the subculture.

During the 1980s, the political aspect of the punk subculture went from being a passive protest of the state to a vocal, albeit small, part of the opposition movement because of the actions of the state and through its relationship with the church. There were two forces at work that helped to shape the political nature of the punk subculture. The first was the state. Although the SED had been working to instill the proper socialist personality in its youth and to engage the next generation of GDR citizens, young people were not necessarily internalizing these values. While many conformed, those in the punk subculture refused to conform. They were one of the
groups for whom the “scratchy undershirt” was intolerable.\footnote{As cited in the introduction, Rubin states that the Stasi was described as a “scratchy undershirt” by Jens Reich, a dissident. Eli Rubin, \textit{Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 132.} The subculture’s refusal to conform, however, meant that the state saw them as a political threat. Yet the way that the state tried to eliminate this threat only led to the development of a more politically involved group. In response to \textit{Härte gegen Punk}, the subculture took political action. At the same time, the relationship that continued to develop between the Protestant churches and punk subculture was also shaping the subculture’s political involvement. The subculture was welcomed by some within the churches, however punks were not completely integrated into the church community. Those that wanted to minister to the punk subculture were often those who felt that the church was not going far enough to engage society and politics. Additionally, punks seemed to gravitate toward the groups more active in issues of social justice such as the peace and environmental movements. Because of these factors, the punk subculture tended to be involved with the opposition groups within the church. Thus, the punk subculture became more politically active due to the pressures placed on it by the state and dynamics caused by the tensions within the church. Though this may seem clear in hindsight, this does not mean that this was the inevitable outcome.

By examining the relationship between the punk subculture and the Protestant churches in East Germany, it is possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of marginalized groups within East German society and to create a more complete picture of what led to the end of East Germany. As proponents of \textit{Alltagsgeschichte} have shown, a top-down approach does not reveal what life was like for the average citizen in the GDR. When one focuses on the daily life of East German citizens, it is possible to examine how individuals navigated the political system.
established by the SED. It humanizes those who lived in East Germany in a way that a top-down view misses. Not only does *Alltagsgeschichte* provide insight into the social and cultural aspects of life in East Germany, but it also promotes a more nuanced understanding of how the SED governed East Germany and how individuals carved out lives for themselves. However, by adding the voices of those who were marginalized by the SED and those who refused to conform, even more details about life in East Germany emerge. By looking at the edges, contrasts emerge that examining the average citizen might miss. These aspects of life, especially with respect to political power, take on a sharper focus. That is one of the reasons that examining the relationship between the punk subculture and the Protestant churches matters; it is one possible case study which examines the groups that did not fit into society and tested the limits of the SED’s power.

The study of the punk subculture and the Protestant churches also demonstrates how East German history has been contested. In a 2005 article, Ozawa-de Silva points this out with respect to the churches in East Germany:

> East German history remains a highly political and contested terrain, not least concerning the political role of the Protestant church. Did the church play an oppositional, democratizing role, contributing to the alleged “Protestant Revolution” and the fall of communism? Or was it successfully infiltrated by the Stasi and co-opted by the state, so that its ultimate effect was to stabilize the regime and quell dissent? This is a debate with more at stake that [sic] mere intellectual curiosity— intricately tied to it is the question of who has the right to write the history of the East German church.\(^{387}\)

The question of whether the churches were too compromised and thus not truly responsible for helping to end the regime seems to hinge on the point of view of the person telling or recounting the events. Similarly, a comparison of archive documents and those written by the main body of the church, the KvU, and punks show that these groups did not agree. However, by comparing

\(^{387}\) Ozawa-de Silva, 503.
these accounts and seeing where they align and where they diverge, a richer understanding of East German society can be cultivated.

The relationship between the punk subculture and Protestant churches in East Germany contributed to the growing activism within the punk subculture. The churches provided the shelter necessary to survive the government’s crackdown, and it was where the punk subculture was socialized into other dissident groups. Although I have only scratched the surface of this relationship, I hope that I have helped to peel back the intersecting layers and components that were a part of life in the GDR. Yet, there is much that is yet to be explored with respect to this relationship between the churches and the punk subculture.
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