



Introduction

A Meeting in Magdeburg

It was 1 September 1940, the first anniversary of the start of World War II. In the small town of Schönebeck in central Germany, a group of school-girls—mostly thirteen years old—wondered what would become of them as the war progressed. There were problems already: lessons canceled when their teachers were drafted into the army; the school itself too cold in the winter as coal supplies dwindled. Soon it would be the boys from the neighboring school, their dancing partners, being put into uniform and taken off to the front. Some of the girls were moving away with their parents; others thought they would be evacuated; and there was talk of the rest being scattered around other schools.

What the girls valued most was their close-knit group of friends; what they most feared was the group falling apart. Desperate to prevent this, they made a solemn promise: come what may, they would meet up again in the Cathedral Square in Magdeburg ten years later, at three o'clock on 1 September 1950. Looking back in 1955, one of the group recalled how they had felt when making this promise: "But what was it we actually said in 1940? I believe, that we would find a way to make it to the class reunion, whether we should turn out to be in Africa or on the moon!"¹

For the girls, Magdeburg was the big city, and Schönebeck no more than a provincial town. Magdeburg was twenty minutes away on the train, a different world, with its theater, opera, restaurants, its diverse population (including a substantial Jewish community), its streets full of shops and people and fascinating buildings from the late middle ages, its busy waterfront on the river Elbe, its quiet corners to meet or enjoy being anonymous. Many years later, Else Hermann, one of the Schönebeck women featured in this book, wrote of a visit to Magdeburg in 1939 with her friend, Charlotte Krüger, another of the Schönebeck women:

I went to my first opera, *Freischütz*, with Charlotte. I can still see the two of us—we were twelve years old—at my house, sitting on the sofa with my father

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as we read through the libretto. We had heard that no one understands what is being said in an opera because it is all sung. We insisted we would understand everything, so learned the text off by heart. In the Stadttheater in Magdeburg, we felt very special, particularly in the foyer during the interval, Charlotte in her best red dress, me in my best blue dress.²

At the end of the war, Magdeburg was in ruins, its theaters, its beautiful baroque center, and much of the rest of the city destroyed by British and American bombing and by artillery in the final battles of April 1945. Five years later, the ruins remained. Nevertheless, the miracle happened: at three o'clock on 1 September 1950, the rain cleared, the sun came out, and fourteen of the girls from the class of 1940—now women in their twenties—gathered in the square, in the shadow of the damaged cathedral. Some brought apologies from others who could not make it. Hardly able to believe what was happening, they drank coffee, swapped ten years of stories, and resolved to hold an annual reunion and to start a *Rundbrief* (round letter).

For young German women, establishing a *Rundbrief* at the end of their time at school or university was common enough. The process involved one person taking the lead, gathering all the addresses, and entering them in a notebook. The organizer then wrote the first letter, addressed to all of them, and sent the book to the next on the list, who wrote her letter and sent it on again, until the final person on the list sent the book back to the organizer. In the second and subsequent years, the organizer circulated the full book and the new book together, so that those who had written early letters in the first book could read the entries from those who followed and take them into account in their new letters.

It was rare for a *Rundbrief* to last long, but the women I call the “Schönebeck women” carried on meeting and writing from 1950 to 2000. In 2001, growing old, feeling they no longer had much to say, and seeing their children and grandchildren embracing the world of computers and emails, they decided to end both the *Rundbrief* and their reunions. They voted to archive the thirty-one notebooks, containing around a thousand letters and several hundred photos, in the Kempowski Biographienarchiv, now in the Akademie der Künste, Berlin. I refer to this set of letters as the “Schönebeck Letters.” They offer us a unique collective image over time of the experience of women who lived through the Nazi Third Reich, then either stayed in the East or moved to the West when Germany was divided, and eventually experienced German reunification.

The Schönebeck women’s determination to keep on writing stemmed partly from the fact that half of them eventually came to live in the West in the American, British, and French Occupation Zones and subsequently the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), while the other half remained in the East in the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ), which later became the German Democratic

Republic (GDR). By repeatedly asserting the unity of their group, they sought to convey a view that at some level Germany itself remained united and that this was in part thanks to them.

Schönebeck and the Schönebeck Women

This book looks at the everyday lives of a group of women who explicitly defined themselves as nonpolitical and tried to distance themselves from what was being done by the authorities in the world outside their group. It considers how they experienced, understood, accepted, rejected, or countered the exercise of power, predominantly by men, across different regimes in Germany, from the 1930s to the end of the twentieth century. It seeks to draw out, from their letters and a number of interviews, the women's assumptions about what their place was and should be in society. It asks how their assumptions, and the words and actions that expressed them, changed as the society around them changed. In doing so, it looks at the way the group itself functioned and how it, too, exercised a form of power. How and why did the women create group norms and values that they expected one another to follow? How did they interact with the society and its structures as they sought to meet these expectations? How and why did their individual actions sometimes fail to conform to the expectations of the group?

This study takes in part a microhistorical approach: that is, an approach that involves assembling and analyzing stories of otherwise unknown or disregarded people's individual lives and their fragmentary events, anomalous behavior, patterns, and repetitions, along with their connections to the structures and frameworks within which such people operate.³ As Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson note, describing their microhistorical approach, "Somewhere between the two poles of social structures and individual agency, we propose a view exploring the 'in-between spaces,' where interaction and communication took place."⁴ In this study, the in-between spaces are particularly complex. One of them is the group itself, which the women created partly to cope with what they saw as problematic external social structures, such as the division of Germany after the war into two states with conflicting ideologies.

The book takes as its subjects a group of women, born in 1926 or 1927⁵ in a small provincial area of Germany, who were at school together in Schönebeck-on-the-Elbe, south of Magdeburg. Schönebeck had a population in the 1930s of almost forty thousand. It was a long-established market town for the fertile agricultural area around it. In the Middle Ages, it had flourished through the production of salt and its distribution up and down the Elbe. In the nineteenth century, like the nearby towns Staßfurt and Calbe, it developed a substantial industrial base and became a stronghold of the Social Democratic Party.⁶

By the late 1920s, there were serious clashes between the Social Democrats, a smaller number of Communists, and the National Socialists. When Hitler took power in 1933, the Nazi Sturmabteilung (SA) under Walter Kärpe brutally attacked the Social Democrats and sought to enforce a boycott of Jewish businesses in Schönebeck. In 1938, the SA led the November Pogromnacht (or Kristallnacht) attacks on the tiny Jewish population, arresting many of them and forcing them to emigrate or be imprisoned in concentration camps, which few survived.⁷

These years of violent political conflict and repression, during which the industrial base of Schönebeck was increasingly turned toward war-related production, formed the backdrop for the girls' time at school. The girls themselves were pressured to join the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM), the female branch of the Hitler Youth, as a way of building support for Nazi policies. After the pogrom in November 1938, they were strictly forbidden even to acknowledge their Jewish former classmates and friends if they passed them in the street.⁸ In their English classes at school, one of their set texts was *Why I Believe in Hitler*, by A. J. Macdonald.⁹

Everyday Life and Power

Scholars are engaged in an ongoing discussion about the nature of the dictatorship and the nature of everyday life first under the Nazis and then under communism in eastern Germany. They contrast these dictatorships with the attempts to construct and entrench a democratic system in western Germany after the war. In all cases, they are looking at the construction and exercise of power. Against this background, what can analysis of the Schönebeck letters tell us that is new about how power was exercised in everyday life? What do the letters reveal not only about denial, dissent, and resistance, but also about agreement, assent, or various forms of accommodation to the regimes and to others using power? In all of these societies, formal power was exercised predominantly by men. What can we learn about how women experienced their lives as women under these political systems with the regimes' different commitments to women's contributions and rights, and what can we learn about how women constructed their own ways of seeing the world and asserting their position in it?

To answer these questions, this study looks at the women's lives in terms of their own experience of the joys and difficulties of growing up into adulthood, moving toward middle age, and finally growing old. In terms of historical events and ruptures they had to contend with, their lives have as their backdrop the Nazi years to 1945; the periods of Allied occupation leading to the establishment in 1949 of both the GDR and the FRG, with the capitalist and com-

munist systems competing with each other until the end of the 1980s; and the Wende and post-Wende period from 1989 to 1990, with German reunification in 1990. This study treats the various political ruptures as important, as well as looking for evidence of continuity during times of transition.¹⁰ It also considers the significance of personal ruptures in the women's lives, looking particularly at ruptures caused by acts of humiliation, a specific way of exercising power that brings with it serious long-term consequences.¹¹ One of the advantages of focusing on humiliation is that, as discussed later in this introduction, memories of humiliation are relatively fixed and vivid, so that responses in interviews are likely to be more reliable and to help with the interpretation of incidents referred to in the letters.

Men and Women in the Nazi Period

The Nazi regime explicitly asserted the power of men and set out its policies accordingly. It promoted a vision that involved a strong man who went out into the world and was prepared to fight and die for his country, along with a revered wife who stayed at home, managed the household, and brought up their children to think and behave as good National Socialists. The Nazis sought to reduce the opportunities available to women in education and the labor force and excluded women from virtually all significant positions of political and administrative power.¹² Jewish women, of course, were fully excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the term the Nazis applied to the supposedly racially pure society they were creating. As the historian Ute Frevert says, the paradise for women that Hitler said he was creating “meant public humiliation, enforced sterilisation, torture, removal to concentration camps, murder” for those not German, Aryan, healthy, and politically loyal.¹³

The Nazis often had difficulty turning policy into practice in the face of conflicting demands. As they proceeded with rearmament in the late 1930s, they needed more, not fewer, single and married women to work in the factories. Similarly, during the war the authorities strongly urged women to work outside the home, but held back from conscripting them because of resistance from women and because conscription would clash too overtly with the regime's propaganda about women.¹⁴

Girls growing up in the Nazi period were faced with a clash of values and attitudes between those of the female branch of the Hitler Youth, the BDM, and those passed down by parents who had been born at the end of the nineteenth century and lived through World War I, the overthrow of the monarchy, and the years of the Weimar Republic.¹⁵ Girls often enjoyed the activities of the BDM, which they saw as a way to escape from the constraints of the family and especially from their controlling mothers.¹⁶ This matched

the regime's wish to limit the influence of the family and to inculcate Nazi values through activities outside the home and outside the school. Dagmar Reese, whose work includes the extensive use of interviews and local studies, points to the substantial long-term impact of out-of-school education of girls through the BDM.¹⁷

The Nazi authorities used organizations like the BDM to give power at a very local level to hundreds of thousands of young women who were group leaders. As Frevert notes, these young women, often hardly more than girls, were figures of state authority, and "as miniature Führers they were enmeshed in a meticulously designed system both of duties and responsibilities, and of rights and privileges, which the Nazi regime employed to make its *Volksgemeinschaft* loyal and disciplined."¹⁸ This was power at a very local level, however, and the Nazi authorities were successful in keeping women out of higher positions of power. At the same time, their approach to building a group or community ethos among girls and young women would have given the girls at school in Schönebeck precisely the expertise needed to build and sustain their own group long after the end of the Nazi regime.

The End of the War

By the end of the war, some of the Schönebeck women were already living in what would become the American or British occupation zones. Others were making their way home through either or both of the American and Soviet controlled areas. Schönebeck itself was occupied initially by the Americans, then by the British, and from July 1945 by the Soviet forces.

The historian Richard Bessel, looking at this period, says that "in 1945 Germans were transformed from active protagonists to passive observers of their fate."¹⁹ However, neither the actions nor the words of the Schönebeck women suggest that they lost their sense of being able to act in their own right with some control over their lives at this time. Nor do they suggest that the women experienced the formal end of the war as a major rupture between one regime and another or between what would later be defined as West and East.

Having had the relatively smooth progress of their lives interrupted by their *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (a form of national service), and by their dramatic journeys home, the Schönebeck women were keen to take up where they had left off, with education, jobs, and getting together with young men. As far as they were concerned, there was not rupture but continuity. In terms of time, there was continuity both with the Nazi and pre-Nazi past and with the future opening up in front of them. In spatial terms, there was continuity as they still viewed Germany as a single entity, even if they accepted the loss of the eastern terri-

tories. Since Schönebeck, Staßfurt, Calbe, and the smaller settlements in the area had not suffered significant war damage, the young women had homes and families to return to and had their friends around them. Schönebeck, therefore, represented continuity in both temporal and spatial terms. If there was a moment of rupture in their lives, it was not Germany's defeat and the end of the war in 1945. Rather it was, as their letters suggest, the rupture caused by the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* itself, which transformed them from schoolgirls into young women and cast them out into the world to fend for themselves.

Generations and Their Significance

It is here that historians' consideration of generations is significant. The Schönebeck women belong to a very specific generation, the one Mary Fulbrook looks at in her discussion of the trajectories of men and women who were born in the late 1920s or early 1930s. In the FRG, people from this generation became prominent among intellectuals and in the media but less so in political, administrative, and economic structures. In the GDR, they were the "long-term carriers of communism" and were disproportionately represented in these structures, though not at the top of them. In both cases, people of this age were "available for conversion to an entirely new, even 'brave new,' world." Similarly, Hartmut Zwahr talks of the generation born between 1920 and 1929 as attracted by the new opportunities in the GDR and most likely to stay there.²⁰

Considering much the same cohort, Mark Roseman and others look at youth revolt, with assessments of the formation and impact after the war of the "Hitler Youth generation" and specifically the "BDM generation."²¹ As Roseman notes, within this generation, it was not just class and social background that shaped people's experiences of the war and its end, but also where they were and what had happened there, in that specific location. He points to the differences "between being bombed out or having an intact home, between staying at home and being evacuated, . . . between town and country," to which could be added the different experiences of men and women at this time.²² It is here that the Schönebeck letters are helpful, offering detailed insight into a group who were "29ers," were women, were not directly affected by bombing or the loss of the family home, and did not become either intellectuals in the West or anything more than indirect representatives of the state in the GDR.

Hester Vaizey, considering the West, and Donna Harsch, the East, both raise questions about the extent to which women could shape their lives in the context of the different structures and expectations of the different regimes after the war.²³ Vaizey points to the "extraordinary resilience of the nuclear family

and the emotional ties that bound its members together, under the extreme pressures of Nazism, war and reconstruction." Vaizey's nuclear families were often led by women, since the men were fighting the war or in prisoner-of-war camps.²⁴ Harsch's work highlights the unexpected actions and power of women who took the male-dominated GDR state organizations at their word. Women demonstrated, without necessarily attempting to do so, their ability to move elements of the state in the direction of women and their "domestic agenda" and away from the state's "productivist agenda."²⁵

According to these accounts, which describe the context for the postwar lives of the Schönebeck women in both East and West, women developed real strengths of their own, as well as influence over their and their families' lives. However, as Gisela Helwig discusses, what the two regimes shared was a set of assumptions about the traditional or natural responsibilities of women. Whether the society or their husbands expected them to go out to work, or expected them not to go out to work, women would be responsible for the home and the family, including meeting the needs of the husband. Where women did work outside the home, they would be more likely to be in jobs seen as traditionally done by women, even in the GDR.²⁶

Women and the History of Everyday Life

Given the formal commitment of both the FRG and the GDR to the equality of women with men, and the claim of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) to have solved the "woman question" in the GDR, it is important to look both at the issues of formal power and its exercise in relation to women, and at the everyday experience of women in relation to power. It is here that *Alltagsgeschichte*, the history of everyday life, with its emphasis on the significance of the actions and behavior of ordinary, apparently or supposedly nonpolitical people, helps to bridge the gap between those seen as the rulers and those over whom they sought to exercise power.

Historians wrestle with the meaning and content of "everyday life" and what it means to write a history of it.²⁷ "Everyday life" takes place in a particular society and a particular period within a set of given structures that influence but are also influenced by the conduct of ordinary people. For Andrew Bergerson and Leonard Schmieding, "Everyday life is fragmented, multivocal, ambiguous, dynamic, and contradictory. It is the locus of complex interactions between elites and masses, micro and macro, public and private, the ordinary and the extraordinary. It contains a confusing mix of structure and agency, myths and experience, propriety and unruliness."²⁸ Approaching the history of postwar Germany from the point of view of the history of everyday life involves moving

away from a primary focus on “big structures, large processes, [and] huge comparisons”²⁹ in the FRG, or on the SED, the Ministry for State Security (commonly known as the Stasi), and repression in the GDR, while not overlooking the significance of these for people’s everyday lives.

Of relevance to studies of everyday life is the much-used concept of “agency,” which microhistorians Magnússon and Ólafsson call “the capacity of individuals to act within the social structure that seems to limit or influence the opportunities individuals have.” They consider that the restraints of the social structure are not just the formal agencies or activities of the state but also “come in the form of categories like class, gender, and ethnicity on the one hand, and social institutions on the other, such as the state, the church, and the educational system.”³⁰ To these can be added the structures people construct for themselves, such as the group the Schönebeck women formed and which helped to shape the way they acted toward one another, and their attitude and responses to other external constraints.

It is here that the concept of “microsocial interactions” becomes helpful.³¹ In order to understand what is happening in everyday life and what it might tell us about perceptions and self-perceptions, and about how power is being exercised, accepted, colluded with, resisted, or ignored, we can look at a very detailed level at the interactions between people in groups they belong to, or between them and their partners, children, friends, colleagues at work, and others they come across in society. In all regimes, but particularly in dictatorial regimes, some of the people with whom they interact at a relatively informal level will be actual or virtual representatives of the state or the ruling party (or parties, in the case of the FRG). Such detailed consideration can start to convey a new picture of the complexity of relations within and between the two states that were created in Germany after the war. Fulbrook, using her concept of “the honeycomb state,” describes the specific, if changing, form of dictatorship that emerged in the GDR:

The boundaries of the state in the GDR are harder to define than one might at first think. . . . What is really quite remarkable about the GDR is the way in which extraordinarily large numbers of people were involved in its functioning, who were implicated in a complex web of micro-relationships of power in every area of life, serving to reproduce and transform the system. Very large numbers of people acted as honorary functionaries in a wide range of organizations, in a manner that, by the 1970s and 1980s, was more or less taken for granted by a very significant proportion of the population.³²

The stories that come out of the Schönebeck letters are in part, whether the women intended them to be or not, stories of this “complex web of micro-relationships of power” across several regimes, both dictatorial and democratic.

Women's Stories

Once again it needs to be emphasized that the stories told here are women's stories and that gender issues were complex within all the regimes considered here. The Nazi regime asserted that society should be male-dominated, and it shaped its policies toward women accordingly, even if there were difficulties turning these policies into practice. In the FRG until the late 1960s and the GDR until the 1980s, the male leaders were not challenged to look at their approach and assumptions. They did not consider, at least openly, that their way of seeing the world and defining possibilities for human interaction and development might arise from a set of concepts and frameworks drawn up specifically by men or with a male bias. They were not open to arguments—made in the West, at least—that their view of the world was constantly reinforced over long periods by theory and action that depended on the same concepts and frameworks. Nor did they see or want to see that such ways of thinking and acting had become so “naturalized” that even the majority of women found themselves only partially conscious of the limitations imposed on them. Nor did they concede that men, too, might be disadvantaged and condemned to lead unfulfilled lives by such ways of understanding and acting upon the world.³³

After the *Wende* in 1989/90, women appeared to be the principal losers in the former GDR. They were often the first to lose their jobs and suffered from the reduction of childcare provision.³⁴ However, women in the former East have often shown great initiative in adapting to the new conditions and building new and successful lives. Some studies suggest that women used the strength and independence they had developed in the GDR to good effect in the newly united Germany.³⁵ For the Schönebeck women, the picture is more complex. Their letters and interviews suggest that their generation found the transition difficult and that this was not helped by the lack of support from some of the group in the West.

Despite the extensive literature on the position of women in the various regimes considered here, there is still a lack of accounts that analyze at the micro level over such a long period the letters, photos, and later interviews of a specific group of supposedly nonpolitical German women. It is this gap that this work seeks to fill. What I am concerned with is the position of women and how it was created, shaped, and reshaped across different periods; the agency of ordinary women individually and in groups; and what we can learn about these concerns through a detailed study of the Schönebeck women. Central to the study is the nature of the group itself, and its successes and failures as it sought to hold together a disparate group of women across many years and different regimes, and as its individual members sought to make distinctive, individual lives for themselves in ways that potentially threatened the unity of the group.

The Schönebeck Letters

This book is based principally on the thousand letters of the Schönebeck women. They are an invaluable and, until now, unused source of commentary on everyday life in Germany from the late 1930s to the late 1990s. “Ego-documents” of any sort, such as these letters, as well as diaries and autobiographies, are written with a number of different aims: self-justification, self-presentation, persuasion, or the imposition of a particular line of argument. However, personal letters have the advantage of usually being a single draft written without detailed planning and aimed at a specific recipient or set of recipients. In this respect, the Schönebeck letters are straightforward. Nevertheless, there are problems of interpretation that need to be borne in mind.

In each book of letters, each writer addressed around thirty recipients, women of roughly the same age who had in common their time at school in Schönebeck. Their task was to keep everyone in touch with one another and up to date with what was happening to each of them, and to follow the rules for writing the letters. The explicit rules were straightforward: the books had to be properly looked after and sent on within a short time to the next woman on the list.³⁶ The implicit rules were complex and restrictive and grew out of a set of myths that the women established for themselves and which did not match the foundation myths of the new German states. The GDR’s foundation myths declared it to be the anti-fascist part of Germany, based on communist resistance to the Nazis and to the KPD’s activities during the Weimar years. The FRG’s myths stressed freedom, democracy, and anti-communism, and also harked back to the Weimar years.³⁷

The first of the Schönebeck women’s foundation myths was that Schönebeck was their *Heimat*, the place they would always remain emotionally connected to, no matter how far away they were, or how long they were prevented from visiting it. They were not explicit about what they meant by the term *Heimat*, whether it was backward-looking toward an ideal past, or forward-looking—a secure base that would help them move forward as their lives developed. It could be both or either, according to what was helpful at different times.³⁸ Implicitly, *Heimat* meant a place where they had all been united and where they had been happy. Its accidental location in the East when Germany was divided ensured that the women living in the West would have an acute sense of the way the FRG and the GDR were permanently entangled.

This set of attitudes required an emotional commitment to the group, which was to be reflected in their writing. Optimism and cheerfulness were to be expressed whenever possible; achievements were to be reported and admired; and the pleasures of one were to be the pleasures of all. When one of the women experienced difficulties or problems or reported on negative aspects of the society around them, the responsibility of the group was to provide comfort and

reassurance, helping them all to cope with suffering and to manage uncertainty and disorientation.

The second of the myths was that their shared memories of happiness in their *Heimat* would ensure friendship and loyalty that would bind each of them to the group. The third myth involved an assumption of innocence: whatever had taken place around them and whatever terrible things might still happen all took place outside the group, and those within the group bore no responsibility or blame for them. The fourth myth was that just as the group itself was forever united, so also, at some fundamental level, Germany remained united. The letters were therefore expected to contribute to maintaining a sense of the group as unable to be divided by the division of Germany.

Differences and Divergence

There were, however, many things that threatened the unity of the group, which was certainly not homogeneous. Though many of the women came from relatively comfortable backgrounds, there were significant differences in terms of class, religion, education, jobs, aspirations, and, even if it was not spelled out, sexual orientation. When the women were growing up in the Schönebeck area, some of their parents were small farmers, while others were teachers, pharmacists, opticians, or carpenters; one family owned a soap factory; another, a construction company. As young adults, the women could expect to benefit from their parents' position. However, the extent of the destruction, disruption, and destitution at the end of the war meant that many had to make their own lives for themselves, starting with very little. These lives were inevitably influenced by decisions made by the different occupying powers and subsequently the two different German states. Where the women found themselves or moved to after the war was critical in determining their future.

In the GDR, all of the women went out to work, though with breaks to have and look after their children. Some became teachers or health workers (but were stopped from becoming doctors); one became a costume designer in the theater and later worked for an organization linked to the Ministry of Culture, where she was responsible for cultivating new talent throughout the GDR. Some took on family businesses that were subsequently taken over by the state; some continued to run tiny professional businesses; and some worked on farms and later became members of the agricultural cooperatives that took over their land. Only one of them ever worked in a factory, and she was in an administrative position. Most of those who stayed in the GDR remained in the Schönebeck area. One (the costume designer) moved to Berlin after positions in different regions in the GDR, but eventually returned to the Schönebeck area. Another moved because of her husband's job to Wismar, a GDR port on the Baltic coast.

Of those who lived in the West at the end of the war, or who moved there over the years—mostly before the Berlin Wall was constructed in 1961—many became comfortably well-off and tended not to work outside the home once they were married. Sometimes they worked part time and sometimes they acted as office managers for their husbands. One became a successful opera singer, one a civil engineer in a senior position, and one a professor of psychology (after doing her early studies in the GDR). Two of them lived in Hamburg, three in smaller cities (Braunschweig, Kassel, and Kaiserslautern), and the rest in small towns.

Some of the women were strongly religious and remained so, both in the FRG and in the officially atheist GDR; some were already nonbelievers or atheists; others ignored any discussion of religion.

The women attempted to overcome the differences between them by engaging in a process of communication and self-narration, describing their lives as they saw them while responding to the demand for assertions of unity. The result was that each letter was also in a way a position statement, setting out the writer's current perception of herself in relation to the others and to the world around them. Each position statement contributed to creating a shared, accepted record, a collective narrative, one which changed as the women and the circumstances in which they lived changed, but which also stressed the continuity of their lives over the decades and the way the women sought to feel part of a single, united Germany.

At the same time, the women in the GDR implicitly created subsidiary myths about their lives under communism. These sometimes appear as a defense against the state's attempts to shape their lives. Asserting that their lives were just as enjoyable as those of the women in the West, they tended to look out for and highlight the positive—the guarantee of a job, the childcare support (later, at least), and an emerging sense of the collective and of support from the collective. Such an approach allowed them to look away from many of the structures that surrounded and restricted them. With their observations and comments, the women in the FRG sometimes accepted these myths and helped to perpetuate them, and sometimes rejected them.

The Photos

The Schönebeck letters are written in a set of notebooks and are often illustrated by photos pasted into the books. The photos open up the letters to us, exposing different ways of seeing and understanding events and the individual women's lives. The photos are deliberately chosen but help us nonetheless to understand something about the women, about local conditions, and about the letters they accompany. For the women themselves, the photos had an import-

ant function: they reminded the others who they were and what they looked like, something that was increasingly important over time, since some of the women did not get to the reunions or see many of the others for years or even decades.

What we find in the notebooks are usually photos of people, but almost always of people in a landscape. In the East we see young women in forested, snowy landscapes; a woman with a baby waiting for a train near derelict railway coaches; a teacher in an overcrowded classroom; a group of husbands sitting drinking, with Erich Honecker on the wall in the background; the women and their husbands sunning themselves on the Baltic coast; and views of Budapest, the Caucasus, or the Black Sea. In the West we see similar forested and snowy landscapes, as well as comfortable, modern houses, and images of the women traveling in France, Austria, Turkey, and Greece.

The photos contribute to the creation of the group myth of unity. They also point to another way of interpreting the letters, as an assertion of individuality, of being more than just a member of a group. This can be seen by the personal nature of what is displayed: the ways individual women have of standing to one side or looking away in group photos; the way one dresses differently from the others, reinforcing points made in their letters; photos of themselves in different contexts, at work or in other groups that contrast sharply with the Schönebeck group and its self-image; photos of press cuttings put in by someone other than the woman featured in them; and photos that, inadvertently or not, compare conditions between East and West. The photos are also a declaration: this is how I see myself and how I want you to see me at this particular time in my life.

Self-Censorship

When analyzing the Schönebeck letters, another area of concern is the issue of self-censorship. The women knew the books might be intercepted by officers of the Stasi within the GDR, or by the GDR's border guards as they went into or out of the FRG.³⁹ They were mostly careful not to implicate themselves or anyone else by voicing opinions that might be considered hostile to the GDR or too complimentary about the FRG. It is also clear that they were careful about what they said both in their letters and at their class reunions, because they understood that no matter how well they knew one another and how important mutual trust was, there might still be someone in the group who was reporting on them to the Stasi. In the midst of what often comes across as nothing but friendly chatter, we find gaps and silences. In at least some cases, these indicate what could not be said or what the writer—being more political than she ever realized—chose not to say.

The Use of Language

These challenges to interpreting the letters make it necessary to treat what is written circumspectly, recognizing the defenses used, the strategies of avoidance and denial, the self-censorship and the special pleading. No one among the Schönebeck women is writing a detailed narrative account of life in whichever regime they are discussing, and only rarely are they recounting how state power and external structures impinged on them. Despite this, the way the letters are written does convey a picture of society and a picture of their own lives in it. Although the letters are often low-key, banal, even trite, the choice of language is frequently a useful clue. Certain words, ironic phrases, metaphors, and other figures of speech, as well as techniques of balancing events or activities against one another, combine to give vivid if fragmentary images of everyday life. In a close reading of the letters, we are forced to puzzle over individual words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, an approach from literary studies that is particularly productive.

Lutz Niethammer describes a similar approach, where comprehension begins with the response to what one does not understand. One of his key methodological concepts is “*Irritation prägnanter Unverständlichkeit*,” which he describes as

the sense of puzzlement the investigator feels when confronted with some element that is highly suggestive, significant yet obscure: a sentence, a basic theme, a trauma, a constellation that taxes and challenges the previous knowledge of the interpreter, who then proposes hypotheses which must be examined in the light of the text of the entire life history. Such work discloses a deep structure of new relations and more general insights, whose specificity and generality can be more tightly defined and closely checked by ethnographic and group-biographical approaches.⁴⁰

In doing so, Niethammer is describing important techniques that are used here to help understand everyday life through an analysis of the Schönebeck letters.

The Interviews

In this study, I complement the Schönebeck letters with interviews I conducted over the period 2012–2016 with some of the surviving Schönebeck women, in both the former East and the former West. By then they were all in their mid- to late eighties, so they were often talking about events from fifty to sixty years earlier. The interviews were semi-structured, based on a set of questions I sought to ask all of them.

Out of the thirty-two women who had been most involved in the group, it was clear that at least twenty-two had already died, and my eventual interviewees told me they believed that a number of the others had died too; or, as they put it, “*heimgegangen*” (gone home). It was possible to track down six of those who remained.⁴¹ I was able to record interviews with Else Hermann and Hertha Pieper, who had always lived in the East, and Anna Siebert and Irma Kindler, who had lived in the West from around the end of the war. Each interview lasted between two and three hours. As is common with such interviews, it was impossible to keep them semi-structured: the women were enormously pleased to see me and determined to tell me everything they could think of about themselves and the other women in the group. I was able to intervene at various times to ask questions, but they were keen to just keep talking.

I interviewed Anna Siebert twice in Hamburg, once with Irma Kindler and once on her own. Irma Kindler asked me to write to her with further questions, then answered these extensively in letters to me. I interviewed Hertha Pieper in the Schönebeck area with her children: one in her late fifties and three in their mid-sixties. Else Hermann was the last organizer of the *Rundbrief* and was keen to wrestle with the meaning of the life she had led under both Nazism and communism, and with the significance of the group. She invited me back again and again and each time had new things to say. She died in October 2016, leaving me with over twenty hours of recordings of our conversations, letters she had written to me to clarify matters, and other documents, including a diary account by her father of the occupation by the Americans of the family house in Schönebeck in April 1945.

The interviews and the associated documents are in themselves not necessarily an accurate record, with details emphasized in a highly selective manner and some events apparently forgotten. At times the women were shocked when I quoted things they had written years or decades earlier—and never read since—as opposed to what they were remembering at the time of the interview. Sometimes they were clearly reinterpreting events and their actions in the light of their current position and the changes in society that had taken place over the preceding decades.

Despite these reservations, the interviews helped me to understand the written record of the women and the nature of the group, and to identify their shared myths, by allowing me to cross-check between the written and photographic record and the historical record. Several of the women referred independently to events and periods in ways that confirmed one another’s accounts and that matched and then expanded on what was written in the letters. Their oral accounts made it easier to understand what was being said at the class reunions and some of the oblique references in the letters to these conversations. In the interviews, the women felt confident enough and far enough removed from the

events to be able to give examples of how they had censored themselves and one another, and how the internal rules of the group encouraged this censorship.

A Spatial Assessment

Using an urban geographer's approach, I supplemented my understanding derived from both the letters and the interviews with a spatial assessment, something that is crucial to an understanding of actions in or arising from a specific place. The location, size, topography, layout, and social and economic structure of *Schönebeck* and its surrounding area are all relevant to the women's perception of who they were, what they were doing, and what was being done to them. Their stories would have been different if the women had come from a small village or been at school together in a large city.⁴²

In the former East Germany, I visited where the women had worked, lived, or had their holidays. Sometimes I could check that what they described had been physically possible at the time. I looked at their houses and their specific location, their distance from those of the other women, the public transport connections from one to another and to where they had worked, the traces of the border, and the earlier and later paths through the woods across it. My aim was to understand the rhythms of their everyday lives and what kept them together or, at times, stopped them visiting one another. Concerned by silences in the letters and interviews, I looked at the locations of former *Buchenwald* subcamps and the routes their prisoners took to work toward the end of the war; I wanted to see whether it would have been possible for the young women to remain unaware of what was happening in their midst. These visits made it easier to understand what the women were expressing in their letters and how it was inextricably bound up with the circumstances in which they lived. The visits were part of the process of matching up what was conveyed by the letters, photos, and interviews both with one another and with the public record of historical events.

The Significance of Humiliation

To build on these approaches, a different and novel way of interpreting the letters is to apply the concept of humiliation to a number of events and experiences the women describe. This can help to understand the long-term significance of these events, and the meaning of letters that may be decades apart.

I am referring here to humiliation as a specific way of exercising power, with a set of common elements and predictable consequences.⁴³ Victims of an act of humiliation have a sense that an injustice has been perpetrated, one that is

against all they could have expected, and for which there is no remedy. One of the consequences involves feelings of rage, but usually of impotent rage, where the desire for revenge clashes with a realistic perception of helplessness. Such an act of humiliation is almost always felt as traumatic. It covers a wide range of actions, such as those of the German state against the German Jewish population (and against Jews elsewhere), or of representatives of the United States in Iraq against prisoners in Abu Ghraib or at Guantanamo Bay; the use of rape as a weapon of war; the sexual abuse of children by priests and others across the world; violence, abuse, or controlling behavior within families; and, increasingly, bullying and other abuse made possible by the internet and social media. The use of humiliation as a way of exercising power has a long history and spreads far and wide across the world.⁴⁴

Neuroscience and psychological studies suggest that nontraumatic and traumatic events are experienced differently not just immediately but also in the long term, and that what we tend to refer to as memories of them are separated out by the brain and respond differently to certain signals. On the one hand, nontraumatic memories can be renarrated, reinterpreted, and perhaps reconstructed over time, and depend on us thinking about and seeking to remember things.⁴⁵ On the other hand, a traumatic event leaves traces that are not so much memories in the narrative sense as sets of emotions and sensations that are, in a technical sense, “persistent” and can, in certain circumstances, be suddenly triggered and immediately re-experienced.⁴⁶ Victims of humiliation may suppress or avoid for many years the feelings the act of humiliation has caused and their anger at the irreversible act of injustice that they still cannot believe happened to them.

In the letters of the Schönebeck women, sudden expressions of anger or frustration, along with unexpected defenses and evasions, sometimes point toward memories of much earlier episodes of humiliation. The consequences of these episodes can then be tracked over time, even if the writer has sought to forget, deny, obscure, or ignore the memory of the humiliation. Using the concept of humiliation in this way can help us to look for meanings that are otherwise inaccessible in the letters.

The concept also becomes useful when we look at how individual women dealt with the expectations of the group. Sometimes they were aware that their actions or attitudes conflicted with the group’s norms and values. They feared exposure and censure, which would have amounted to humiliation, and found creative ways to save themselves from this treatment and from the resulting sense of rejection and exclusion. Anticipating humiliation and taking steps to preempt it was part of the ongoing struggle for position and status within the group. Looking at both the internal and the external cases through the lens of humiliation can give us insights that we otherwise would not have into the way power was exercised, along with its long-term consequences.

A Clash of Myths

The Schönebeck women, writing to one another over fifty years, established and tried to live by a set of myths. Considering their letters and photos, and analyzing the interviews, we can perceive the myriad “microsocial interactions” among the women themselves and with others in the wider society. We see the women struggling to live for themselves, for one another, and at times against one another. We see them happily perpetuating traditional attitudes and values and reaching out toward new ways of thinking and acting. We see them asserting and reacting to power and acting as if external power does not exist.

What we witness in the slowly emerging pattern is a complex clash of myths, centered on the long period of their adult lives when Germany was formally divided. This clash sets the women’s personal and group myths against the founding myths of the FRG and the GDR. It also leads the women in each part of Germany to express, however ambivalently, their loyalty to their own state, and puts them in opposition to their friends on the other side of the inner-German border. Additionally, the myth of friendship and loyalty that would bind each of them to the group made no allowance for the impact of individual or societal change. The reality of change and separation gives an occasional air of wistfulness and melancholy to the letters, and a sense of loss and isolation. In response, for those who slip out of the heart of the group or threaten to, there is always someone reaching out to bring them back in, at the price of reining in the errant woman’s individuality and distinctiveness. Just as the external forces in society exercise power, so the group itself has its own power that has to be accepted, rejected, or ignored. It is this complex interplay of myths and power that is at the heart of the stories of the Schönebeck women.

The Shape of the Book

In considering these issues, this book is organized both chronologically and thematically. Chapter 1 starts with the period when these women were young girls. It covers the Nazi period before and during the war; the end of the war and the occupation of Germany in 1945; and the emergence of the Cold War, leading to the establishment of both the German Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic in 1949. This chapter considers the impact of propaganda, actions, and structures on the attitudes and values of the Schönebeck group of girls as they grew into young women. It looks at the women’s implicit attempts, individually and as a group, to establish and maintain a position out of reach of those with power over them. It suggests that by looking at attitudes regarding family, work, study, and the authorities, we can construct

a picture of a group determined to remain united but already divided in ways they themselves did not recognize.

In this and subsequent chapters, a number of the women are mentioned and quoted, either from their letters or from interviews. The most prominent of these have their stories told throughout the book: Else Hermann from Schönebeck, Irma Kindler from Schönebeck/Bad Salzelmen, Anna Siebert from nearby Staßfurt, and Hertha Pieper from Calbe. Of these, Else and Hertha would stay in the Soviet Occupation Zone and then the GDR, while Irma and Anna lived in the West. Their stories are referred to as the “principal stories.”

Chapter 2 explores the period in the women’s lives when they saw themselves as active young women, growing up in new societies that were different but closely connected. In terms of historical events, it extends from the birth of the FRG and the GDR to the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the period that confirmed the SED’s determination to build socialism on the Soviet model, and ended with the physical separation of the two parts of Germany. This chapter looks at homes, families, and the “woman question”; interactions with the state; the significance of role models for the group; and travel, leisure, and holidays. It highlights tensions between earlier values and those that the new states and some of the women themselves wanted the group to espouse. The letters show the women continuing to enjoy their lives and their personal development, as well as struggling to come to terms with both the subtlety and the viciousness of external power, most particularly in the GDR.

We can also see that the women felt that what connected them was stronger than anything that those exercising power from the outside might impose upon them. This gave them a feeling that they could look to the group and one another for sustenance in the face of difficulties, and for confirmation that, as young, enthusiastic women embarking on adult life, the pleasures and opportunities the world had to offer were theirs for the taking. The letters for this period make clear that the GDR, where their *Heimat* was located, would be the focus of attention for many of the women from both the East and the West and would help to shape much of what they wrote in the *Rundbrief* over the next fifty years, even after the GDR had ceased to exist.

Chapter 3 adopts a similar thematic approach for the period from 1961 to the early 1970s, as the women move toward middle age. This was a period of rapid economic, cultural, and social change in both the FRG and the GDR, with an ever-widening gap between the two in terms of the standard of living. There was also significant political change. In the West, Willy Brandt, the first postwar Social Democratic chancellor, promoted the idea of agreements with the Soviet Union, Poland, and the GDR. In the East, a decade of consolidation and modernization, with an emerging economic crisis at its end, culminated in Erich Honecker replacing Walter Ulbricht at the head of the SED in 1971, with promises of some liberalization and “consumer socialism.”

In this period, as the women become aware of their own vulnerability and find themselves caring for their aging parents, they introduce an additional theme: health, illness, and dying. In the GDR, the political leaders' concession to women, while urging them to participate fully in the building of socialism, is to increase preschool and out-of-school care for children and provide extra facilities in the workplace to make women's lives easier. They do not ask men to share the work women have traditionally done. While most of the women in the group still display traditional attitudes to their husbands and families, there are comments in the letters from the East that indicate resistance to these attitudes and resentment of the burden women are expected to bear. It also becomes clear that women in the GDR are internalizing the SED's view of the importance of working outside the home, while those in the West remain happy with their position as mothers not expected to go out to work. As the gap widens further between East and West, any underlying resentment tends to be expressed as frustration about the different opportunities for travel and leisure, for which the GDR state can take the blame.

Once again, news of the authorities' arbitrary and unjust treatment of one of the families—a clear case of humiliation—is transmitted by the *Rundbrief*, highlighting its role as a conveyer of news and a creator of consensus within the group.

The same themes are considered in Chapter 4, covering the 1970s. The women in the East are increasingly inward-looking as they move into their fifties, while those in the West are lively and outward-looking, benefiting from the opportunities and consumer comforts of the prosperous FRG, despite social problems they see emerging there. Neither side makes any reference to the arguments set out by the women's liberation movement in the West.

The letters from the East confirm a shift in attitude in the 1970s, involving frustration and disappointment with the lack of improvement in conditions in the GDR. However, this is counterbalanced by the women's continued enthusiasm regarding their jobs, their families, and the trips they make to other eastern European countries and the Soviet Union.

Chapter 5 covers the 1980s, when the women reach retirement age. This, the final decade of the GDR, was a time of international and internal tensions that affected both East and West and caused significant social upheaval. In the West, there was a huge peace movement, the Green Party grew substantially, and the *Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF) continued its attacks on state or senior business figures. In the East, independent women's, environmental, and peace groups grew but were infiltrated or repressed by the constantly expanding Stasi, and the SED made clear its opposition to the changes in the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev. For the Schönebeck women there is, at first glance, little sense of this in their letters. They have other preoccupations: what is happening to their children and grandchildren; illness and death; the traveling they are allowed to

do; and, late in the 1980s when they have all turned sixty, meeting up again in their first joint reunion in the West. Nevertheless, the long-term consequences of an act of humiliation in 1950 threaten the group's unity.

This period exposes the fragility of the GDR's founding myths. Several of the women in the East who had expressed satisfaction at what had been achieved now write about the way things are decaying in the GDR, and about the first of their children seeking to move to the West.

Chapter 6 covers the years when the women retired and felt themselves growing old as they looked back on their youth. This is the period from 1989/90—the *Wende*, when the SED lost power and the GDR ceased to exist—to the start of the new millennium. What emerges from the *Schönebeck* letters is that the women in the East were enthusiastic about the *Wende* but often found it difficult to adapt to the sudden changes and the different forces that were now affecting their lives. Some had to leave their jobs before they wanted to; many were anxious about how much money they would have in their retirement; some missed the sense of the collective they had absorbed over the previous forty years; most felt disoriented by the loss of the old certainties.

At this time, the question of gender confronted them. Women, they saw, often lost their jobs before men. They were isolated and pushed back into the home, and they could no longer see how to find a purpose in their lives. Looking beyond their own generation, they saw many of their daughters and granddaughters fearing for their jobs and worried by the threatened closure of childcare centers.

At this point, the group as a whole should have helped them, but initially failed to. As a subgroup within it, the women in the East felt suddenly distanced from those in the West. Some of the letters from the West display ignorance, insensitivity, and a feeling of superiority, which angered those in the East. Attempts were made to overcome the damage. The *Rundbrief* and the reunions continued, and individual friendships flourished between East and West. In the end, it was growing old, along with the shock of illness and death, that kept them united, rather than a common understanding of what had happened to them in their years of separation and of how significant the rupture of the *Wende* and reunification had been for all of them.

It is here that their stories bring us full circle, back to their time as girls at school. Earlier attitudes reappear for some of them in the East—attitudes from the Nazi time, suddenly and brutally expressed, as if forty-five years of anti-fascist propaganda and education had had no impact on them. Earlier stories are also told for the first time. Most strikingly, overlapping from comments in 1989, two of the women give an account of what happened to one of the Jewish girls who was originally in their class. A serious question arises here about the limits of empathy: if it is so powerful within a group such as the *Schönebeck* women, does this mean it is more likely not to be applied to those outside the

group? If so, is this something that they learned so many years earlier as girls socialized in the Nazi period and retained throughout their subsequent lives? We are forced at this point to look again at the nature of the group itself, to see whether its myth of unity was one that always depended on the exclusion of the “other,” not just the Jewish girls in their class but also the women seen as too capitalist or too communist, too arrogant, too assertive, or too compliant. If this is so, then the clash of myths is much more than a story of conflicting ideologies; it is also a story of self-deception and of the difficulties we face, as individual people living under different regimes, as we try to live with integrity and create hope, confidence, and enduring friendships in our everyday lives.

Notes

1. Lisa Liebmann, 20 February 1955, in “31 Originalbände Klassenrundbriefe von ehemaligen Schülerinnen einer Oberschule in Schönebeck an der Elbe. Jahre 1950–2001” (hereafter “Schönebeck Letters”), Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Kempowski-Biographienarchiv (hereafter AdK Kempowski-BIO) 6383. “Lisa Liebmann” is a pseudonym, as are the names of all the women discussed, in order to preserve their anonymity and protect their families from intrusion.
2. “Schönebeck Letters,” 26 September 1995.
3. Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and Davíð Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory: Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2017), 6. See also Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijárto, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (London, 2013); Carlo Ginzburg, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It,” *Critical Inquiry* 20/1, 1993; Carlo Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces: True, False, Fictive* (Berkeley, 2012); Matti Peltonen, “What is Micro in Microhistory?” in Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, eds., *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing* (Leiden, 2014).
4. Magnússon and Ólafsson, *Minor Knowledge*, 3.
5. The one exception was Hertha Pieper, born in 1925.
6. Kreisleitung der SED Schönebeck, eds., *Zeittafel der Chronik der Kreises Schönebeck (Elbe)*, Teil 1, 1945–1949 (Schönebeck, 1985).
7. Michael Viebig and Daniel Bohse, *Justiz im Nationalsozialismus. Über Verbrechen im Namen des Deutschen Volkes. Sachsen-Anhalt* (Magdeburg, 2013); Personalakte: Walter Karpe, PA 23, Stadtarchiv Schönebeck (Elbe); Günter Kuntze, *Juden in Schönebeck* (Schönebeck, 1991); Hans-Joachim Geffert, *Fragmentarische Nachrichten aus dem Leben jüdischer Mitbürger Schönebecks*, Stadtarchiv Schönebeck, 2012; “Schönebecker SA-Terroristen verurteilt,” *Volksstimme Magdeburg*, 15 June 1948.
8. Kuntze, *Juden*, 54, quoting an eye-witness account.
9. Cecilienschule zu Schönebeck/Elbe: *Bericht über das Schuljahr 1939/40*, https://goobi.web.bbf.dipf.de/viewer/ppnresolver?id=101166545X_1940.
10. See the discussion about ruptures and continuity in Andrew Stuart Bergerson and Leonard Schmieding, lead authors for the ATG26 Collective, of which I was a member, in *Ruptures in the Everyday: Views of Modern Germany from the Ground* (New York, 2017), 22–4.

11. Phil Leask, "Losing Trust in the World: Humiliation and Its Consequences," *Psychodynamic Practice* 19/2, 2013.
12. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York, 1984); Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (London, 2001); Dorothee Klinksiek, *Die Frau im NS-Staat* (Stuttgart, 1982); Dagmar Reese, *Growing Up Female in Nazi Germany* (Ann Arbor, 2009); Dagmar Reese, ed., *Die BDM-Generation. Weibliche Jugendliche in Deutschland und Österreich im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 2007).
13. Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford, 1988), 207.
14. Frevert, *Women in German History*, 223–24, 229.
15. For different strands of the women's movement in the Weimar years, and the various organizations' relations with and attitudes to National Socialism, see Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, *When Biology Became Destiny*, xiii; Frevert, *Women in German History*, 199–201, 209–11.
16. Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 75–79, Frevert, *Women in German History*, 244.
17. Reese, *Growing Up Female*; Reese, *Die BDM-Generation*.
18. Frevert, *Women in German History*, 243.
19. Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (London, 2009), 6.
20. Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford, 2011), 8, 260; Dorothee Wierling, "How Do the 1929ers and the 1949ers Differ?" in Mary Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979: The "Normalisation of Rule?"* (New York, 2009), 204–19; Hartmut Zwahr, "Die DDR auf dem Höhepunkt der Staatskrise 1989," in Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr, eds., *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart, 1994), 449–50.
21. Mark Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770–1968* (Cambridge, 1995), especially these chapters: Alexander von Plato, "The Hitler Youth Generation and Its Role in the Two Post-War German States"; Dagmar Reese, "The BDM Generation: a Female Generation in Transition from Dictatorship to Democracy"; Michael Buddrus, "A Generation Twice Betrayed: Youth Policy in the Transition from the Third Reich to the Soviet Zone of Occupation (1945–1946)."
22. Mark Roseman, "Introduction: Generation Conflict and German History 1770–1968," in Roseman, *Generations*, 32.
23. Hester Vaizey, *Surviving Hitler's War: Family Life in Germany, 1939–1948* (Basingstoke, 2010); Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford, 2007). For the dangers facing German women at the end of the war, see Miriam Gebhardt, *Als die Soldaten Kamen. Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des zweiten Weltkriegs* (Munich, 2015); Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), 69–140; Antony Beevor, *Berlin: The Downfall, 1945* (London, 2002), 409–15; Wolfgang Leonhard, *Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder* (Cologne, 1962).
24. On the tensions and difficulties when the men returned, see Christiane Wienand, *Returning Memories: Former Prisoners of War in Divided and Reunited Germany* (Rochester, NY, 2015).
25. Harsch, *Revenge*, 2, 14.

26. Gisela Helwig, "Einleitung," in Gisela Helwig and Hildegard Maria Nickel, eds., *Frauen in Deutschland, 1945–1992* (Berlin, 1993), 9–10; Frevert, *Women in German History*, 268, 276.
27. For a summary of the dispute among historians in relation to the FRG, see Geoff Eley, "Foreword," in Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), viii–xiii; for the GDR, see Andrew I. Port, "The Banalities of East German Historiography," in Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port, eds., *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York, 2013).
28. Bergerson and Schmieding, *Ruptures*, 5.
29. Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984).
30. Magnússon, *Minor Knowledge*, 1–2.
31. Bergerson and Schmieding, *Ruptures*, 6.
32. Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT, 2005), 235.
33. See Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91/5, 1986; Judith Butler and Elizabeth Weed, eds., *The Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott's Critical Feminism* (Bloomington, 2011); Frevert, *Women in German History*, 4–5, 295; Fulbrook, "Gender," in *The People's State*, 141–75. For a longer-term view on how meanings of gender were historically constructed in Germany, see Ulinka Rublack, ed., *Gender in Early Modern German History* (Cambridge, 2002).
34. Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 174.
35. Dinah Dodds and Pam Allen-Thompson, eds., *The Wall in My Backyard: East German Women in Transition* (Amherst, 1994), 19. See also Angelika Griebner and Scarlett Kleint, *Starke Frauen kommen aus dem Osten: 13 Frauen, über die man spricht, sprechen über sich selbst* (Berlin, 1995); Martina Rellin, *Klar bin ich eine Ost-Frau! Frauen erzählen aus dem richtigen Leben* (Berlin, 2004); Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung der Humboldt-Universität Berlin, ed., *Unter Hammer und Zirkel: Frauenbiographien vor dem Hintergrund ostdeutscher Sozialisationserfahrungen* (Pfaffenweiler, 1995).
36. Marianne Schneider, 1 September 1950, in "Schönebeck Letters."
37. Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1989* (Ann Arbor, 1999); Bill Niven, "The Sideways Gaze: The Cold War and Memory of the Nazi Past, 1949–1970," in Tobias Hochscherf, Christoph Laucht, and Andrew Plowman, eds., *Divided, but Not Disconnected: German Experiences of the Cold War* (Oxford, 2010), 48.
38. See the discussion of Heimat concepts in Caroline Bland, Catherine Smale, and Godela Weiss-Sussex, "Women Writing Heimat in Imperial and Weimar Germany: Introduction," *German Life and Letters* 62/1, 2019, 1–13.
39. Marianne Schneider, 1 May 1971, "Schönebeck Letters."
40. Lutz Niethammer, "Zeroing in on Change: In Search of Popular Experience in the Industrial Province in the German Democratic Republic," in Lüdtke, *History of Everyday Life*, 256, footnote.
41. There was one unsatisfactory interview with one of the women who had joined the group toward its end. She had been in a lower year at school and neither she nor most of the others seemed to feel she was a full member of the group. She half-heartedly answered my questions in the reception area of an optician's office, while also dealing with incoming clients. Another of the women was too ill to be interviewed.

42. This is demonstrated by the different preoccupations that show up in *Rundbriefe* written by women from Stuttgart (born around 1870): H. Jansen, *Freundschaft über Sieben Jahrzehnte. Rundbriefe deutscher Lehrerinnen, 1899–1968* (Frankfurt/Main, 1991); Dresden (born 1907 or 1908): Charlotte Heinritz, ed., *Der Klassenrundbrief* (Opladen, 1991); Erfurt (born 1915): Eva Jantzen and Merith Niehuss, eds., *Das Klassenbuch. Geschichte einer Frauengeneration* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1997); and Breslau (born 1925): Juliane Braun, ed., *Ein Teil Heimat seid Ihr für mich. Rundbriefe einer Mädchenklasse, 1944–2000*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 2002).
43. Ute Frevert, *Die Politik der Demütigung. Schauplätze von Macht und Ohnmacht* (Frankfurt/Main, 2017); Leask, "Losing Trust"; Phil Leask, "Power, the Party and the People: The Significance of Humiliation in Representations of the German Democratic Republic," Ph.D. dissertation, University College London, 2012; Phil Leask, "Humiliation as a Weapon within the Party: Fictional and Personal Accounts," in Fulbrook and Port, *Becoming East German*.
44. Frevert, *Die Politik der Demütigung*, chapters 1 and 3. See also Karen J. Greenberg and Joshua L. Dratel, *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib* (Cambridge, 2005); Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib* (London, 2004); Michael Clemenger, *Everybody Knew: A Boy. Two Brothers. A Stolen Childhood* (London, 2012).
45. Alison Winter, *Memory: Fragments of a Modern History* (Chicago, 2012), 262–64; Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *The Brain's Body: Neuroscience and Corporeal Politics* (Durham, NC, 2016), 2–4.
46. Shane O'Mara, *Why Torture Doesn't Work: The Neuroscience of Interrogation* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 23, 53, 117, 136–37; Winter, *Memory*, 266.