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Commemoration through Glorification? How the Memory Politics of the SED (1946-1989) turned Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) into a Socialist Heroine

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Commemoration through Glorification?

How the Memory Politics of the SED (1946-1989)
turned Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) into a Socialist Heroine



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Figure 1 Clara-Zetkin-Straße in East-Berlin, former capital of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). © ddrbildarchiv.de/Manfred Uhlenhut

Abstract

A nation's identity builds on a common past and traditions. After the Second World War, the newborn government of the GDR had to make a concerted effort to create such traditions, building on the history of the German working class and their leading historical figures. Among them: Clara Zetkin. A dedicated and respected politician in her time, she was made an icon in the GDR, as she was portrayed as an ideal socialist role model and heroine throughout the public sphere, by means of the memory politics of the SED. The biographies, newspaper articles, films, and museums focused on Zetkin, as well as the street signs, statues, banknotes, and awards bearing her name in the GDR created a particular image of the historical figure: a model socialist heroine. This image differs from the historical figure of Zetkin, as some parts have been emphasized, others downplayed, or left out entirely.

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List of Abbreviations

ADF	German Association of Female Citizens
BArch	Bundesarchiv
Comintern	Communist International (Third International)
DEFA	Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft
DFD	Democratic Women's League of Germany
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
FDJ	Free German Youth
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IWD	International Women's Day
KPD	Communist Party of Germany
MfDG	Museum für deutsche Geschichte
MSPD	Majority Social Democratic Party of Germany
ND	Neues Deutschland
NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers' Party
SAP	Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands
SAPMO	Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR
SBZ	Soviet Occupation Zone
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SMAD	Soviet Military Administration Germany
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
USPD	Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany

Introduction

As of March 4th, 1987, a walker strolling through the small neighborhood park in Berlin-Marzahn could admire a brand-new bust positioned in the middle of the park. It ought to be familiar: The bust depicted Clara Zetkin (1857-1933), a socialist heroine and role model to any ‘decent’ woman in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). To place someone on a pedestal – quite literally in this case – is to create an idealized version of them: One that encourages people to picture them as perfect and to admire them greatly through a lens that distorts reality. Zetkin was a figure that was constantly memorialized, commemorated, and put on a pedestal throughout the history of the GDR. Yet, in her idealization, the reality of Zetkin was lost behind the ideological utility she had to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) – founding and ruling party of the state – in propagating and perpetuating their beliefs. She was transformed and reconfigured to meet their expectations of who Zetkin was, and to use this image for their political endeavors.

The newly born state faced the difficulty of establishing its own history and tradition. To do this, it needed role models, heroes, and heroines, based on which it could shape history and the present to its own liking. This study uses the commemoration of Zetkin as an example to show exactly how this was done. The reader gets an insight into how the SED shaped the historical narrative through various elements and turned Clara Zetkin into a socialist heroine. Statues, museums, street names, biographies, history books, newspaper articles, commemorative events, and even the 10-*Mark* bill shed light on her life and character. They did this, however, selectively, as parts were either omitted or overly exaggerated.

Theoretical Framework

No depiction of the past is ever completely objective. Historians have long portrayed objectivity as the uppermost commandment in historiography. Newer literature suggests, however, that memories of the past “are not fixed things, but representations or constructions of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena.”¹ Scholars in the field of memory studies² acknowledge a division between memory and history as modes of understanding the past.³ Frequently quoted in this context is Pierre Nora, who has emphasized the selective process of

¹ Cf. Gillis, John R. 2018. “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship.” In *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, by John R. Gillis, 3-24. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 3.

² An interdisciplinary approach that emerged in the late 20th century.

³ Cf. Hutton, *Memory*, 355.

remembering certain events: “Without the intention to remember, *lieux de mémoire* would be indistinguishable from *lieux d’histoire*.”⁴

Different scholars have proposed classifications within collective memory. Richard Lebow distinguishes between collective, individual, and institutional memory.⁵ Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik identify several subcategories of memory, among them are ‘official’ and ‘cultural memory.’⁶ While the former term describes the narrative propagated by the state, political parties, and other actors in the public sphere, the latter refers to the way a community views its past via newspaper articles, memorials, monuments, films, and buildings. Lebow’s term ‘institutional memory’ describes the “[...] efforts by political elites, their supporters, and their opponents to construct meanings of the past and propagate them more widely or impose them on other members of society.”⁷ The distinctions made by the authors depend on the mnemonic actors involved in the creation or distribution of memory.⁸ In the specific case of the GDR, as will be shown in this study, official and cultural memory were tightly linked, as the SED played a significant role in the formation of the public memory landscape and therefore influenced both categories of memory.

According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory helps individuals to find meaning in their lives and to create bonds of solidarity with other people.⁹ All personal memories are localized within social contexts that frame the way they are recalled. Thus, the images of collective memory are reconfigured to conform to current cultural conceptions.¹⁰ Barry Schwartz emphasizes that “given the constraints of a recorded history [...], the past cannot be literally construed; it can only be selectively exploited.”¹¹ Thus, collective memory is a constant negotiation between available historical records and current social and political agendas. Also, according to Yael Zerubavel, “in the process of referring back to these records, it shifts its interpretation, selectively emphasizing, suppressing, and elaborating different aspects of that record.”¹²

Memory and identity are closely connected.¹³ Lebow states that “shared experiences and memories, and the values and commitments they create and sustain, provide distinctive identities and communities.”¹⁴ Thus, the specific set of memories of every community provides a collective

⁴ Nora, Pierre. 1989. “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire.” *Representations*, 7-24, 19.

⁵ Cf. Lebow, Richard. 2006. *The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe*. Durham: Duke University Press, 8.

⁶ Cf. Bernhard, Michael, and Jan Kubik. 2014. *Twenty Years After Communism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 8.

⁷ Lebow, *The Memory of Politics*, 13.

⁸ On mnemonic actors and a more detailed classification, see Bernhard, Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism*, 11-13.

⁹ Cf. Lebow, *The Memory of Politics*, 8.

¹⁰ Cf. Hutton, Patrick H. 2013. “Memory: Witness, Experience, Collective Meaning.” In *SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, by Nancy Partner, 354-377. London: SAGE Publications, 356.

¹¹ Schwartz, Barry. 1982. “The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study of Collective Memory.” *Social Forces*, Vol. 61: 374-402, 393.

¹² Zerubavel, Yael. 1995. *Recovered Roots. Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 5.

¹³ Cf. for example, Gillis, *Memory and Identity*; Lebow, *Memory of Politics*; Bernhard, *Twenty Years After Communism*; Hutton, *Memory*; Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

¹⁴ Lebow, *The Memory of Politics*, 3.

identity that is different from the identity of other communities. According to Patrick Hutton, memory imports the past into the contexts of the present, in the process of which it becomes vulnerable to refashioning to suit present needs.¹⁵ Consequently, mnemonic actors like the SED can influence collective memory and thereby shape collective identity. The term that best describes this is ‘memory politics.’¹⁶ According to Olga Malinova, memory politics are the “public activity of various social actors aimed at propagation of particular visions of the collective past and development of the memory infrastructure that supports such visions [...]”¹⁷ Examples of its instruments are established public rituals, holidays and festivals, monuments, museums, and the toponymy of public places.¹⁸ Zerubavel also points out the prominent role of education in the socialization of national traditions.¹⁹

According to John Gillis, public memory and identity are “embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end.”²⁰ Similarly, Lebow argues that the construction of memory is in any case infused by politics, whether it is a matter of a top-down or a bottom-up process.²¹ Thus, the specific power structure of a state and its direct or indirect use of memory politics influence the course of public memory. Commemorative representations of the past can reveal hidden political agendas,²² which is why analyzing them can be useful to historians exploring the processes in a state’s memory politics. Commemorations can take various forms within a set of cultural and institutional practices,²³ and while memories can evolve and change over time, artifacts like monuments, museums, eulogies, rituals of commemoration, and pictorial representations “remain anchored in fixed times and places.”²⁴ This is why they were chosen as objects of analysis in this study.

Thus, in this study, it is assumed that collective memory is subjective and can therefore be influenced by mnemonic actors. The collective memory of a community is fundamental for identity formation. When a mnemonic actor attempts to influence collective memory through for example the commemoration of historical figures, this is called memory politics. In this study the SED’s memory politics in the GDR through the commemoration of Clara Zetkin is the object of investigation.

¹⁵ Cf. Hutton, *Memory*, 356.

¹⁶ Another frequently used term is ‘politics of memory’.

¹⁷ Malinova, Olga. 2018. “The Embarrassing Centenary: Reinterpretation of the 1917 Revolution in the Official Historical Narrative of Post-Soviet Russia (1991-2017).” *Nationalities Papers*, 2. Vol. 46: 272-289, 275.

¹⁸ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁹ Cf. Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 6.

²⁰ Gillis, *Memory and Identity*, 3.

²¹ Cf. Lebow, *Memory of Politics*, 4.

²² Cf. Hutton, *Memory*, 356.

²³ Cf. Bernhard, *Twenty Years After Communism*, 15.

²⁴ Hutton, *Memory*, 361.

When Germany was split in two after the end of the Second World War, both East and West began to formulate a new identity by adjusting their narratives of the past. A radical regime change includes the “reformulation of collective identities and the introduction of reinvigoration of the principles of legitimizing power.”²⁵ To do so, the group’s historical memory must be re-examined. Ultimately, Gillis argues, this process in Germany “demanded forgetting rather than remembering.”²⁶ Although both states claimed to be the true representatives of the German people, as political leaders tried to develop a state-based identity next to the preexisting national one, the identities remained fragile.²⁷ According to Brian Ladd, this search for identity is expressed in various visual and social ways, for example through monuments.²⁸ Stefan Ebenfeld points to the importance of historical scholarship for the SED, as it was a means for political and ideological education and the justification of political courses of action or visions.²⁹ These and more commemorative elements will be discussed in this study.

Jon Olsen has provided a detailed study of memory politics in East Germany in the years from 1945 to 1990. He argues that the SED played a key role in cultivating a specific form of memory culture.³⁰ For that, it ‘tailored’ pre-existing memories of the working class, to fit the new political agenda. The party went on to “construct a memory landscape intended to further bolster its authority.”³¹ Because the SED was never fully able to control the public representation of the past, it was constantly ‘retailoring’ its message and launching new memory projects, which can roughly be divided in five stages.³² In the first stage, from 1945 to 1949,³³ the SED established itself as the dominant party in the Soviet occupation zone (SBZ) by drawing on existing memories of the German working class and promoting the concept of antifascism as the defining element of the party. The second stage started in 1949, when the traditions of the German labor movement were found and amplified, with a focus on the narrative of a struggling working class that finally achieved its goals with the founding of the East German state. In stage three, from 1955 to 1969, the upcoming generation was targeted. The SED aimed to transfer the memories of the antifascist struggle and “develop new interpretations of the past that spoke directly to the political concerns

²⁵ Bernhard, *Twenty Years After Communism*, 8.

²⁶ Gillis, *Memory and Identity*, 12.

²⁷ Cf. Lebow, *The Memory of Politics*, 30.

²⁸ Ladd, Brian. 2002. “East Berlin Political Monuments in the Late German Democratic Republic: Finding a Place for Marx and Engels.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1. Vol. 37: 91-104, 91.

²⁹ Ebenfeld, Stefan. 2001. *Geschichte nach Plan? Die Instrumentalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR am Beispiel des Museums für Deutsche Geschichte in Berlin (1950 bis 1955)*. Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 8.

³⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³² Cf. *Ibid.*, 6.

³³ The dates do not represent a strict division, and some memory projects cannot be classified.

of the time.”³⁴ In stage four, from 1969 to 1985, the SED drew on older Prussian traditions and figures, aiming to reach a bigger public. A growing dichotomy was developed between fascist and antifascist historical figures. In stage five, from 1985 to 1989, the SED resumed previously abandoned memory projects like the construction of monuments.³⁵

The commemoration of Zetkin in the GDR has so far been little addressed in research. Tânia Puschnerat, author of a comprehensive, source-based biography on Zetkin, has dedicated a small chapter to this topic. From her observation, Puschnerat concludes that the SED aimed to make Zetkin usable in a tradition-building way.³⁶ For this, the image conveyed to the public through museums and biographies contained a constructed heroic and socialist path of life, in which Zetkin’s individuality was compromised to fit the exemplary and desirable role model. Puschnerat found that this was done through the construction and overinterpretation of obsolete continuities and breaks in Zetkin’s life, like her childhood socialization and the break with her family and teacher.³⁷ Olsen’s study mentions ‘hybrid sites of memory,’ where for example the former house of Jenny Marx, or the Gotha Conference, were renovated and made into museums.³⁸ Zetkin’s former residence in Birkenwerder, near Berlin, has similarly been turned into a museum-monument. Olsen observes that the exhibition portrayed Zetkin as the ideal revolutionary figure and that it was meant to target mainly women.³⁹

Through its women’s policy, the SED attempted to socialize women of the GDR according to its envisioned women’s image. The GDR’s view on women was based on the theories of Marx, Engels, and Bebel, who argued that women’s emancipation would be accomplished with the emancipation of the working class.⁴⁰ The laws enacted for women’s emancipation focused primarily on women as mothers and wives.⁴¹ Women’s role in society remained traditional, with the addition that women now carried the double burden of their job and the additional housework and childcare.⁴² For the resocialization into what was regarded as the ideal woman – a political fighter and campaigner for the realization of socialism – the SED provided historical female role models who had performed heroic deeds in the past. These role models were presented through propaganda, literature, and art as political and moral heroines.⁴³ Their names were used as honorary

³⁴ Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 12.

³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁶ Puschnerat, Tânia. 2003. *Clara Zetkin: Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus. Eine Biographie*. Essen: Klartext Verlag, 9.

³⁷ Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 419.

³⁸ Cf. Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 131.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁰ Cf. Kranz, *Women’s Role in the German Democratic Republic*, 70.

⁴¹ Kranz, Susanne. 2005. “Women’s Role in the German Democratic Republic and the State’s Policy Toward Women.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 1. Vol. 7: 69-83, 69.

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴³ Gibas, Monika. 1997. “Vater Staat und seine Töchter. Offiziell propagierte Frauenbilder der DDR und ihre Sozialisationsauswirkungen.” In *Parteiauftrag: Ein Neues Deutschland. Bilder, Rituale und Symbole der frühen DDR*, by Dieter Vorsteher-Seiler, 312-317. München: Koehler und Amelang, 312.

titles for social collectives, on street signs, or for socialist companies and schools. They were praised for their commitment to socialism, their loyalty towards the communist movement, and their fighting spirit, courage, and perseverance in their confrontation with capitalists and fascists.⁴⁴ Zetkin is one example of these women, alongside Rosa Luxemburg, Jenny Marx, Nadeshda Krupskaja, Rosa Thälmann, Sophie Scholl, Käte Niederkirchner, Olga Benario Prestes, and Lilo Hermann.⁴⁵ They were honored in numerous exhibitions, on postage stamps, through commemoration days, and more.⁴⁶

Further debates in literature around Zetkin mainly focus on her personal and political life and her impact during her lifetime. As Tânia Ünlüdağ has argued, Zetkin's personality has been viewed as too one-sided, as many of her writings indicate that bourgeois influences from her childhood have kept her mentality from being fully socialist. Ünlüdağ, therefore, proposes the notion that Zetkin held a socialist ideology, but a bourgeois mentality.⁴⁷ This observation is relevant to the research, as it contrasts with the Zetkin-image portrayed in GDR commemoration. At the same time, this study distances itself from the ongoing debate on her personality and her intentions behind her involvement in politics. For instance, it is argued that she was a feminist at heart.⁴⁸ These debates disregard the fact that her personality was multifaceted and that her activism did not have to follow a default pattern. This retrospective interpretation is again associated with certain expectations and hopes in current research and is thus a topic of its own.

Research questions, scope, and relevance

Historical events can be transformed into political myths when collective memory is altered, which changes the way community members “perceive the present and prepare for the future.”⁴⁹ However, one should not assume that mnemonic actors are entirely free in their construction of ‘history,’ at least not if they want to retain their credibility towards their target audience.⁵⁰ Memory

⁴⁴ Gibas, *Offiziell propagierte Frauenbilder*, 313.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁴⁶ Klotz, Katharina. 1997. “Führerfiguren und Vorbilder. Personenkult in der Ära Ulbricht.” In *Parteiauftrag: Ein Neues Deutschland. Bilder, Rituale, Symbole der frühen DDR*, by Dieter Vorsteher-Seiler, 332-336. München: Koehler und Amelang, 332.

⁴⁷ Cf. Ünlüdağ, Tânia. 2002. “Bourgeois Mentality and Socialist Ideology as Exemplified by Clara Zetkin's Constructs of Femininity.” *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 47: 33-58.

⁴⁸ Historically, the term feminism/feminist is to be associated with the bourgeois women's movement. In Zetkin's time, the proletarian and bourgeois movements were still strictly separated. For the construction of Zetkin as a feminist, see: Honeycutt, Karen. 1976. “Clara Zetkin: A Socialist Approach to the Problem of Woman's Oppression.” *Feminist Studies*, 3. 3/4: 131-144.

⁴⁹ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 9.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bernhard, *Twenty Years After Communism*, 8; see also Lebow, *The Memory of Politics*, p. 14; Lebow refers to Orwell's novel *1984* in this context, where it is indicated that totalitarian regimes have total control over the citizens' understanding of the past and present. While it is possible to construct certain visions of the past that help to legitimize certain ideologies or authority, his research of Communist regimes has indicated that this does not equate to total mind control.

politics can thus appear in rather subtle details in commemorations and the public sphere in general. Gillis points out that workers, ethnic minorities, young people, and women have only slowly been starting to be admitted to national memories. Women and minorities “often serve as symbols of a ‘lost’ past, nostalgically perceived and romantically constructed, but their actual lives are most readily forgotten.”⁵¹ Therefore, the examination of the commemoration of Zetkin in the GDR in this study investigates the subtle details that have been altered in the image of her as a person, politician, mother, and wife.

The main question that guides this research is as follows:

To what extent did the SED’s memory politics reshape the image of Clara Zetkin and how does this image relate to her as a historical figure?

The underlying assumption in this question is that when a historical figure is commemorated in any kind of way, there is always a process of (re-)interpretation that directs the collective memory of this person, as discussed under *theoretical framework*. Furthermore, answering this question requires mirroring the Zetkin portrayed in GDR commemoration with the political figure that she was in her lifetime, meaning that her life and work shall be examined through sources and literature.⁵² To extend the research question and further contextualize it, forming the grounds for a differentiated and critical approach, further research questions are as follows:

What were the instruments of the SED’s memory politics? Why was it in the interest of the SED to influence Zetkin’s image? How did the commemoration of Zetkin support or benefit the SED’s women’s policy?

The efforts of the SED to create their historical legitimation built on existing memories of the German working class that started after the end of the war in 1945. Thus, the time frame set for this research is based not just on the time of existence of the GDR, from 1949 to 1989, but also includes the period from the foundation of the SED in 1946.

The aim of this study is not only to show that Zetkin was made a heroine in the GDR, but exactly how this was done. It shows the rhetorical, creative, and structural instruments that were used to shape the heroine Zetkin through commemoration. A broad and nuanced picture is drawn through the analysis of elements from different spheres of GDR life. Above all, the study aims to argue that memory politics can be hidden in small details. While they can appear as subtle or even obsolete, the analysis will show that in fact, these details contain hidden ideological objectives.

⁵¹ Gillis, *Memory and Identity*, 10.

⁵² Chapter one.

Sources

This study draws on a selection of primary sources. Many of Zetkin's speeches, letters, writings, and conversations are documented. They are accessible through source editions, the internet, and archives. Amongst other sources, Zetkin's speeches in Paris 1889, in Gotha 1896, in Stuttgart 1907, in Basel 1912, and in Berlin 1932, as well as correspondences between Zetkin and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924) from 1921 and 1923 form the basis for the first chapter. The last-mentioned letters were accessed through the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin-Lichterfelde. The three works considered for the analysis of GDR historiography on Zetkin in chapter two are a biography by Luise Dornemann (1901-1992) from 1959, the preface of a source collection written by Wilhelm Pieck (1976-1960) in 1957, and a biography by Dieter Goetze⁵³ from 1982. Articles from the archive of the GDR newspaper *Neues Deutschland*⁵⁴ from the years 1946 to 1980 have been consulted in chapters three and four. Chapter three also draws on the film *Wo Andere Schweigen*,⁵⁵ produced in 1984. For chapter four, additional sources are a postcard of the *Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte* in Birkenwerder from 1988,⁵⁶ a booklet named *Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte Wiederau* from 1981, as well as the online catalog of the *Bundesarchiv*.

Structure and methodology

The order of information in this study is guided by the research questions, which form a common thread. Each chapter provides a contribution to their discussion. The first chapter is a discussion of Zetkin's life, her views, and her political career. In particular, there is a focus on those aspects that are relevant when looking at GDR commemoration, as they were either discussed in detail, or completely ignored. This way, the first chapter aims to give an impression of Zetkin as a person and politician, while providing grounds for comparison for the following chapters. Those discuss the commemoration of Zetkin, and the details of her biography and character that were enhanced or omitted. The second chapter focuses on Zetkin-biographies, the third on representations of Zetkin in the media, and the fourth on the memorialization of Zetkin in the public sphere of the GDR. Combining detailed analysis and contextual embedding, the sources are thoroughly

⁵³ No life data known.

⁵⁴ Access to the digital nd-archive has kindly been provided to me by the publisher.

⁵⁵ The film was kindly provided to me by the DEFA-Stiftung for viewing on January 9th, 2023. It is not available to the public.

⁵⁶ This postcard has kindly been given to me by the administrator of the museum in Birkenwerder.

illustrated and the intention behind their specific composition is revealed. The conclusion connects the arguments and finalizes the discussion of the research questions.

Chapter One – Clara Zetkin, 1857-1933

In her views, character, and her relationships, Zetkin was no regular woman. She lived in times of constant political change – revolutionary and uncertain times. She was unique in her views and her ways due to both her bourgeois family background and her individual political career. This chapter highlights important landmarks in Zetkin’s biography with a focus on the last ten years of her political career. It also elaborates on her views on women’s emancipation. This chapter is fundamental to the analysis in subsequent chapters and therefore emphasizes as neutral a presentation as possible. As will be seen, an accurate and detailed representation of events is important to understand which details were later highlighted or concealed in GDR commemoration. These were the details that mattered in shaping Zetkin into a socialist heroine.

1.1. Life

Clara Josephine Zetkin (née Eißner) was born on July 5th, 1857, in Wiederau, Sachsen. She came from a bourgeois family. Her mother Josephine Vitale Eißner (1822-1906) had connections to liberal circles and was friends with the founder of the German bourgeois women’s movement, Luise Otto-Peters (1819-1895). Her father Gottfried Eißner (1806-1875) was a schoolteacher and member of the evangelical Lutheran church. Zetkin received training at a women’s institute in Leipzig by Auguste Schmidt (1833-1902), a co-founder of the bourgeois German Association of Female Citizens (ADF). These bourgeois and religious-idealistic influences later shaped Zetkin’s perception of Marxism, as well as her understanding of female emancipation.⁵⁷ The encounter with a group of exiled Russian Narodniks⁵⁸ led Zetkin to deepen her knowledge of socialism and study the writings of Marx, Engels, and Bebel.⁵⁹ Among the Narodniks was young carpenter Ossip Zetkin, who would later become Clara’s partner. In 1878, Zetkin joined the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SAP).⁶⁰

Due to Otto von Bismarck’s Socialist Laws (1878-1890), which banned socialist, social democratic, and communist associations, meetings, and writings, Zetkin went into exile in 1881. After having stayed in Austria and Switzerland for a year, she joined Ossip, who had gone to Paris a year before.⁶¹ They lived together and had two children, Maksim (1883-1965) and Kostja (1885-

⁵⁷ Cf. Ünlüdağ, *Bourgeois Mentality and Socialist Ideology*, 36.

⁵⁸ Supporters of a partly anti-tsarist movement of the Russian intelligentsia.

⁵⁹ Cf. Quataert, Jean H. 2015. *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 66.

⁶⁰ The party was renamed in 1890 to *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD).

⁶¹ Cf. Hervé, Florence. 2020. *Clara Zetkin oder: Dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 13.

1980). Because Zetkin wanted to keep her German citizenship, she and Ossip did not get married. This is important to note due to the way the GDR altered this facet of her biography in their commemoration of Zetkin to circumvent her unconventional relationship with Ossip.

Zetkin was politically involved in the French workers' movement in Paris, writing for the socialist press. In 1889, she helped organizing the Second International meeting in Paris.⁶² At the meeting, Zetkin held a widely recognized speech on women's place inside the socialist movement.⁶³ It would later serve as a policy statement of the European working class on the women's question.⁶⁴ Upon her return to Stuttgart in 1890, Zetkin became the editor of the social democratic magazine *Die Gleichheit*. Its major task was to educate its readers on socialist theory.⁶⁵ From this time on, her objective was to engage women for socialism, at the same time creating a place for them within the socialist movement. Her publications and speeches in Germany and internationally established her as a respected leading figure in the international proletarian women's movement.

Zetkin's partner Ossip had died back in Paris, in 1889.⁶⁶ In 1895, the year when Zetkin was elected to the control commission of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), she met the German artist Friedrich Zundel. They married in 1899 and got divorced in 1927. Zundel was eighteen years younger than Zetkin and their relationship was consequently bitterly criticized.⁶⁷ Thus, in both her romantic relationships, Zetkin made rather emancipated, unconventional choices, which made her unique. In GDR commemoration, however, these details were concealed. Zetkin was intended to function as a role model for GDR women, and her independent, unconventional decisions might have set an example that was not desirable.

The years 1914 to 1921 marked a crucial turn in Zetkin's political biography, as she turned away from her party due to its approval of the war bonds.⁶⁸ Zetkin had been known for her antimilitarist political activity. At the International Socialist Congress in Basel of November 1912, she warned her listeners: "Der Krieg ist nichts als die Erweiterung und Ausdehnung des Massenmordes, dessen sich der Kapitalismus auch im so genannten Frieden zu jeder Stunde am Proletariat schuldig macht."⁶⁹ She was even imprisoned in 1915, for initiating an antimilitarist

⁶² The Second International was an organization of socialist and labor parties from across the world, including Europe, the Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, the USA, and Argentina. It was formed at several meetings in France, 1889.

⁶³ More on this speech and Zetkin's understanding of women's emancipation in 1.2.

⁶⁴ Cf. Honeycutt, *A Socialist Approach*, 133; the term women's question describes the public discourse that dealt with the issue and the demand for the realization of equal rights for women.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶⁷ Cf. Hervé, *Dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist*, 16.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁹ Zetkin, Clara. 1912. "Wir erheben uns gegen den imperialistischen Krieg! Rede auf dem Internationalen Sozialistenkongress zu Basel, 25.11.1912." In *Clara Zetkin. Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften, Band I*, 564-569. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957, 565.

women's conference in Bern and spreading the '*Manifest der Berner Frauenkonferenz*'.⁷⁰ Zetkin's antimilitarism would later be emphasized in GDR commemoration, and the degree to which she could foresee the extent of the war's consequences strongly overinterpreted.

Zetkin became part of the Spartacist League in 1916.⁷¹ The SPD had split into a leftist and a rightist wing over the war approval. Together with a likeminded minority of the SPD, Zetkin formed the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) in 1917. She was elected to the Landtag of Württemberg.⁷² Because the head of what was now the Majority Social Democratic Party of Germany (MSPD), Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925), did not approve of Zetkin's antimilitarist views in her *Gleichheit* articles, she was dismissed from the editorial board in 1917.⁷³ Inspired and impressed by the October Revolution of that year in Russia, her attention shifted more and more toward the Russian socialist women's movement. Zetkin made deep connections that turned into friendships with leading figures of the Soviet movement, including Lenin and his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya (1869-1939). She looked up to the Russian movement and praised the October Revolution in many of her speeches. She felt that it was more important to celebrate the success of the Bolsheviks than to condemn their violent strategies, as she expressed in an article for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in January 1918: "Halten wir in Herz und Hirn das Große, das Unvergängliche fest, was die ‚bolschewistische Taktik des Putschismus‘ den Völkern in Zeiten gegeben hat, in denen für sie das strahlende sozialistische Ideal verdunkelt war [...]."⁷⁴

By 1919, a year of political crisis, Zetkin had become a top functionary in the communist organizational world. The USPD had split due to a disagreement on the conditions to join the Communist International (Comintern) led by Lenin, and the USPD and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) became one in 1920.⁷⁵ Zetkin was now elected to the central office of the KPD.⁷⁶ She was also elected a member of parliament in the German Reichstag. Zetkin condemned the lack of strategy in the Spartacist uprising of January 1919, which had resulted in the murder of Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) and Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919) by right-wing counter-revolutionary soldiers: "sie verblutet an der mangelnden revolutionären Erkenntnis und Energie der

⁷⁰ Cf. Hervé, *Dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist*, 37; Zetkin was released after payment of bail by fellow Social Democrats.

⁷¹ The Spartacist League was an association formed around Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, that grew out of the *Gruppe Internationale* (opposition group within the SPD). Its goal was the international revolution of the proletariat, to overthrow militarism, capitalism, and imperialism worldwide. Its members were called Spartacists.

⁷² Cf. Plener, Ulla. 2008. "Vier Anmerkungen zu Clara Zetkins Wirken und Persönlichkeit 1900-1933." In *Clara Zetkin in ihrer Zeit. Neue Fakten, Erkenntnisse, Wertungen*, by Ulla Plener, 157-163. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin, 159.

⁷³ Cf. Sachse, Mirjam. 2008. "Ich erkläre mich schuldig.' Clara Zetkins Entlassung aus der Redaktion der 'Gleichheit' 1917." In *Clara Zetkin in ihrer Zeit. Neue Fakten, Erkenntnisse, Wertungen*, by Ulla Plener, 72-78. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin, 72.

⁷⁴ Zetkin, Clara. "Kein Bängliches Zagen," 11.01.1918. Accessed January 24, 2023.

<https://sites.google.com/site/sozialistischeklassiker2punkt0/zetkin/zetkin-russische-revolution/clara-zetkin-kein-baengliches-zagen>

⁷⁵ ...forming the VKPD (Vereinigte Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands). Since the new party was only temporarily referred to as VKPD, this study will use the term KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands).

⁷⁶ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 211.

proletarischen Massen.”⁷⁷ Nonetheless, she stood behind the underlying objective of the proletarian revolution and harshly criticized the MSPD as traitors of socialism and friends of the capitalists. In defense of the KPD, she reasoned:

Die Leitung der kaum gegründeten [...] Kommunistischen Partei hatte die Führung der Januarkämpfe⁷⁸ nicht in der Hand gehabt. In klarer Wertung der Lage hatte sie die Beschränkung der Aktion und ihres Ziels gefordert [...]. Als jedoch der ihrer Überzeugung nach falsch orientierte und geführte Kampf entbrannt war, durfte sie ihm nicht in den Rücken fallen.⁷⁹

In the early 1920s, disagreements on the formation of the party and the approach to the planned proletarian revolution led to conflicts in the KPD, which caused Zetkin to temporarily leave the central office.⁸⁰ After that, her political influence decreased and her status within the Comintern became symbolic rather than influential.⁸¹ Additionally, due to Zetkin’s deteriorating health, she was restricted in her mobility and often forced to seek medical treatment.⁸² An important factor was also that a change of power was taking place within the Bolshevik Party. While Zetkin maintained her friendship with Lenin and shared his opinion in many respects, she did not feel the same towards his successor, Joseph Stalin (1878-1953).⁸³ Even though she expressed her esteem for him in a public speech in 1933: “In aufrichtiger Wertschätzung grüße ich Genossen Stalin, den hervorragenden Leiter des Sowjetstaates, der mit bewunderungswürdiger Energie und Treue seine ganze Kraft daransetzte, dass der sozialistische Aufbau, das teure Vermächtnis der drei großen Führer, verwirklicht wird,”⁸⁴ her personal opinion of him was quite the opposite. In a letter to Pieck from 1932, she called Stalin a “gehirnkrankes Weib in Männerhosen.”⁸⁵ This complex relationship with the Soviet Union is significant for Zetkin’s commemoration in the GDR, as there her relationship with Stalin was often portrayed differently.

On August 30th, 1932 – the day Hermann Göring (1893-1946) of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) was elected president of the Reichstag – Zetkin held one of her last big speeches. She criticized the social situation in Germany, the growing unemployment, and

⁷⁷ Zetkin, Clara. 1920. *Revolutionäre Kämpfe und Revolutionäre Kämpfer*. January 01. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://sites.google.com/site/sozialistischeklassiker2punkt0/zetkin/zetkin-revolution-in-deutschland/clara-zetkin-revolutionaere-kaempfe-und-revolutionaere-kaempfer>.

⁷⁸ Alternative name for Spartacist uprising.

⁷⁹ Zetkin, *Revolutionäre Kämpfe und revolutionäre Kämpfer*.

⁸⁰ See 1.3. for an elaboration on the intraparty disputes of the 1920s.

⁸¹ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 211.

⁸² Cf. Hervé, *Dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist*, 26.

⁸³ Political leader of the Soviet Union from 1924 to 1953; Even though Lenin’s and Stalin’s relationship started out well, Lenin increasingly criticized Stalin for his ambitions and politics.

⁸⁴ Zetkin, Clara. 1933. *Bis zum letzten Hauch fest und unlösbar mit der Sowjetunion verbunden. Dankrede für die Verleihung des Lenin-Ordens am 8. März 1933 in Archangelskoje bei Moskau*. March 08. Accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://sites.google.com/site/sozialistischeklassiker2punkt0/zetkin/clara-zetkin-1925--1933/clara-zetkin-bis-zum-letzten-hauch-fest-und-unloesbar-mit-der-sowjetunion-verbunden>.

⁸⁵ Letter from Clara Zetkin to Wilhelm Pieck, 14.03.1932, ADS Berlin, Archive stock Clara Zetkin, 2007-XIV-2.10 quoted from Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 374.

the violence on the part of the supporters of the NSDAP. One last time, she reminded her supporters of the only way to overcome economic crises and all threatening imperialist dangers of war: the proletarian revolution. True to her enthusiasm for the October Revolution in Russia, she added: “Der große weltgeschichtliche Beweis dafür ist die russische Revolution.”⁸⁶ Shortly after the speech, Zetkin died, on the 20th of July 1933 in her home in Arkhangelskoye, Moscow.

1.2. Zetkin on Female Emancipation

The organization and expansion of the proletarian women’s movement ran like a thread through Zetkin’s life, who was soon regarded as its leader of the movement. It had emerged from the proletarian movement in the 1870s and its main goal was the abolition of unequal treatment of female and male workers. Zetkin was well-read in the theories on women’s emancipation by Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), and August Bebel (1840-1913).⁸⁷ She had reformulated them and, above all, combined them into a program of action in her speech in Paris in 1889.⁸⁸

Zetkin made sure to distinguish the proletarian movement from the liberal-moderate bourgeois women’s movement in her speeches and writings. And yet, Zetkin was never able to remain unaffected by bourgeois influences from her childhood as well as from the growing understanding that not all women’s issues were exclusive to one class. As has been argued by Ünlüdağ, while Zetkin was well-read in socialist ideology, a “bourgeois mentality”⁸⁹ can be detected in her constructs of femininity. Her ideal proletarian female carried old bourgeois virtues. Demands like political and legal equality for women and Zetkin’s initiatives for education and training opportunities, employment, and workplace protection for women were largely in line with the goals of the bourgeois women’s movement.⁹⁰ On the other hand, she viewed their demands on behalf of individual autonomy, personal independence, an individually determined life, and sexual self-determination as secondary.⁹¹ This bourgeois influence in Zetkin’s thinking was covered up in the commemoration of the GDR, as it did not fit into the ideal image of the socialist heroine.

To further exemplify the bourgeois elements in Zetkin’s politics, in early speeches, Zetkin regarded financial emancipation as the decisive factor towards female emancipation, which could

⁸⁶ Zetkin, Clara. 1932. *Rede als Alterspräsidentin bei der Eröffnung des Reichstags*. August 30. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/zetkin/1932/08/alterspraes.html>.

⁸⁷ Cf. Honeycutt, *A Socialist Approach*, 134.

⁸⁸ Zetkin, Clara. 1889. “Für die Befreiung der Frau! Rede auf dem Internationalen Arbeiterkongreß zu Paris, 19. Juli 1889.” In *Clara Zetkin. Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften, Band I*, 3-11. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1957.

⁸⁹ Cf. Ünlüdağ, *Bourgeois Mentality and Socialist Ideology*, 35.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 57.

⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 35.

be achieved through the emancipation of work from capital.⁹² In Paris, Zetkin had dismissed the value of female suffrage in ensuring women's emancipation: "Die Länder, in denen das angeblich allgemeine, freie und direkte Wahlrecht existiert, zeigen uns, wie gering der wirkliche Wert desselben ist."⁹³ She, however, soon adapted her views to the circumstances, adopting the bourgeois demand for women's suffrage. She argued that it was a means to make the female an equal partner in the fight against the capitalist class. At the Second International Socialist Women's Conference in Copenhagen of 1910, an International Women's Day (IWD) was initiated by Zetkin and Käthe Duncker (1871-1953), which was meant to primarily serve the yearly promotion of women's suffrage.⁹⁴ In a speech on the SPD party congress in Gotha, 1896, Zetkin argued: "[Die proletarische Frau] betrachtet die Erfüllung dieser Forderungen nur als Mittel zum Zweck, damit sie gleich ausgestattet an Waffen mit dem Proletarier in den Kampf ziehen kann."⁹⁵ Zetkin's skillful combination of bourgeois and proletarian demands is exemplified in this argument. In GDR commemoration, her bourgeois mentality would crucially be elided in favor of promoting her affinity to the socialist cause.

Having initially dismissed their impact, Zetkin later promoted the necessity for separate women's organizations. They were vital for the organization and growth of the women's movement. Zetkin continued to support the existence of separate organizations, even after the legal barrier was lifted in 1908.⁹⁶ According to Marilyn French, the SPD wanted women in its ranks mainly to keep them from undermining men.⁹⁷ Zetkin promoted reading and discussion nights for women, which in her opinion were particularly "eine Frage der inneren Fortentwicklung [der sozialistischen Frauenbewegung] zu jener Klarheit und Reife, die sie in steigendem Maße dem allgemeinen proletarischen Emanzipationskampf eingliedert und leistungstüchtig für seine Schlachten macht."⁹⁸ In both SPD and KPD, many did not recognize the necessity of these demands, which is why Zetkin frequently encountered resistance or rejection.⁹⁹ Intraparty

⁹² Zetkin, *Für die Befreiung der Frau.*, 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁴ Zetkin, Clara. 1910. "Internationaler Frauentag." In *Clara Zetkin. Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften, Band I*, 480. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 480; The date for the holiday was changed from March 19th to March 8th by a resolution of the Second International Socialist Congress in Moscow, 1921, in honor of the female workers' protests in Russia in 1917, which formed the beginning of the February revolution.

⁹⁵ Zetkin, Clara. 1896. *Only in Conjunction With the Proletarian Woman Will Socialism Be Victorious. Speech at the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Gotha*. October 16. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1896/10/women.htm>.

⁹⁶ Cf. Honeycutt, *A Socialist Approach*, 136; Before 1908, the legislation in most German states still prohibited women from joining political organizations, which created a necessity for separate organizations on purely pragmatic grounds.

⁹⁷ Cf. French, Marilyn. 2008. *From Eve to Dawn. A History of Women in the World, Vol. 4: Revolutions and the Struggles for Justice in the 20th Century*. New York: The Feminist Press, 24.

⁹⁸ Zetkin, Clara. 1911. "Zur Frage der Frauenleseabende." *Die Gleichheit*, September 11: 386-390.

⁹⁹ Cf. Hervé, *Dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist*, 26-27.

disagreements like these involving Zetkin were hardly addressed in GDR commemoration. Instead, they were often presented as a coherent and unanimous mass.

In general, when looking at Zetkin's understanding of female emancipation and her women's politics, it can be said that she was unique in both her bourgeois mentality that led her to keep an open mind to the demands of the feminist movement, and the general openness to adapt her opinions and decisions to the changes and developments of the time. This dynamic was not captured to the same extent in GDR commemoration, as attempts were made to conceal her bourgeois mentality.

1.3. KPD Intraparty Disputes

By the 1920s, Zetkin held many crucial positions within different communist organizations. She was a member of the central committee and party secretary of the KPD from 1919 onwards and took several functions in different bodies of the Comintern. For example, she was a member and chairwoman of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) from 1922.¹⁰⁰ Thus, while it seems that Zetkin had a long-established position within communist networks and the KPD, the attention within the party started shifting toward a younger generation of communists. Their views regarding party organization and the revolutionary approach differed from the views of the older generation. This led to intraparty disputes in the KPD in the 1920s.

In 1919, Zetkin had entered the KPD central office together with Paul Levi (1883-1930), a former USPD member and a Spartacist.¹⁰¹ After the Spartacist uprising that year in January, a part of the new KPD leadership promoted the adoption of a strategy called *revolutionärer Attentismus*. This term describes a policy of waiting for events to overthrow the existing order, where radicalism is outed verbally rather than in initiatives.¹⁰² However, the leftist opposition within the KPD, including Heinrich Brandler (1881-1967) and Walter Stoecker (1891-1939), demanded a different approach, called *Offensivstrategie*.¹⁰³ This provocative tactic involved seizing any opportunity to push even the slightest political activity as far as possible to the point of a decisive struggle.¹⁰⁴ This proactive and revolutionary strategy had been advocated by the Comintern leadership around chairman Grigory Zinoviev (1883-1936).¹⁰⁵ The main point of disagreement also lay in the

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 211.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 242.

¹⁰² The term was defined by Dieter Groh; cf. Herwig, Holger. Review of *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges*, by Dieter Groh. *Central European History* 10, 2 (June 1, 1977): 172-177, 172.

¹⁰³ Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 256.

¹⁰⁴ Jentsch, Harald. 2018. "KPD von 1919 bis 1924." *Zeitschrift Marxistische Erneuerung*, 01. 09: 77-93, 82.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Wernicke, Günter. 2008. "Clara Zetkin gegen Ausgrenzungen in KI und KPD Mitte der 20er Jahre." In *Clara Zetkin in ihrer Zeit. Neue Fakten, Erkenntnisse, Wertungen*, von Ulla Plener, 131-138. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin, 131.

structuring of the communist party in general and the influence of the ECCI and the Bolshevik party in European communist party politics.¹⁰⁶

The leftist stance, supported by the Comintern, outweighed the rightist stance, which had been supported by Levi and Zetkin. At the meeting of the KPD central office on February 22nd, 1921, Levi argued: “Diese Methode der Heranbildung kommunistischer Parteien kann nie zur Bildung kommunistischer Massenparteien führen, sondern lediglich zur Bildung zwar reiner und durchgebildeter, aber wegen ihrer zahlenmäßigen Schwäche gegenüber den großen Arbeiterorganisationen einflussloser Gruppen.”¹⁰⁷ Zetkin agreed with him, sharing her view with Lenin in a letter on February 1st: “Wir brauchen sowohl die klare, einheitliche Ideologie und die organisatorische Geschlossenheit wie die Massen. Qualität in der Quantität!”¹⁰⁸ In her eyes, the isolation of the party from the masses, as demanded by the opposition, would be a mistake, as it created a monolithic cadre party. The discussions led to Levi’s and Zetkin’s resignation from the central office in February 1921, together with three other members.¹⁰⁹

After the rightists’ resignation, the new party leadership under Karl Radek (1885-1939), Brandler, and Stoecker applied the *Offensivstrategie*. A worker’s revolt was initiated by the party, to weaken the bourgeois Republic and to overthrow Reichs chancellor Constantin Fehrenbach (1852-1926). The revolt, called *Märzaktion*, failed and weakened the KPD temporarily.¹¹⁰ As a reaction, Levi published *Unser Weg. Wider des Putschismus* in early April 1921, a brochure in which he elaborated on his position on the *Märzaktion*.¹¹¹ He was subsequently expelled from the party. In a letter to Lenin, Zetkin wrote that while she didn’t subscribe to Levi’s every word and opinion, she did agree with the mindset. In her opinion, the *Märzaktion* had failed because the situation in Germany had been misjudged by the ECCI representative Béla Kun (1886-1838). The *Offensivstrategie* could not be applied to any state:

In Staaten mit einer dünnen, kleinen Schicht eines jungen Proletariats ohne geschichtliche Tradition kann eine ideologisch und organisatorisch festgeschlossene, wohldisziplinierte Minderheit verhältnismäßig rasch und leicht die proletarischen Massen mitreißen. Ganz anders aber liegen die Dinge in den Ländern mit einem sehr zahlreichen, alten Proletariat, das den Kopf noch voller bürgerlicher Anschauungen [...] hat.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 255.

¹⁰⁷ Levi, Paul. 1921. *Protokoll der Sitzung des Zentralausschusses vom 22. bis 26.2.1921*. Archive holding, Bundesarchiv Berlin: BArch SAPMO I 2/1/5.

¹⁰⁸ Zetkin, Clara. 1921. *Letter from C. Zetkin to V.I. Lenin, 01.02.1921*. Archive holding, Bundesarchiv Berlin: BArch SAPMO 4005/84, p. 20; In this letter, Zetkin refers to the Communist Party in Italy, as there was a similar debate going on there.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Hervé, *Dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist*, 18.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 256.

¹¹¹ Levi, 1921. *Unser Weg. Wider den Putschismus*. 04. March. Zugriff am 15. February 2023. <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/levi/1921/weg/index.htm>.

¹¹² Zetkin, Clara. 1921. *Letter from C. Zetkin to V.I. Lenin, 14.04.1921*. Archive holding, Bundesarchiv Berlin: BArch SAPMO 4005/85, p. 34.

She assured: “Ich bin durchaus für Aktion. Aber ich muss die geplante Aktion für durchaus verfehlt ansehen.”¹¹³

In a personal conversation between Lenin and Zetkin in June 1921, Lenin criticized Zetkin’s behavior. On the one hand, he, too, was no supporter of the *Offensivstrategie*: “Ist das überhaupt eine Theorie? Bewahre, das ist eine Illusion, ist Romantik, ja, nichts als Romantik.”¹¹⁴ On the other hand, Lenin condemned Zetkin’s resignation from the central office of the KPD and her reluctance to find a compromise. “Sagen Sie mir, wie konnten Sie eine solche Kapitaldummheit begehen, jawohl, eine Kapitaldummheit, und aus der Zentrale davonlaufen? Wo hatten Sie nur den Verstand?”¹¹⁵ His message was clear: “Sie müssen mir in die Hand versprechen, dass Sie nie mehr solch unüberlegten Streich machen, sonst ist es mit unserer Freundschaft aus.”¹¹⁶ In his eyes, Zetkin’s mistake had been to disobey the authority of the party’s majority and the advice from the ECCI – a breach of discipline.¹¹⁷ Lenin set conditions that Zetkin should comply with to preserve her position, which included refraining from her support of Levi.¹¹⁸

Zetkin later publicly apologized for her opposition, at the Third World Congress of the Second International, on July 2nd, 1921: “Ich bekenne [...], dass ich [...] zwei Fehler gemacht habe, und zwar zwei große Fehler.”¹¹⁹ She said that she had not distinguished the struggle of the proletarian masses in the *Märzaktion* from the central office leadership, and that she had not separated the party’s will from its theoretical attitude. Under the given circumstances, it is questionable whether this apology was sincere. Essentially, she had been offered an ultimatum: Preserve her good contacts and her position within the party and the Comintern, or become the ‘Fall Zetkin,’ just like Levi had become the ‘Fall Levi.’¹²⁰ A peace agreement was signed between the two halves of the German party on July 9th, 1921, and Zetkin was reelected into the central office at the party conference in Jena in August 1921.¹²¹

With Lenin’s deteriorating state of health, Stalin’s increase of power, and the growing power struggle within the Soviet and German communist parties, Zetkin’s political influence decreased. After the peace agreement, the two wings inside the KPD kept existing, and the left wing stayed

¹¹³ Zetkin, *Letter from C. Zetkin to V.I. Lenin, 14.04.1921*, p. 35.

¹¹⁴ Zetkin, Clara. 1924. *Erinnerungen an Lenin. Aus dem Briefwechsel Clara Zetkins mit W. I. Lenin und N. K. Krupskaja*, Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1957. January 30. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/zetkin/lenin/titlepage.html>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 258; The ECCI also condemned the disciplinary breach.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Ibid., 262-265.

¹¹⁹ Zetkin, Clara. 1921. *Redebeitrag über die Märzaktion*. July 02. Accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://sites.google.com/site/sozialistischeklassiker2punkt0/zetkin/zetkin-kommunistische-taktik/clara-zetkin-redebeitrag-ueber-die-maerzaktion>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.: “Ich wehre mich dagegen, dass man hier einen *Fall Zetkin* konstruiert und nach dem *Fall Levi* einen *Fall Zetkin* behandelt.”

¹²¹ Cf. Badia, Gilbert. 1994. *Clara Zetkin. Eine neue Biographie*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 212.

powerful.¹²² The split was mainly a generational divide. While Zetkin was part of the older, originally social democratic generation, younger party members like the leftist leaders Arkadi Maslow (1891-1941) and Ruth Fischer (1895-1961) had been Communists for most of their political careers. The generations thus had a different understanding of communism.¹²³ For Zetkin, it meant an improved 'reissue' of social democracy, while the leftists insisted on a total break with their social democratic past, much like the Bolsheviks.¹²⁴

From the events after the *Deutscher Oktober* in 1923, it becomes even more clear that Zetkin was slowly ousted politically. With the support of the ECCI, the KPD leadership under Brandler and August Thalheimer (1884-1948) had prepared an armed overthrow in Germany. The plan had been to seize power and signal revolution in Central Europe, the long-term goal being a communist world revolution. However, the revolution was thwarted by measures taken by the imperial government, which led to great disappointment in Moscow. Evidently, the situation in Germany had been incorrectly communicated by the German party leadership. Brandler had exaggerated when communicating the chances of success to the ECCI. The failure of the uprising was taken as a pretext by the ECCI to initiate the disempowerment of the old rightist cadres and the seizure of power by the young leftist forces, to which Zetkin also fell victim.¹²⁵

In the following years, Zetkin was limited in her political activity. Due to her sickness, she spent an increasing amount of time in health resorts in Moscow. In terms of publicity, she only appeared in Soviet periodicals with small appeals, while vanishing from the German communist media landscape.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, thanks to Russian intervention, the leftist wing of the KPD became predominant in 1924, and the process of Bolshevization was in full swing.¹²⁷ Zetkin did remain a member of the Reichstag.¹²⁸

1.4. Concluding Remarks

The events discussed in this chapter show Zetkin's position in the growing division within the KPD. She was undeniably a part of the older generation in the party and could not withstand the political shift that had started in the Bolshevik party and was now spreading within the KPD. However, because she was a respected party member – indeed, one of its founders – she was not radically excluded, but rather kept down. The anticlimactic end to such a brilliant political career

¹²² Cf. Ibid., 223.

¹²³ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 296.

¹²⁴ Cf. Ibid., 241.

¹²⁵ Cf. Ibid., 294.

¹²⁶ Cf. Ibid., 296.

¹²⁷ Cf. Badia, *Clara Zetkin*, 225.

¹²⁸ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 301.

would later be presented in a different light, as with Zetkin's bourgeois mentality and her relationships. This chapter has thus suggested the most important passages to pay special attention to in GDR commemoration, as Zetkin's image was reshaped to fit the SED's ideological framework.

Chapter Two – Historiography in the GDR

During German partition, in the West, Zetkin became more of a marginal figure. On the other side of the border, however, Zetkin became an “iconic”¹²⁹ socialist heroine. To reshape the historical narrative and influence collective memory, one of the SED’s main strategies was to influence historiography. This included the depiction of Zetkin in biographies and history books. Historiography was highly esteemed by the SED, as it was a means to educate the people according to Marxist-Leninist ideology, as well as a means for the foundation or justification of their political courses of action and visions.¹³⁰ With the publication of Zetkin’s work and biography, the SED particularly wanted to reach women. Zetkin had potential to provide an idealized image of the female socialist and mother and could thus be formed into role model. According to Susanne Kranz, the SED’s “mommy politics”¹³¹ aimed at reproducing an image of the perfect socialist woman, who, in return for legal equality to men, would be an equally productive worker, and a wife and mother.¹³² As this chapter illustrates, the biographical accounts by Wilhelm Pieck (1957), Luise Dornemann (1959), Dieter Goetze (1982), and the mentions of Zetkin in the *Lehrbuch der deutschen Geschichte* (1977) can be viewed as a part of this political strategy. By avoiding controversial topics on the one hand and emphasizing exemplary aspects on the other, they created an image of Zetkin that represented the desired socialist women’s image.

The first two biographies discussed in this chapter are classified in the third of Olsen’s stages, where the memories of the antifascist struggle were transferred to the upcoming generation and the interpretations of the past were intended to benefit the political purposes of the present. This was between 1955 and 1969.¹³³ The *Lehrbuch* and the Goetze’s biography are classified in the fourth stage, between 1969 and 1985.¹³⁴ Here, above all, a changed view of Stalin can be detected.

2.1. Wilhelm Pieck, 1957

In 1957 and 1960, two volumes were published by the *Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED* with a selection of Zetkin’s writings, letters, and speeches. Among other things, the *Institut* was a leading academic institution in the discipline of historical studies. It was a department of the SED’s central committee. This connection allowed direct influence by the party on the publication,

¹²⁹ Dollard, Catherine. 2009. *The Surplus Woman: Unmarried in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918*. New York: Berghahn Books, 92.

¹³⁰ Cf. Ebenfeld, *Geschichte nach Plan*, 8.

¹³¹ Kranz, *Women’s Role in the German Democratic Republic*, 79.

¹³² Cf. *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³³ Cf. Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 12.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.

which made it a vehicle for their memory politics. Consequently, publications like these were remarkably shaped by the political and ideological general line of the SED.¹³⁵ The first volume of the publication contains a preface by Wilhelm Pieck, a chairman of the SED – moreover, a former member of the SPD, Spartacist League, and later a KPD member – and a valued Stalin supporter. Over sixteen pages, Pieck provided a short overview of Zetkin’s biography.

This biography exemplifies how certain elements in Zetkin’s life were slightly altered to create the preferred image of her. This starts with the justification of her bourgeois family background. On the first pages, Pieck described Zetkin’s childhood and learning years. He stated: “Clara Zetkin, zunächst gefühlsmäßig für die sozialistischen Ideen eingenommen, wandte sich dem Studium des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus zu und wurde zu einer glühenden Marxistin.”¹³⁶ With the latter expression describing a person who is a Marxist with the utmost conviction, Pieck intended to emphasize that Zetkin was an excellent and utter socialist. This was because he had to justify her bourgeois family background and education. While Pieck’s account did not hide this fact, he placed an emphasis on Zetkin’s excellent knowledge and her conviction to change ‘sides.’ After all, the image of Zetkin as a socialist heroine would have lacked credibility if the bourgeois influences in her life and thought had been discussed in detail.

Another detail altered in Pieck’s narration is the relationship between Clara and her first partner, Ossip. According to his biography, Clara married Ossip after moving to Paris.¹³⁷ However, as indicated above, they were never married legally.¹³⁸ The subtle, yet deliberate change was intended to conceal this unconventional arrangement. The second relationship with Zundel was not mentioned at all. To provide a good role model, Zetkin’s individual idiosyncrasies were concealed. The emancipated decision Zetkin had made back in her time evidently did not fit into the stereotypical image of women and marriage promoted by the SED. This passage thus fed into the SED’s women’s policy, which promoted and reaffirmed a traditional role for women.¹³⁹ Since Zetkin was to be considered a role model for women, they did not want to give the wrong example, and thus Pieck deliberately adjusted these kinds of details in accordance with their official narrative. This was cleverly done by sticking to the historical narrative for the most part and only adding one small detail.

Not only were details added – some were omitted. This resulted in an incomplete and less problematic picture. In Pieck’s preface, little detail is given on political issues, to avoid controversy surrounding Zetkin and to keep an immaculate political reputation. In the discussion of the

¹³⁵ Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 416.

¹³⁶ Pieck, Wilhelm. 1957. “Vorwort.” In *Clara Zetkin. Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften, Band I, V-XII*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, V.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, VI.

¹³⁸ Cf. Hervé, *Dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist*, 14.

¹³⁹ Kranz, *Women’s Role in the German Democratic Republic*, 71.

intraparty disputes of the KPD in the 1920s, some key points were left out. Pieck stated: “In den inneren Auseinandersetzungen und Klärungsprozessen der KPD blieb Clara Zetkin nicht frei von Schwankungen.”¹⁴⁰ These changes in opinion originated, according to Pieck, from the past of the party’s leftist wing.¹⁴¹ With no further elaboration following, the events were inadequately dealt with, leaving many questions unanswered. Essentially, the facts were twisted in Pieck’s account. Zetkin had not mistakenly positioned herself on the rightist side. She had intentionally stuck to her position even after she acknowledged – or at least officially admitted – the breach of discipline. Zetkin’s changing stance in the conflict was thus presented by Pieck as a mere personal error, which neglected the fact that Zetkin’s situation represented the emerging split in the party. Moreover, as the conflicts surrounding the *Märzaktion* ushered in the last phase of Zetkin’s political life, their discussion should have been of more relevance to the author. Instead, Pieck’s narrative resolved the controversial issue by continuing to provide only vague information. He stated: “Sie verstand aus ihren Fehlern zu lernen, sie zu überwinden und über sie herauszuwachsen.”¹⁴² Whether by ‘mistakes’ Pieck meant the stance that Zetkin took in the debate around the importance of the masses, or the fact that she broke party discipline by resigning from the central office, remains unclear. What can be seen here, then, is the evasion of a topic that required critical examination. The intention was to place Zetkin in the general tradition of the party, without assigning her to the rightist or leftist side. This created continuity between the SED’s history and the KPD on the one hand, and Zetkin’s position on the other, thereby enabling a memory link between the reader and Zetkin herself. Moreover, Pieck was a convinced Stalinist, which makes it seem plausible that he did not want to contrast the two historical figures, but to present them as a single entity. Various ideological and tactical factors thus play a role here.

Pieck thus avoided addressing controversial topics by providing incomplete information and using ambiguous wording. This way, he made Zetkin into an unproblematic and heroic character. Simultaneously, aspects of Zetkin’s work that could benefit the party’s interests in the present were highlighted. For example, Zetkin’s antimilitarist stance and her antiwar agitation were mentioned several times,¹⁴³ which implies that it was considered one of her most important qualities. The emphasis specifically supported the GDR’s antifascist self-conception, as in the construction of their history they attached great importance to emphasizing antifascist resistance. By highlighting Zetkin’s role in that, she became an integral part of this narrative. Another emphasis was laid on Zetkin’s role as an educator of women and children. Pieck stated that it was Zetkin’s

¹⁴⁰ Pieck, *Vorwort*, X.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.; “In den inneren Auseinandersetzungen und Klärungsprozessen der KPD blieb CZ nicht frei von Schwankungen, die aus der Vergangenheit der deutschen Linken herrührten.”

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., IX, XII.

‘vocation’ as a mother and pedagogue to address the problems in family life and the education of children at school and home.¹⁴⁴ In this phrasing, which carried a religious implication, the intention to portray Zetkin as an all-encompassing embodiment of the feminine becomes evident, as the historical figure was presented in an idealized way. This was a means to strengthen her exemplary role towards the women of the GDR. Pieck’s entire biography was thus designed to present Zetkin as a proper role model. In the process, individual traits that didn’t quite fit the picture were covered up, while traits that fit the picture well were emphasized.

2.2. Luise Dornemann, 1959

To mark the 100th anniversary of Zetkin’s birth, the *Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED* published a biography on her.¹⁴⁵ The author, Luise Dornemann, was a functionary of the Democratic Women’s League of Germany (DFD), a women’s organization that was part of the GDR’s National Front.¹⁴⁶ The 562 pages cover a description of Zetkin’s life, starting with her earliest childhood memories. As the preface indicates, the biography was aimed primarily at women: “Dieses Buch [...] will den werktätigen Menschen, vor allem unseren Frauen und Müttern, das Leben dieser großen deutsche Sozialistin und Friedenskämpferin nahebringen.”¹⁴⁷ This illustrates the intention behind this sort of publication, as they were meant to familiarize women in particular with the historical figure, enabling them to draw on her as a role model.

Rather than being scholarly in tone, the biography reads like a novel. In addition, the narrative is very rich in detail. It seems unlikely for the author to have gathered this kind of information from first-hand accounts of Zetkin’s life, especially regarding the limited number of sources used. Passages like the following reinforce the sense that creative freedom was taken to fill in the gaps:

[Clara und Ossip] gingen in bedrücktem Schweigen nebeneinander her, beide mit ihren Gedanken beschäftigt, die um den gleichen Punkt kreisten. Schließlich begann Ossip zu sprechen, von seiner Liebe, von dem unsicheren Leben des Revolutionärs, das ihm geboten habe, über seine Gefühle zu schweigen.¹⁴⁸

Although the sources are listed at the end of the book, there is no use of footnotes, which makes it difficult to trace the exact origin of the information.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., VIII.

¹⁴⁵ This implies an influence on the publication by the party similar to Pieck’s.

¹⁴⁶ Dornemann was also author of another biography, on Jenny Marx, published in 1953.

¹⁴⁷ Dornemann, Luise. 1959. *Clara Zetkin. Ein Lebensbild*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 47.

From the detailed and precise characterization of Zetkin in this biography it becomes clear that an attempt was made to match Zetkin with a preformed image of the socialist heroine. Three aspects of Dornemann's characterization stand out. First, she emphasized Zetkin's warm and motherly heart with much empathy for the people surrounding her.¹⁴⁹ The image of women propagated by the SED can be identified here since great value was placed on mothers, and being a mother was regarded the highest expression of femininity.¹⁵⁰ Second, added details like Zetkin's racing heart when approaching the speaker's lectern before a big speech show that the author attempted to build a connection between the reader and Zetkin through emotions, through which the reader would identify with her. Zetkin was thus made relatable to the reader.¹⁵¹ A third emphasis was put on Zetkin's strength and confidence: "Clara Zetkin war eine starke und kräftige Frau und besaß neben einem unerschöpflichen Optimismus einen eisernen Willen."¹⁵² By highlighting those three aspects, she was presented as the all-encompassing socialist woman, who could combine traditional female values with a modern, socialist work ethic.

Dornemann attempted to conceal the exact details of Clara's and Ossip's relationship, to set a good example for the reader. On the timeline in the back of the biography, the entry for 'Ende 1882' says: "Clara geht nach Paris. Sie heiratet Ossip Zetkin."¹⁵³ There is no wedding mentioned in the text of the biography. Instead, the descriptions of Ossip change throughout the text. While in the passage on Ossip's arrest in 1880, Zetkin wonders, what would happen to her "Freund"¹⁵⁴ next, Zetkin encounters her "Mann"¹⁵⁵ in their new apartment at their reunion in Paris. Ossip is then referred to as Clara's *Mann* for the following pages until the story reaches his illness and death, whereupon Zetkin grieves her "Gatten."¹⁵⁶ While the German word *Mann* could either be translated into *man* or *husband*, the word *Gatte* is non-ambiguous in its meaning and thus clearly refers to Ossip as Clara's husband.¹⁵⁷ Thus, Dornemann implied exclusively through changing wording that there was nothing extraordinary to note regarding the relationship between the two – a clever solution that is even less noticeable than Pieck's. The intention behind this was similar to Pieck's, especially because in Dornemann's biography, the focus was very much on emphasizing Zetkin's femininity and promoting a traditional women's image, in compensation for her political self-determination and maturity.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid., 8; 117.

¹⁵⁰ Kranz, *Women's Role in the German Democratic Republic*, 71.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin*, 79.

¹⁵² Ibid., 71.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 436.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 46; "Was würde dem Freund geschehen?"

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 78.

¹⁵⁷ Additionally, Zundel is later referred to as Zetkin's "zweite[r] Gatte[.]"; Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin*, 153.

Like Pieck, Dornemann was confronted with the difficulty of integrating Zetkin's bourgeois family background into the narrative of the socialist heroine. She put a strong emphasis on the fact that Zetkin set herself apart from her surroundings early on, to create a clear distinction between the environment into which she was born and that which she chose for herself as she grew up. According to Dornemann, she soon outgrew her teachers, turning to socialism out of interest and a devotion to social problems: "[...] Clara war damals schon über ihre Lehrerinnen hinausgewachsen und in dem Begriff, einen Weg zu beschreiten, der von den Plänen, die Mutter und Lehrerin für sie hatten, ganz verschieden war."¹⁵⁸ According to the biography Zetkin had reoriented herself early on. There is mention of early socially critical and revolutionary readings, which, as current research agrees, never took place.¹⁵⁹ Clearly, an attempt was made to stress Zetkin's inner convictions and at the same time to formally distance her from her bourgeois family background. Further in the biography, Zetkin's understanding of emancipation and her views on women's politics were described as essentially socialist, which neglected her bourgeois mentality.¹⁶⁰ This way, the image created of Zetkin would fit better into the position of a socialist role model.

Since the biography did not go into much detail when it came to political topics, the *Märzaktion* was also not sufficiently addressed. Dornemann mainly referred to Zetkin's speech at the Third World Congress, where she had apologized for her resignation from the central office. She thus skipped over the part of the conflict where Zetkin had resigned from the central office and spoken out against the leftist direction within the party. Once again, this was an attempt to circumvent controversial issues. Dornemann merely depicted the concluding conversation between Zetkin and Lenin: "[Lenin] gab ihrer Auffassung im wesentlichen recht, doch auch sie wurde von ihm hart kritisiert [...]."¹⁶¹ The situation is resolved by the simple conclusion: "Clara Zetkin versprach, [...] niemals wieder etwas Derartiges zu tun."¹⁶² The gravity of the situation was thus not presented, as there was no mention of the fact that Zetkin's opinion was no longer in the interest of the party majority. The author created an image of Zetkin that was more ideologically and politically straightforward and in accordance with her party. By denying the changes that were taking place, the author aimed at creating historical continuity.

Another attempt at creating historical continuity, Dornemann stressed Zetkin's good relationship to the Bolsheviks: "Claras Verhältnis zur Partei der Bolschewiki war unerschütterlich fest. Dies blieb ihre Überzeugung bis zum Tode."¹⁶³ The fact that the Bolsheviks were portrayed as a homogeneous group and that no distinction was made in the various currents or opinions

¹⁵⁸ Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin*, 30.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 419.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Dornemann, *Clara Zetkin*, 117-118.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 339.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 340.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 391.

within the party indicates that the image that was to be conveyed was one of unity. Lenin had become Zetkin's friend and in terms of ideology and views on politics, they were mostly in agreement. However, in the last years of the Weimar Republic, Zetkin criticized the omnipotence of the Comintern leadership over European communist parties.¹⁶⁴ This was partly due to her views on Stalin's politics and person. Dornemann's statement thus did not consider the political differences within Bolshevik leadership, as it simplified Zetkin's relationship with them. While in 1953, Nikita Khrushchev (1894-1971) had initiated de-Stalinization in Soviet Russia, the GDR initially resisted this process. This had mainly been on Walter Ulbricht's (1893-1973) initiative.¹⁶⁵ It was not until 1961 that such a process was initiated in the GDR. Still, Stalinism was never entirely abandoned.¹⁶⁶ Thus, by creating this continuity in Bolshevik leadership, as well as in Zetkin's relationship with them, a stable tradition was created, and the parties involved were presented in a better light.

Dornemann's biography offered a romanticized version of Zetkin's life in which sensitive or controversial issues were significantly abbreviated or skirted around. Along with the novel-like style, it was intended for leisure reading and above all to appeal to the female reader, who was to take a leaf out of this idealized version of Zetkin. Moreover, she was portrayed as an integral part of the 'stable' tradition in the KPD leadership and German-Soviet friendship.

2.3. Lehrbuch der deutschen Geschichte, 1977

The *Lehrbuch der deutschen Geschichte* was a multi-volume textbook series for universities. The textbooks were based on a Marxist-Leninist worldview and intended to form an authoritative standard work on German history in the GDR.¹⁶⁷ A collective of authors was assembled in 1952, consisting of exclusively Marxist historians. According to Ebenfeld, the isolation of the collective prevented ideological clashes: "Man war, in ideologischem Sinne, unter sich, dass die *Bürgerlichen* ausgeschlossen blieben."¹⁶⁸ The process of writing the textbook was dragged over several years, and by the time the last volume was published in 1969, updates were already due for the first volume, published ten years before.¹⁶⁹ The work of the collective was constantly monitored by the SED's central committee. The chairmanship was held by Alfred Meusel, who was also the director

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Bois, Marcel. 2008. "Clara Zetkin und die Stalinisierung von KPD und Komintern." In *Clara Zetkin in ihrer Zeit. Neue Fakten, Erkenntnisse, Wertungen*, von Ulla Plener, 149-156. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 151.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Weber, Hermann. 2012. *Die DDR 1945-1990*. München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 48.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶⁷ Ebenfeld, *Geschichte nach Plan*, 144.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 146.

of the *Museum für deutsche Geschichte* (MfDG), a museum that was established parallel to the *Lehrbuch* and opened in 1952.¹⁷⁰

Compared to the biographies discussed in this chapter, a book on German history inherently creates different expectations for the extent of detail on Zetkin's involvement in certain events. However, her name should be found in places where events are described in which she played a crucial role. In analyzing these textbook series, the focus lay not so much on finding the passages where Zetkin was mentioned, and more on the ones where she was not – but should have been. In the passages where Zetkin was mentioned, she forms a part of the collective of fellow leading Social Democrats and Communists, as can be seen in the following quote from a chapter discussing the years from 1903 to 1905:

[...] desto stärker wurde der Widerstand der konsequent revolutionären Sozialdemokraten. [...] Ihre hervorragenden Vertreter, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, Clara Zetkin u.a. wurden auf den folgenden Parteitag [...] bemüht, die Partei entsprechend den Lehren von Marx und Engels auf dem revolutionären Weg zum Sozialismus weiterzuführen.¹⁷¹

Recurring names were listed with designations such as “bedeutendste Führer”¹⁷² or “hervorragende Führer der Linken.”¹⁷³ This way, while reading the book, the names imprint themselves in the reader's memory. The intention behind this was to create a fixed set of socialist heroes and heroines to be placed in the GDR's tradition. The collective mention of these names implied a unity amongst them, which neglected their individual differences and pressed them into a mold for socialist role models. They were ascribed common qualities and presented as a collective entity.

Die Linken [...] vertraten klar und entschieden die Interessen der Arbeiterklasse. [Sie] verteidigten [...] die marxistische Theorie und trugen zu ihrer Weiterentwicklung bei. Als überzeugte Verfechter des proletarischen Internationalismus suchten sie insbesondere die Erfahrungen der ersten russischen Revolution im Klassenkampf der deutschen Arbeiter anzuwenden und waren begeisterte Propagandisten des politischen Massenstreiks. Die Linken waren hervorragende Kämpfer gegen den Militarismus.¹⁷⁴

In this collectivization, the individuality of each figure, including Zetkin, was lost. They became representatives of a certain nostalgic memory of the history of the workers' movement.

For this study, most remarkable in the textbooks are those passages in which mention of Zetkin might be expected, but none occurs. For instance, the volume *Deutschland von 1917 bis*

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Ebenfeld, *Geschichte nach Plan*, 144.

¹⁷¹ Klein, Fritz, 1977. *Deutschland von 1897/98 bis 1917. Deutschland in der Periode des Imperialismus bis zur Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution (Lehrbuch der Deutschen Geschichte)*. Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 171.

¹⁷² *Lehrbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 171.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 246-247.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

1933¹⁷⁵ provided a discussion of the intraparty disputes in the KPD during the 1920s.¹⁷⁶ According to the authors, the *Offensivstrategie* was a major weakness of the KPD. They argued that it had been an error of the leftists to assume that there was no necessity for a mass movement.¹⁷⁷ The textbook thus aligned ideologically with Lenin's party theory. It condemned the leftists' failure to assess the revolutionary potential in Germany. By the time of the publication of this volume of the *Lehrbuch*, the process of de-Stalinization had been set in motion in the GDR.¹⁷⁸ The clear position statement in this dispute – and the mere recognition of its existence are indicators of the change in the official narrative of the SED's memory politics. Nevertheless, it was clearly expressed that Levi had violated party discipline with his public pronouncements against the party's decisions, thus clearly justifying his expulsion from the party.¹⁷⁹ Simultaneously, the conflicts were projected solely onto him, as there is no mention of his supporters within the central office – including Zetkin. A controversy around Zetkin was consequently avoided by the creation of a dichotomy. Levi was blamed for the conflict as its sole perpetrator, while Zetkin was left out of the narrative.

The *Lehrbuch* accordingly aimed to establish well-defined traditions of working-class heroes and heroines by presenting them as a unified collective with common aspirations. In addition, efforts were made to avoid controversies surrounding individuals such as Zetkin. A dichotomy can be detected between those to be included or excluded from the party's tradition.

2.4. Dieter Goetze, 1982

The biography *Clara Zetkin* by Dieter Goetze was published in 1982 by the *VEB Bibliographisches Institut Leipzig*, a state-owned publisher.¹⁸⁰ The SED had direct influence on the publication. Goetze was a co-author of other publications, published for example by the *Akademie für Gesellschaftswissenschaften beim ZK der SED*. Amongst the literature in the bibliography were Dornemann's and Pieck's publications.

It becomes evident when reading Goetze's biography that he based his work on Dornemann's and Pieck's narratives, as they show many commonalities. For instance, the marriage construct was maintained. Ossip, the "aufrechter Mann,"¹⁸¹ who was forced to leave Leipzig in

¹⁷⁵ Full title: *Deutschland von 1917 bis 1933. Von der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution bis zum Ende der Weimarer Republik*.

¹⁷⁶ *Lehrbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 170.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Weber, *Die DDR 1945-1990*, 61.

¹⁷⁹ *Lehrbuch der deutschen Geschichte*, 172.

¹⁸⁰ Institut, Bibliographisches. 2012. *Verlagsgeschichte*. Accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120114143151/http://www.bi-media.de/unternehmen/verlagsgeschichte.php>; The publishing house expropriated in 1946 and nationalized in 1948, making it a part of the official GDR publishing houses.

¹⁸¹ Goetze, Dieter. 1982. *Clara Zetkin*. Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 12.

1881, became Clara's husband in a "glücklichen Ehe"¹⁸² upon her arrival in Paris. This shows that within the different biographies, there was an attempt to maintain a common narrative. This way, the image of Zetkin favored by the SED was maintained. Goetze also followed the lead of the other biographers in his reconstruction of the *Märzaktion*. Presenting a significantly abbreviated retelling of the disputes, the author used ambiguous phrasing so as not to shed a negative light on any of the involved parties. Like Dornemann, Goetze only addressed Zetkin's and Lenin's conversation in advance of the Third World Congress: "[Lenin gab Zetkin] den für die Entwicklung der gesamten Partei wichtigen Hinweis: 'Ihr in Deutschland müsst jetzt das Examen in der Taktik der Masseneroberung bestehen. Immer an den Menschen denken, Clara [...]: mit den Massen, durch die Massen'."¹⁸³ This quote was taken from Zetkin's *Erinnerungen an Lenin*.¹⁸⁴ However, in her script, this part came many pages after Lenin's expression of his discontent with Zetkin's behavior. It also does not become apparent that a conflict preceded this discussion that represented the growing split in the KPD. Goetze thus created the pretense of completeness, while not addressing the specific point of conflict and misleadingly summarizing the events. He had thus chosen a strategy similar to Pieck's and Dornemann's, avoiding a potential controversy around the situation and in the process creating an image of Zetkin that could be seen more readily as a role model.

Goetze found another strategy for not addressing the changing political situation in the 1920s, or Zetkin's role in it. According to him, by 1922, Zetkin was already in such poor health that she was hardly involved in political matters.¹⁸⁵ Granted, Zetkin did spend quite some time in medical treatment during the last years of her life. She did, however, stay up to date on political events whenever possible, sending comments in letters wherever she was.¹⁸⁶ Goetze, on the other hand, indicated that her tasks in these years were social rather than political.¹⁸⁷ He traced Zetkin's declining importance in the KPD on her declining health, avoiding the discussion of controversial issues. Moreover, he essentially shifted the focus to her activities in the Soviet Union during these times.

Goetze thus continued and expanded the narrative of the other biographies. In this way, a unified image was created within the GDR's historiography.

¹⁸² Goetze, *Clara Zetkin*, 14.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁸⁴ Zetkin, *Erinnerungen an Lenin*; Zetkin had documented this conversation from her memory and published it a few years later.

¹⁸⁵ Goetze, *Clara Zetkin*, 75.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 302.

¹⁸⁷ Goetze, *Clara Zetkin*, 77.

2.5. Concluding Remarks

Essentially, then, the same elements can be detected in the three biographies and the *Lehrbuch*. Historiography – an instrument of SED memory politics – made deliberate changes in its retelling of Zetkin's life by bypassing controversial topics and highlighting exemplary traits and activities. This way, the image of Zetkin was idealized to the point of historical incorrectness, to better fit the stereotype she was intended to represent to GDR women. She was placed in the GDR's tradition and history and was made a representative and supporter of its ideologic 'founding fathers' Lenin and Stalin, despite personal differences with the latter. The SED benefitted from this, as they were able to legitimize their power and control within the state through the construction of tradition and shaping the historical narrative. The use of Zetkin's biography as a moral compass worthy of emulating offered them the opportunity to exert more control and influence on identity formation within the state.

Chapter Three – Media

Media such as newspapers and films were a significant part of GDR memory politics. For this chapter, the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* and the film *Wo Andere Schweigen* have been selected for the way they exemplify the representation of Zetkin in GDR media. As will be shown in this chapter, the articles in the newspaper were not only meant to commemorate Zetkin but also had a contemporary reference and often directly appealed to the reader. This was very similar in the case of the film. Elements were deliberately added to give the story a topical reference and to instrumentalize Zetkin for the political endeavors of the time.

The articles discussed in this chapter are mainly located in the first three of Olsen's stages. As will become clear in the subchapter, there was an emphasis on antifascism, and the articles contributed to the tradition-building efforts of the SED. Moreover, very clear in these articles are the attempt to create interpretations of the past that spoke to the political concerns of the time.¹⁸⁸ The film *Wo Andere Schweigen* was shown in stage four, where the antifascist narrative was projected to a bigger public.¹⁸⁹

3.1. Neues Deutschland, 1946-1989

After the merge of SPD and KPD by the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) in 1946, former SPD-newspaper *Das Volk* and former KPD-newspaper *Deutsche Volkszeitung* became *Neues Deutschland*.¹⁹⁰ From 1946 on, the jurisdiction of the SMAD was extended to the licensing for the press, film, and publishing industries, enabling a broad exercise of censorship.¹⁹¹ Being directly subordinate to the central committee of the SED and headed by the department for press and broadcasting, the newspaper became the central organ of propaganda for the SED.¹⁹² Through it, official and – in between the lines – unofficial politics were communicated.¹⁹³ The newspaper also formed a guideline for other newspapers in its political leanings.¹⁹⁴

As can be seen in an article by Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl (1894-1964) in the issue of April 24th, 1946, the newspaper made no claim to objectivity.¹⁹⁵ On the contrary, the newspaper

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 12.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Meiners, Jochen. 1987. *Die Doppelte Deutschlandpolitik. Zur nationalen Politik der SED im Spiegel ihres Zentralorgans »Neues Deutschland« 1946 bis 1952*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 3.

¹⁹¹ Ebenfeld, *Geschichte nach Plan*, 31.

¹⁹² Cf. Meiners, *Die Doppelte Deutschlandpolitik*, 6.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Fiedler, Anke, und Michael Mayen. 2011. *Fiktionen für das Volk: DDR-Zeitungen als PR-Instrument. Fallstudien zu den Zentralorganen Neues Deutschland, Junge Welt, Neue Zeit und Der Morgen*. Berlin: LIT Verlag, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Meiners, *Die Doppelte Deutschlandpolitik*, 6.

was to be the voice of the party, serving as “das lebendige Glied zwischen der Parteiführung, der gesamten Parteigenossenschaft und dem deutschen Volke.”¹⁹⁶ The title of the newspaper indicated the general theme, or “watchword”¹⁹⁷ of the time: ‘New Germany – New People.’ It aimed to work towards a “neues Deutschland, [...] dessen Aufgabe darin besteht, dem Frieden zu dienen und Deutschland wieder einzugliedern in die Familie der anständigen Völker”¹⁹⁸ – the latter pointing to its focus on antifascism. The newspaper assured to be the voice of “Bauern, der Frauen und Mütter, der Jugend und der deutschen Intelligenz.”¹⁹⁹ The first chief editors – Max Nierich, Lex Ende, and Rudolf Herrstadt, all of whom were former SPD or KPD members – were soon replaced by an editorial board, which readily submitted to the dictates of the SED leadership.²⁰⁰ The party thus had full control over the publications of the newspaper, making it a key vehicle for their memory politics.

From the years 1946 to 1989, hundreds of articles can be found with Zetkin’s name in them. Often, she is mentioned together with other familiar names from the socialist movement of her time.²⁰¹ This collective mention of historical socialist figures is a commonality with the *Lehrbuch*. It implied a unity between the figures, while at the same time the name imprinted themselves on the reader’s mind. This was to strengthen their memory of them and to affirm their role model function, at the same time creating a memory link between the current generation and the socialist heroes and heroines, generating and building on new traditions. In other articles, Zetkin is the main topic. Many of those articles were published around the anniversary of her birth- or death day, the 5th of July and the 20th of June, or IWD, the 8th of March.

The typical structure in these articles was an introductory paragraph on the inducement of the article, a biography and characterization in several paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph about Zetkin’s importance for the GDR. This structure indicates that the articles had a dual function, as the reader obtained ideologized information on the historical figure, through which, in turn, a message was transmitted that fed into current political interests of the SED. The message differed somewhat depending on the article. As with the biographical accounts discussed in the previous chapter, the articles were mainly directed towards women: “[D]ie deutschen Frauen

¹⁹⁶ Grotewohl, Otto, und Wilhelm Pieck. 1946. “Dem Zentralorgan ‘Neues Deutschland’ zum Geleit.“ *Neues Deutschland*, 24. April: 1.

¹⁹⁷ Brock, Angela. 2009. “Producing the ‘Socialist Personality’? Socialisation, Education and the Emergence of New Patterns of Behaviour.” In *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?*, by Mary Fulbrook, 220-252. New York: Berghahn Books, 222.

¹⁹⁸ ND, 24.04.1946, 1.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Meiners, *Die Doppelte Deutschlandpolitik*, 7.

²⁰¹ See for example: Be. 1948. “Brauchen wir ein Jungmädchenbuch?” *Neues Deutschland*, 13. August, 3: “[...] die Biographien vorbildlicher Frauen, wie Clara Zetkin und Madame Curie [...]”, and G., R. 1948. “Die Novemberrevolution und die Frauen.” *Neues Deutschland*, 10. November, 4: “Der große wegweisende Kampf der sozialistischen Frauen unter Führung von Klara Zetkin um Gleichberechtigung und ihr mutiger Kampf gegen den Krieg und die Kriegspolitik des sozialistischen Parteivorstandes [...]”

sollten, wie unsere Klara Zetkin, nicht rasten und ruhen, bis das Ziel endlich erreicht ist: Die einheitliche geschlossene sozialistische Arbeiterbewegung als sicherster Garant des Friedens, der Freiheit, des Glücks der Menschheit.”²⁰² Zetkin was thus given a pioneering function, whereas the articles commemorating her mainly served a propagandistic purpose. Depending on the article, four of Zetkin’s key characteristics were highlighted, contributing to her new image.

The first leading theme was the emphasis on Zetkin’s antimilitarist and antiimperialist stance. In every biographical account in the articles, there is mention of Zetkin’s “entschlossene[r] Kampf gegen den Krieg,”²⁰³ or an emphasis on her demand to fight “gegen den deutschen Imperialismus und Militarismus mit [...] dem politischen Massenstreik.”²⁰⁴ The latter also emphasized her support of Lenin’s theory of the masses. Frequently cited in these articles were Zetkin’s speeches at the Congress in Basel of 1912 and the International Women’s Conference in Bern of 1915, which she had organized to promote an antimilitarist mindset amongst proletarian women. One article from 1950 about the historical importance of Zetkin and the IWD provides a strong indication of the intention behind this specific type of article:

Deutschland, das schon einmal [...] das faschistische Kriegsverbrechen nicht verhindern konnte, soll heute nach dem Willen des amerikanischen Imperialismus das Kanonenfutter für einen neuen Weltkrieg gegen die sozialistische Sowjetunion stellen. [...] [V]or allem in den Händen der Frauen, als der Mehrheit des Volkes, liegt die Erhaltung des Friedens und damit die Zukunft der Menschheit.²⁰⁵

The articles thus had a strong contemporary relevance, since Zetkin’s antimilitarist stance was intended to provoke and reinforce an antimilitarist attitude in the reader. In general, then, historical figures like Zetkin were used as arguments or even evidence for the character and tradition of the GDR. Some years before the publication of this article, the Cold War had started. By emphasizing Zetkin’s antimilitarist convictions, the author²⁰⁶ reinforced the idea of a tradition of pacifist socialists. The text passage above is followed in the article by a quote by Stalin from October 13th, 1950: “es unterliegt keinem Zweifel, daß die Existenz eines friedliebenden demokratischen Deutschland neben dem Bestehen der friedliebenden Sowjetunion die Möglichkeit neuer Kriege in Europa ausschließt [...]”²⁰⁷ As seen before, this article placed Zetkin directly in the tradition of Stalin, as it linked their views together without critical examination of the two individuals’ respective views on violence and power. Ultimately, Zetkin’s peace efforts were emphasized and utilized for propaganda.

²⁰² Arendsee, Martha. 1946. “Zum Todestage von Klara Zetkin.” *Neues Deutschland*, 10. November : 4.

²⁰³ Ullrich, Lisa. 1948. “Zwei Begegnungen mit Clara Zetkin.” *Neues Deutschland*, 20. June: 3.

²⁰⁴ ND. 1957. “Ich muss dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist.” *Neues Deutschland*, 05. July: 1-2.

²⁰⁵ Arendsee, Martha. 1950. “Gemeinsam für die Sache des Friedens.” *Neues Deutschland*, 08. March: 4.

²⁰⁶ Martha Arendsee, former communist and member of the SED executive board.

²⁰⁷ ND, 08.03.1950, 4.

The second leading theme in the articles was the mention of Zetkin's late antifascist efforts. Zetkin "hat [...] das Menschenmöglichste getan, damit die Einheitsfront der Werktätigen gegen Faschismus und Kriegsgefahr zustande kommt,"²⁰⁸ one article stated, and another: "Clara Zetkin fand aufmunternde und erhebende Worte, bestärkte uns Frauen im Kampf gegen die drohende Gefahr des Nationalsozialismus."²⁰⁹ Fascism became a major issue in the last ten years of Zetkin's life, and so the articles refer primarily to one of her last speeches – the "letzte große Rede"²¹⁰ on the 30th of August 1932. Especially emphasized are the passion and power of the speech – a "flammende Anklage [gegen den Faschismus]."²¹¹ What is striking is the retrospective interpretation of Zetkin's statements, portraying them as if she had been able to foresee exactly the extent of what was to come. The account gives the impression that Zetkin's predictions went beyond a mere warning, giving her visionary abilities that, combined with the religiously tinged wording, present Zetkin as a kind of prophetess: "Es entging ihren sehenden Augen nicht, wie [...] wie das Monopolkapital das Aufkommen des Faschismus unterstützte, um ihn für seine Zwecke zu benutzen. Schon 1923 warnte sie vor den ungeheuren Gefahren des Faschismus und eines zweiten Weltkrieges."²¹² Another article used this connotation: "[...] wie eine Seherin kündigt sie die furchtbare Zukunft, vor der es kein Ausweichen gibt [...]."²¹³ This association idealized Zetkin, as it elevated her to an exceptional figure. The prominence of the mention of Zetkin's antifascist efforts in the articles served as a direct contribution to the perpetuation of the GDR's antifascist self-conception. As Zetkin was to provide a role model function to the GDR reader, this seemed to be of special interest to the SED.

The third leading theme was the mention of Zetkin's engagement in the international women's movement. Zetkin's early speech in Paris in 1889 is cited throughout many articles. They honored her lifelong dedication to women's rights and her role in the education of proletarian women.²¹⁴ In many places, it was emphasized that Zetkin had an excellent grasp of Marxist theory and made valuable contributions to its further development.²¹⁵ Similar to the biographies discussed in the previous chapter, the narrative was that as a young child, Zetkin had begun to critically observe and evaluate the social ills around her. Zetkin was presented as predestined for a socialist path of life, which set her apart from her surroundings:

²⁰⁸ ND, 19.06.1946, 3.

²⁰⁹ ND, 20.06.1948, 3; This article was written by Lisa Ullrich/Dreßler (1900-1986), a member of the Reichstag for the KPD from 1932-1933. She was a concentration camp survivor and joined the SED after the war. In the article, she recounts her encounters with Clara Zetkin, whom she greatly admired.

²¹⁰ ND, 05.07.1957, 1.

²¹¹ Ibid., 2.

²¹² Reinicke, Ilse. 1947. "Ein Leben für Frauenrechte und Frieden." *Neues Deutschland*, 05. July: 3.

²¹³ ND, 05.07.1957, 1.

²¹⁴ ND, 05.07.1947, 3; ND, 20.06.1948, 3.

²¹⁵ ND, 20.06.1948, 3.

Als [...] Gründungstaumel, wilde Spekulationen, Erstarren der Groß- und Rüstungsindustrie [...] die Mitarbeit der Frau in der Industrie erzwangen, entwickelte sich Klara Zetkin alsbald über die enge bürgerliche Frauenrechtleri hinaus zur Sozialistin. [...] Sie durchschaute die politischen Zusammenhänge und wußte nüchtern zwischen der wachsenden Macht der Reaktion und des Monopolkapitals und der analoggehenden unaufhaltsamen Verelendung breiter Volksmassen zu unterscheiden.²¹⁶

According to another article, as a young girl she listened to the speeches of Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel.²¹⁷ As mentioned before, this sort of depiction of her childhood, the early socialist socialization, was rather stereotyped and untrue.²¹⁸ More even, it was an attempt to justify the bourgeois environment that Zetkin grew up in, as it made her stand out and appear particularly self-determined. This way, Zetkin's understanding of Marxism was presented as even more profound, as it sprung from her well-founded and enlightened insights, which ultimately idealized her as a character and made her a better fit to be used as a role model. This representation can be considered as an attempt to portray Zetkin's understanding of women's emancipation as more profoundly socialist.

The fourth leading theme was the emphasis on Zetkin's close connection to the Soviet Union. Very few articles failed to mention her friendship with Lenin, as well as her enthusiasm towards the revolutions in 1905 and 1917. She was portrayed as an ambassador of the revolutionary spirit of the "russischen Brüder und Schwestern,"²¹⁹ forming the connective element between the Russian and the German proletarian movement – or more specifically the proletarian women's movement. There was no mention of how Zetkin's opinions towards the Soviet Union might have changed or shifted according to the Russian leadership, especially towards the end of Lenin's period. On the contrary, some articles noticeably exaggerated the degree of affection Zetkin felt towards Stalin: "[Zetkin] erkannte die große Bedeutung des Genossen Stalin als Fortführer des Werkes Lenins, unter dessen Führung die sowjetischen Frauen, die heute den Frauen der Welt vorangehen, bewiesen, wie die Gedanken und Forderungen Clara Zetkins verwirklicht werden."²²⁰ As mentioned above, Zetkin's personal opinion of her friend's successor differed significantly from the heartfelt friendship with and respect towards Lenin. The mention of Stalin indicated a continuation of Zetkin's friendship with the Soviet Union throughout changing political leadership. This, in turn, supported the appeal of the article to follow Zetkin's example:

Die Entwicklung unserer Frauen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik nach 1945 beweist, wie richtig Clara Zetkin an die Lösung der von ihr gestellten oder vertretenen Forderungen heranging. Die

²¹⁶ ND, 05.07.1947, 3.

²¹⁷ ND, 19.06.1946, 3.

²¹⁸ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 418.

²¹⁹ ND, 08.03.1950, 4.

²²⁰ Thiele, Ilse. 1953. "Clara Zetkin, Vorkämpferin für Frieden und Sozialismus." *Neues Deutschland*, 06. March: 5.

Mitarbeit der Frauen [...] zeigen, welche große Kraft und Initiative geweckt wird, wenn wir es verstehen, die Frauen aufzurütteln und sie zur Teilnahme am politischen Leben zu bewegen.²²¹

Again, a connection is drawn to current political endeavors from the commemoration of Zetkin. What also becomes evident in the cited article is an important part of the SED's women's policy, which was aimed to induce gratitude towards the state. By commemorating women like Zetkin, who had to fight for their basic rights, the SED aimed to highlight the comparatively good legal situation women in the GDR found themselves in.²²²

As seen in the four examples mentioned above, the articles thus always carried a dual function, as they transferred the historical themes to current events and thus formed different appeals. By establishing memory links, Zetkin was placed in the tradition of the SED and the relevance of her commemoration in current political endeavors was emphasized. Moreover, controversial issues were entirely bypassed in the articles, while Zetkin's exemplary qualities came to the fore. In doing so, the articles presented an idealized version of Zetkin, allowing for an instrumentalized use of her as a historical figure.

3.2. *Wo Andere Schweigen*, 1984

Wo Andere Schweigen is a film first shown on the 5th of October 1984 in the movie theatre 'Kosmos' in Berlin about Zetkin and her struggle against fascism.²²³ According to an article in *Neues Deutschland*, high politicians and members of the central committee of the SED were invited to the premiere, like Horst Sindermann, president of the *Volkskammer* and former Chairman of the GDR Council of Ministers, and Joachim Hoffmann, the minister of culture.²²⁴ The fact that these SED members were present symbolized the direct support or involvement of the SED in these projects, which is an indicator that films, too, could be a part of memory politics. The film was directed by Ralf Kirsten, a well renowned East German director. It was produced by the *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA), the main film production company of the GDR, which followed direct instructions from the SED. According to Stott, the cinema industry was no exception from other spheres of life in the GDR that were subject to state control and surveillance, as the SED tried to ensure that films promoted party interests and did not fuel audience discontent with the

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Cf. Kranz, *Women's Role in the German Democratic Republic*, 76.

²²³ ND. 1984. "Clara Zetkin-Film uraufgeführt - bedeutender Beitrag zum Jahrestag." *Neues Deutschland*, 05. October: 2.

²²⁴ Ibid.

government.²²⁵ Thus, the films produced by DEFA reflected the socialist politics, ideology, and culture of the state. A research report from the *Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung* in Leipzig on viewers' opinions of the film in 1985, stated: "es ist dem Film gut gelungen, Zetkin als Mensch und als führende Persönlichkeit näher zu bringen."²²⁶

The film shows the ten days leading up to Clara Zetkin's speech as *Alterspräsidentin* at the opening of the new legislative term in the German Reichstag on August 30th, 1932. The 75-year-old Clara, played by Gudrun Okras, is portrayed as rather fragile, as she is shown to be struggling with sickness and poor eyesight. However, she is determined to stand up against the rising fascist movement in Germany, and so she makes her way to Berlin by train. Despite the efforts to keep her arrival a secret, several death threats get sent her way. Clara remains unbothered and shows up to the opening of the Reichstag, where she delivers her speech. The contrast between the NSDAP and KPD members of the Reichstag is clearly presented. In the last scene, in which Göring is appointed the new Reich President, the behavior of the NSDAP members is insolent and mischievous.

The film presented an enhanced and idealized image of Zetkin. An attempt to exemplify her compassionate side, the storyline involves her involvement in Christa's troubles, the granddaughter of Clara's friend, whose friend had been killed by a Nazi. Clara later addresses the political murders in her speech.²²⁷ Her determination in her fight against fascism is shown in the film mainly through her willingness to show her resistance, despite her state of health. At the beginning of the film, Clara needs help collecting information for her speech from newspapers, as her eyesight is too bad for her to read herself. Then, in the last scene of the film, where her speech is shown, she seems to either have memorized the speech or be able to read it herself. Comparing this to the real speech that Zetkin held in the German Reichstag on the 30th of August 1932, the makers of the film deliberately changed some details. In the recording of the real speech, it is audible that Zetkin had a prompter to help her recite the speech.²²⁸ It was not made clear to the viewer where the historical accuracy begins and where it ends. An attempt was thus made to enhance the storyline of the film and create a final moment of success for Clara. This way, the

²²⁵ Stott, Rosemary. 2016. "The State-Owned Cinema Industry and Its Audience." In *Re-Imagining DEFA: East German Cinema in its National and Transnational Contexts*, von Séan Allan und Sebastian Heiduschke, 19-40. New York: Berghahn Books, 20.

²²⁶ Karig, Ute, und Hans-Jörg Stiehler. 1985. *Hauptergebnisse der Untersuchung zum DEFA-Film "Wo Andere Schweigen"*. Research Report, Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 4.

²²⁷ Zetkin, 1984. *Wo Andere Schweigen*. Regie: Ralf Kirsten. Interpret: Gudrun Okras: "Schwerstens belastet ist das Schuldkonto des Präsidialkabinetts durch die Morde der letzten Wochen, für die es die volle Verantwortung trägt durch die Aufhebung des Uniformverbots für die nationalsozialistischen Sturmabteilungen und durch die offene Begönnerung der faschistischen Bürgerkriegstruppen."

²²⁸ A full audio of the speech can be found in the SWR archives: Archivradio, SWR2. 1932. *Clara Zetkin träumt von Sowjetdeutschland*. August 30. Accessed February 15, 2023. <https://www.swr.de/swr2/wissen/archivradio/clara-zetkin-traeumt-von-sowjetdeutschland-1932-reichstag-vor-hitler-100.html>.

speech appeared even more effective and impressive. What also plays a role here is the reformulation of the end of Zetkin's political career, which in reality was rather a slow fade from the political arena. Instead, the Clara shown in the film quite literally goes out with a bang. To add further dramatic emphasis to this narrative, an interesting twist was given to the end of the speech, which is also the last scene of the film. Clara, who has just finished her speech, pauses on her way down from the lectern, looks out over the camera into the audience, and says: "Wir tragen vor der Geschichte die Verantwortung. Wir werden um den Frieden auf dieser Erde kämpfen, unter allen Bedingungen."²²⁹ The scene conveys the image of a proactive, militant Zetkin – and, by extension, KPD. In reality, the KPD had not done everything in its power to fight against fascism, as it refused to cooperate with the SPD in the struggle against the NSDAP.²³⁰

The speech is arguably the most important part of the film. It shows a shortened version of the real speech held by Zetkin.²³¹ It should be noted that an entire paragraph of the real speech, where Zetkin criticized the Social Democrats' failure to act against the rising power of the NSDAP, was left out: "Die Politik der Papen-Schleicher-Regierung ist nichts anderes als die unverschleierte Fortsetzung der Politik der von den Sozialdemokraten tolerierten Brüning-Regierung, wie dieser ihrerseits die Koalitionspolitik der Sozialdemokratie als Schrittmachern vorausgegangen ist."²³² This way, a further discussion of the conflict between the SPD and the KPD and the lack of cooperation in the fight against National Socialism were avoided. Moreover, at the end of the speech in the film, Clara expresses a wish: "Ich eröffne den Reichstag [...] in der Hoffnung, trotz meiner jetzigen Invalidität das Glück zu erleben, als Alterspräsidentin den ersten Rätekongress eines sozialistischen Deutschlands zu eröffnen."²³³ In the real speech, Zetkin wished for a "Rätekongress Sowjetdeutschlands."²³⁴ It can be assumed that this was changed because the wish for a *Sowjetdeutschland* was inherent to the thinking of Zetkin's time but did not align with the contemporary political visions of the SED. Thus, even if this motive is coherent, it shows that there was no hesitancy to make deliberate changes in the story of the film to adapt it to the current political circumstances.

Another way that Clara's character was dramatized was through retrospective enhancements to her statements regarding the future, which reminds of the articles in *Neues Deutschland*. In a conversation with Christa, Clara speaks of the dangers of a potential world war triggered by an attack on the Soviet power. "Schrecken eines Weltkrieges?" Christa asks. "Ja, mein

²²⁹ *Wo Andere Schweigen*.

²³⁰ Cf. Dassen, Patrick. 2021. *De Weimarrepubliek, 1918-1933. Over de Kwetsbaarheid van de Democratie*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Van Oorschot, 161.

²³¹ Full speech: Zetkin, *Rede als Alterspräsidentin*.

²³² Zetkin, *Rede als Alterspräsidentin*.

²³³ *Wo Andere Schweigen*.

²³⁴ Zetkin, *Rede als Alterspräsidentin*.

Kind. Später einmal werden die Kriege dieses Jahrhunderts nummeriert, Millionen gefallener Menschen statistisch erfasst. [...] Niemand aber wird die Fülle zerstörter menschlicher Hoffnung zählen können [...]. Die Zeit wird knapp, dies alles zu verhindern.”²³⁵ Here her statements were adapted, according to the political message that was to be conveyed. Clara’s alleged predictive powers were intended to make a lasting impression on the viewer, while at the same time building on the narrative of the pacifist and antimilitarist traditions of the GDR. Moreover, Zetkin’s commitment in the antifascist struggle was again overemphasized, even though the speech was followed by little action.

3.3. Concluding Remarks

Essentially, the film visualized the image of Zetkin that had been shaped in *Neues Deutschland*. In both, there was an emphasis on Zetkin’s contemporary relevance to the GDR reader or viewer. The commemorative articles were a chance to constantly shape and reshape Zetkin’s image. The film was a heroization and dramatization of the character, where historical facts mixed with creative additions. In both film and newspaper, the strategy was to highlight exemplary traits and leave out the discussion of any controversies, which distinguishes them from the historiography discussed in last chapter. Moreover, details were invented to complete the image. Both also represented the ideological framework of the SED, as there were close connections. In addition, it can be said that the way Zetkin was portrayed in the media as a heroine and pioneer for women’s rights was meant to generate gratitude in the GDR woman towards the state. This figured directly into the SED’s women’s policy.

²³⁵ *Wo Andere Schweigen*.

Chapter Four – Memorialization

Monuments, museums, and commemorative events were an essential part of the GDR's effort to spread their vision of the past to support their claim to represent the best interest of the East German society.²³⁶ Furthermore, the memory landscape was formed by renaming streets, parks, bridges, and squares.²³⁷ All these elements figured into the creation of a GDR tradition.²³⁸ As shown in this chapter, memorials of Zetkin could be found in different shapes and sizes, ranging from a small bust in a park to two museums entirely dedicated to her. More or less visible, these elements all contributed to the image of Zetkin favored by the SED.

This chapter contains a range of elements that can be classified into different phases of Olsen.²³⁹ Wiederau, the *Medaille*, and the *Clara-Zetkin-Straße* are located in phase two, where early on, traditions were built for the legitimization of the state. Birkenwerder followed shortly after, in phase three, when the younger generation was targeted with a reinterpretation of the past, the SED sought to emphasize that local events both contributed to and reflected national trend. Both museums were redesigned in stage four, now targeting more of the younger generation and a bigger public in general. In this stage also were the banner and the 10-DM bill. Very suitably in the last phase, where more statues were erected, the bust is categorized.

4.1. Museums

According to Olsen, museums in the GDR mainly served as educational instruments for workers and students.²⁴⁰ Amongst other things the state built new “hybrid house museums”²⁴¹ – museums that were located in the former residence of historical figures like Zetkin. The SED sought to establish an emotional connection, thus ensuring a memory link between the historical figure and the visitor of the site.²⁴² The two museums in Wiederau and Birkenwerder show that this was also attempted in Zetkin's case. Moreover, the narrative that had already been produced in historiography and the media was further expanded – and, above all, modified over the years to current political aspirations.

²³⁶ Cf. Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 2.

²³⁷ Cf. Koshar, Rudy. 2000. *From Monuments to Traces. Artifacts of German Memory, 1870-1990*. London: University of California Press, 197.

²³⁸ Cf. Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 9.

²³⁹ Cf. Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 12-13.

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, 105.

4.1.1. Wiederau, 1952

Before Zetkin moved to Leipzig in 1872 to start her education at the women's institute, she lived with her family in a house in Wiederau, a small town in Saxony.²⁴³ In 1952, on the anniversary of Zetkin's birthday, July 5th – this house was made into a museum on the initiative of the DFD. The minister of culture, Johannes R. Becher (1891-1959), was invited to the inauguration of the museum,²⁴⁴ as well as Zetkin's "Kampfgefährtninnen"²⁴⁵, like Lilly Wächter (1899-1989).²⁴⁶ Again, there was thus a close connection to the SED. In the following years, commemorative events were held at the museum around Zetkin's birthday or day of death. In 1977, on the anniversary of her birthday, many guests, like members of the Central Committee of the SED, members of the DFD's national board, so-called "Veteranen der Arbeiterbewegung,"²⁴⁷ and Free German Youth (FDJ) members, were welcomed in Wiederau for a big event. Speeches were held, in which the listeners were reminded of Zetkin's contemporary importance: "Heute im Sinne Clara Zetkins zu wirken, [...] heißt sich täglich als sozialistischer Patriot und proletarischer Internationalist zu bewähren."²⁴⁸

A newspaper article from 1971 reported that in 1970, the museum was mainly visited by FDJ members and pioneers, which was assumably the result of the increased pursuit of the younger generation by the SED's propaganda in the 70s.²⁴⁹ Another article from 1974 reports that in honor of IWD, many women made their way to Wiederau.²⁵⁰ The mention of these groups of visitors indicates that the museum's target audience was mainly women and young students.

There are no detailed records of the initial exhibition. However, the museum in Wiederau was redesigned in 1979 and 1980, with what was described as a clear shift in its contents. As a newspaper article from 1979 explained, the exhibition had now grown significantly in its size, making way for a large section about Zetkin's childhood and the period she was born into.²⁵¹ This is an element recognizable from for example Dornemann's biography. The museum found ways to construct Zetkin as a woman predestined to find her way to socialism, despite her bourgeois

²⁴³ Cf. Hervé, *Dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist*, 13.

²⁴⁴ Baumbach, Udo. 1981. *Clara Zetkin Gedenkstätte Wiederau*. Karl-Marx-Stadt: Druckhaus Karl-Marx-Stadt, 7.

²⁴⁵ L., M. 1952. "Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte eingeweiht." *Neues Deutschland*, 08. July, 8.

²⁴⁶ Lilly Wächter (1899-1989), former Social Democrat and functionary of the DFD.

²⁴⁷ ND. 1977. "Clara Zetkin lebt in unseren Taten für den Sozialismus." *Neues Deutschland*, 05. July: 2.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. An example of a similar event is the commemoration of her 50th death day, in 1983; ND. 1983. "Gedenken zu Ehren von Clara Zetkin." *Neues Deutschland*, 21. June: 2.

²⁴⁹ Rennert, Helmut. 1971. "Im Geburtshaus von Clara Zetkin." *Neues Deutschland*, 03. February: 8.

²⁵⁰ ADN. 1974. "Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte in Wiederau erwartet Gäste." *Neues Deutschland*, 06. March: 2.

²⁵¹ Knüpfer, Volker. 1979. "Wo Clara Zetkin ihre Kindheit verbrachte." *Neues Deutschland*, 26. June: 15; The other part of the exhibition highlighted her role in the revolutionary Social Democratic movement, her role in the proletarian women's movement, her attachment to Leninism and the Soviet Union, as well as her activities as a leading functionary of the Comintern and KPD; ND, 16.06.1979, 15.; A more detailed description especially of the latter elements could not be found, which makes a more detailed analysis of the representation of the events in the 1920s quite hard. According to Puschnerat, however, internal party matters were not discussed at all in the museum.; See Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 417.

background. The curators of the museum aimed to illustrate the influences on Zetkin of the industrialization and her parents, who, according to a newspaper article, despite their bourgeois limitations, were progressive for their time.²⁵² A booklet on the *Gedenkstätte* elaborated: “Die Eindrücke des Elternhauses und die Erfahrungen der Kindheit [sind] ein bedeutender Quell für das schöpferische Leben Clara Zetkins geblieben.”²⁵³ The museum constructed an image of a particularly politically astute child with an eye for social problems. Avoiding the acknowledgement of Zetkin’s bourgeois mentality, it was said that Zetkin was already evolving into a socialist.²⁵⁴ The break with her family and teachers was overemphasized to create a clear cut between Zetkin’s socialist career and her bourgeois background:

Die Überzeugung von der Allmacht und Richtigkeit des Marxismus, die Erkenntnisse der Rolle der Arbeiterklasse in der Menschheitsgeschichte sowie das Erlebnis [der SPD], stellt Clara vor die Entscheidung ihres Lebens [...]. Sie tauschte kleinbürgerliche Geborgenheit ein gegen Opfer und Entbehrungen. Sie wusste, der Schritt zum Proletariat bedeutete Bruch mit den Menschen, die sie am meisten verehrte [...].²⁵⁵

Moreover, as seen before in Pieck’s biography and in *Neues Deutschland*, the phrasing in the above quotation carried a strong religious tone. Marxism was portrayed as a religious authority, of whose omnipotence Zetkin was utterly convinced. In this scenario, then, Zetkin would be the prophetess delivering the message to the people. Again, through this religious symbolism, she was elevated in her status and authority – creating an idealized version of herself.

Altogether, by overemphasizing childhood influences and her break with the bourgeois world, Zetkin was presented as an absolute socialist. She was also credited with extraordinary abilities that shaped her image to become a role model and heroine to GDR women.

4.1.2. Birkenwerder, 1957

When Zetkin moved to the recreation home in Moscow in 1926, her younger son Kostja bought her a house in Birkenwerder, just outside Berlin, to stay in whenever she came to visit. Zetkin only really lived in the house between 1929 and 1932.²⁵⁶ Regardless, the GDR designated the Birkenwerder house a memorial on the anniversary of Zetkin’s 100th birthday on the 5th of July

²⁵² ND, 16.06.1979, 15.

²⁵³ Baumbach, *Gedenkstätte Wiederau*, 7; The booklet includes many pictures of the museum, as well as 95 pages of information on Clara Zetkin. Like the museum, it focuses heavily on Zetkin’s childhood, as well as the circumstances around the time she was born.

²⁵⁴ As Puschnerat has aptly put it, the exhibit showed a “milieutheoretisch hergeleitete Besonderheit, die ihre Prädestination für einen außergewöhnlichen, d.h. konsequent sozialistischen Werdegang begründet.”; Puschnerat, *Bürgerlichkeit und Marxismus*, 418.

²⁵⁵ Baumbach, *Gedenkstätte Wiederau*, 50.

²⁵⁶ Schultze, Heinz. 1982. “Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte in Birkenwerder neu gestaltet.” *Neues Deutschland*, 26. June: 8.

1957.²⁵⁷ The setup of the exhibition was coordinated by the MfDG, which implies close cooperation with the SED in the ideological structure of the museum. The exhibition included a room where films were shown about Zetkin's life. The film material was provided to the museum by the Soviet Union.²⁵⁸

When by the end of the 1960s, the exhibition no longer reflected the desired pedagogical aims of the party, it was redesigned and reopened in 1971.²⁵⁹ A bigger emphasis was now put on Zetkin's role as one of the leading figures of the German and international workers' and women's movements. Zetkin was depicted as the "driving force behind the fight for women's equality, an educator of the working class, a friend of the Soviet Union, and an ardent opponent of imperialism, militarism, and fascism."²⁶⁰ Olsen marks out the importance of the project as a means of speaking directly to the role of women in a socialist society as well as providing a role model for young women. The intended function of the new exhibition, according to documents from the MfDG, was to "contribute to an increase in the class-consciousness of the working class and to the solidification of the workers' socialist consciousness, especially that of women."²⁶¹ As can be gathered from this, Zetkin was to be depicted as the ideal revolutionary figure and leader.

The exhibition was redesigned once more from 1981 to 1982. According to a *Neues Deutschland* article announcing the reopening on the 5th of July 1982, the exhibition now visualized Zetkin's contribution to the struggle and leadership of the revolutionary workers' movement until the 1930s, with a bigger emphasis on her antifascist efforts.²⁶² The intention was very similar to the one in *Wo Andere Schweigen*, which was released in the same period. The article also mentioned that the exhibition now showed the sitting room with its original furnishing, including a wall clock – a present to Zetkin from August Bebel – and a samovar – a present from female workers in Tula.²⁶³ On a postcard from 1988²⁶⁴ bearing the title 'Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte Birkenwerder' the exhibition is depicted in four colored photographs. The samovar was placed on the dining table in the photo above right. Also noticeable is the wall in the photo bottom left, which was decorated with a large portrait of Zetkin and her frequently quoted statement:²⁶⁵ "Ich will dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist."²⁶⁶ From the arrangement of the exhibition, one can see that it was primarily through

²⁵⁷ Cf. Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 107.

²⁵⁸ ADN/ND. 1957. "Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte in Birkenwerder." *Neues Deutschland*, 03. July: 4.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 107.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

²⁶¹ DHM, Hausarchiv: MfDG/1174, quoted after: Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 108.

²⁶² ND, 26.06.1982, 8.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ See Appendix A.

²⁶⁵ The placement of the quote resembles the *Klassikerzitate* in the MfDG; See Ebenfeld, *Geschichte nach Plan*, 117.

²⁶⁶ This frequently cited quote comes from a speech that Zetkin held during the party congress of the USPD of 1919 in Berlin, where she explains her decision to withdraw from the USPD; 1919. *Ich will dort kämpfen, wo das Leben ist. Rede auf dem außerordentlichen Parteitag der USPD in Berlin, 4. März 1919*. 04. March. Accessed February 15, 2023.

personal items, photos, and quotes that an attempt was made to create an emotional connection with the visitor. As mentioned before, the hybrid-house museums sought to establish an emotional connection between the historical figure and the visitor, thereby creating a memory link that embedded Zetkin into the tradition of the GDR and making her a role model. In this process, Zetkin was also humanized, to remind the visitor that she was an attainable role model. This creation of relatability is another feature recognizable from Dornemann's biography.

4.2. Public memory landscape

Street signs, public parks or schools, statues, and banknotes are usually perceived rather subconsciously. And yet, choices regarding for example the naming of streets or the design of banknotes are deliberately made and can thus be an important part of memory politics. Quite literally, elements like street names make up a significant physical element in the memory landscape.²⁶⁷ While the museums and the commemorative events discussed in the previous subchapter played more of an educative role, the elements discussed in this subchapter hold a representative function.

When the new Berlin civil administration met for the first time, in September 1945, on the list of urgent topics to discuss – besides the food supply and housing – was the renaming of streets. As Rudy Koshar has noted, this is a clear indication of how important the symbolic element of street names was, especially as the street names were reminders of aristocratic, militarist, or Nazi traditions. Simultaneously, the goal was to honor “Soviet and German communist heroes²⁶⁸ and resisters as well as Third World revolutionaries, other European Communists, and figures from the early German socialist and communist movements.”²⁶⁹ Five years after the beginning of the renaming of Eastern Berlin streets, it was Zetkin's turn to appear on a street sign.²⁷⁰ An article from March 1951 announced that the *Dorotheenstraße* in Berlin-Mitte was to be renamed.²⁷¹ This street had previously been named after Dorothea, Electress of Brandenburg,²⁷² in 1822.²⁷³ On the evening of March 7th, 1951, in front of the *Haus der Frau* at the *Hegelplatz*, the DFD and the Eastern Berlin

<https://sites.google.com/site/sozialistischeklassiker2punkt0/zetkin/zetkin-gegen-reformismus/clara-zetkin-ich-will-dort-kaempfen-wo-das-leben-ist>.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 197.

²⁶⁸ ...and heroines.

²⁶⁹ Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 197.

²⁷⁰ A newspaper article from April 1950 announced the renaming of “einer repräsentativen Berliner Straße in Clara-Zetkin-Allee.”; ND. 1950. “Deutsche Frauen - international anerkannt.” *Neues Deutschland*, 23. April: 1.

²⁷¹ The *Dorotheenstraße* in Berlin has in the meantime been reassigned its historical name, as it was renamed again in 1995, after a controversial discussion.

²⁷² Full name: Dorothea Sophie von Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderburg-Glücksburg, Electress of Brandenburg.

²⁷³ Edition Luisenstadt, ZEPTER&KRONE. n.d. *Dorotheenstraße*. Accessed February 15, 2023.

<https://berlin.kauperts.de/Strassen/Dorotheenstrasse-10117-Berlin#Geschichte>.

magistrate had organized a “feierliche Umbenennung”²⁷⁴ for the street sign. It was no coincidence that the date was chosen so Zetkin’s name was on the street sign just in time for the start of IWD, on March 8th. This suggests that a great emphasis was placed on symbolism. This symbolic representation of Zetkin thus integrated her into the public landscape and memory, while also associating her with the GDR’s history and tradition.

Another indication of the importance of symbolic representation was the appearance of Zetkin on a banknote in 1971. When the GDR introduced the *Deutsche Mark* as their sole currency in 1948, the design of the banknotes was still purely functional.²⁷⁵ With the redesign of the banknotes in 1964 after the economic reforms in 1963, the design became more symbolic, as historical figures and places were now being printed on them.²⁷⁶ The historical figures depicted on the notes, however, were still all men. This changed with the new series of banknotes that were distributed starting in 1971. Part of this series was the 10-*Mark* bill that depicted Zetkin on the recto, replacing Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805).²⁷⁷

Statues and busts are objects of high symbolic value. Several ones were made in commemoration of Zetkin. An example of this is a Clara-Zetkin-bust, which was placed in the park of the same name in Berlin-Marzahn on the 4th of March 1987. The park and the bust were a present from the DFD to the city of East Berlin. A photograph shot on the day of the inauguration and naming of the park shows Ilse Thiele (1920-2010), chairwoman of the DFD, with Günter Schabowski (1929-2015), member of the Politburo and secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, and Erhard Krack (1931-2000), mayor of East-Berlin.²⁷⁸ Thus, it was made into a commemorative event, with the presence of SED politicians forming a direct association of Zetkin’s commemoration and the interest of the party in it. In addition, the placement of the bust in a neighborhood park indicates that the target audience was more of a regular worker, perhaps in particular women living in the area. Objects like statues visually reinforced the party’s interpretation of historical figures.²⁷⁹ Thus, similar to *Wo Andere Schweigen*, the Clara-Zetkin-bust built on the idea of Zetkin conveyed in previous works and descriptions, visualizing the image of Zetkin that had percolating through the public for years.

The three examples given in this subchapter show the SED’s valuation of symbolism and highlight the efforts to redesign the public landscape and reinforce its view on history. Of course, less than other forms of commemoration and memorialization, statues, banknotes, and street signs

²⁷⁴ ND. 1951. “Heraus zur Kundgebung!” *Neues Deutschland*, 07. March: 8.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Kunzel, Michael. 1997. “‘Neues Geld für ein Neues Deutschland’ Banknoten und Münzen der SBZ und DDR bis 1964.” In *Parteiauftrag: Neues Deutschland. Bilder, Rituale und Symbole der frühen DDR*, by Dieter Vorsteher-Seiler, 72-75. München: Koehler und Amelang, 72.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Kunzel, *Neues Geld*, 75.

²⁷⁷ See Appendix B.

²⁷⁸ See Appendix C.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*, 11.

could convey a specific image of Zetkin. Nonetheless, the repeated appearance of the same faces and names of the socialist role models helped creating a stronger culture of remembrance and reinforced the antifascist self-conception of the GDR.

4.3. Awards

The role model function attributed to historical figures like Zetkin not only served the purpose of figuring directly into the GDR view on history. It was also used to directly inspire and reward hard work according to the socialist standard. Two examples of this were the *Clara-Zetkin-Medaille* and the *Clara-Zetkin-Ehrenbanner*, by the DFD board.

Starting on February 18th, 1954, the *Clara-Zetkin-Medaille* was awarded annually around IWD to “Frauen und Männer ohne Unterschied der Staatsangehörigkeit sowie an Kollektive, Institutionen, Betriebe und Zeitschriften, die sich besondere Verdienste im Kampf um den Frieden und um die Gleichberechtigung der Frau erworben haben.”²⁸⁰ According to an article in *Neues Deutschland*, the medal was sponsored by the *Ministerrat* for Zetkin’s lasting memory and in appreciation of her life and work.²⁸¹ Every year, the men and women, as well as the collectives and brigades awarded the medal were listed in the newspapers.²⁸²

Twenty-five years later, on the 28th of September 1979, the *Clara-Zetkin-Ehrenbanner* was awarded for the first time. In contrast to the *Medaille*, the *Ehrenbanner* was not awarded annually but was connected to central competitions of the DFD. The award was meant for women’s organizations or groups, who had distinguished themselves by special achievements “bei der Gestaltung des politischen und geistig-kulturellen Lebens, durch Erschließung ökonomischer Reserven in den Wohngebieten und besondere Fürsorge für berufstätige Mütter und deren Familien.”²⁸³

A dual function of these awards can be established, as they were intended to uphold the tradition of the GDR by honoring Zetkin on the one hand, while on the other hand rewarding and highlighting the work of women and men carrying on her legacy. Zetkin’s memory was maintained, and a direct connection was formed between her and the merits of female workers. In this, one can pinpoint the utilization of Zetkin as a historical figure and role model for social re-education and the promotion of a socialist work ethic.

²⁸⁰ ADN. 1954. “Clara-Zetkin-Medaille gestiftet.” *Neues Deutschland*, 19. February: 3.

²⁸¹ Cf. Ibid.

²⁸² See for example Stern, Katja. 1975. “Dokumentarspielfilm um Clara Zetkin.” *Neues Deutschland*, 08. March: 4.

²⁸³ ADN. 1986. “Clara-Zetkin-Ehrenbanner für Initiativen der Frauen.” *Neues Deutschland*, 27. March: 2.

4.4. Concluding Remarks

The commemorative elements discussed in this chapter were a means for the SED to visualize, emotionalize, and humanize Zetkin's image. A memory link was created and reinforced through the encounters of the memorials in the public sphere. The image was shaped by the elements that were chosen to be displayed and highlighted, providing an excellent chance to suppress those elements that might disrupt the narrative. The commemorative elements contributed to the creation and continuation of the GDR's tradition, especially through the celebration of holidays such as IWD or Zetkin's birthday. Her name stood for specific values and within her commemoration, there was always an appeal to the public. Her representation in the public memory landscape helped with promoting the ideal women's image and was thus an important contributor to the SED's women's policy.

Conclusion

The commemoration of Clara Zetkin by the SED had a clear intention and message behind it. Zetkin became one of the GDR's heroines, representing its built tradition and history. She formed a moral compass and guideline for GDR women, as the image created of her represented the perfect socialist woman.

The commemoration of Zetkin exemplifies an attempt to influence collective memory. The SED functioned as a mnemonic actor, intending to build a tradition for the state and shape the collective identity by the direct use of memory politics. Commemorative elements were intended to create a memory link between the new generation and Zetkin. Ultimately, memory politics were used to legitimize the state's system and the SED's prominent position in it. An ideologically shaped vision of the past was created through the commemorative elements examined in this study. More specifically, they portrayed Zetkin as the embodiment of an ideal socialist woman, hoping to inspire women to view her as a role model.

The instruments of commemorative politics are revealed in this study by demonstrating the close connection and cooperation between the SED and the respective authors, producers, curators and attendees at the various commemorative elements. The notion of the SED as a mnemonic actor is solidified in the observation that the commemoration of Zetkin was closely linked to and monitored by the SED. The *Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus* as the publisher of the Zetkin biographies, the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* as the party's mouthpiece, the DEFA being under the SED's direct influence, the connection of the house-museums and the *Lehrbuch der deutschen Geschichte* with the MfDG and the presence of high politicians at commemorative events have shown this.

In the altered portrayal of Zetkin in the commemorative elements, this study has been able to reveal the interests of the SED that were hidden behind the respective details. Both Zetkin's individual character traits and certain events in her life were presented in an altered way. On the one hand, details to Zetkin's biography were changed or omitted that could have potentially undermined the idealized image pursued by the SED due to their controversial nature. First, attempts were made to distract from Zetkin's bourgeois background and mentality. An overemphasis was placed on her profound understanding of Marxist theory and her personal differences from her bourgeois surroundings growing up. Second, as a justification for Zetkin's unconventional relationships with Ossip Zetkin and Friedrich Zundel, the former was portrayed as her legal husband, while the latter was barely mentioned. Third, incomplete or biased information was given on events like the intraparty disputes in the 1920s to avoid either addressing

the inconsistencies in the Comintern leadership, or Zetkin's declining political relevance towards the end of her life and career.

On the other hand, details of Zetkin's character and aspirations that fit into the SED's ideological framework were emphasized and exaggerated. First, Zetkin was consistently portrayed as heroic and exemplary, so that her behavior could provide a moral compass. Her role as an educator and a mother, and the overall attempt to humanize her figure were emphasized as a means to this end. Second, the emphasis on Zetkin's antimilitarist and antifascist efforts figured directly into the state's antifascist self-conception and contributed to the creation of a pacifist tradition. Third, Zetkin's individuality was compromised to embed her within the socialist tradition, as her relationship with and views towards important Bolsheviks such as Lenin and Stalin were romanticized and misrepresented. Fourth, using religious symbolism, her assessment of the situation regarding for instance the increase of power in the political far-right in Germany was exaggerated. This was to add vigor and credibility to Zetkin's figure.

Resulting from the changes made in the representation of Zetkin's life and work was an idealized version of her, that provided a template to be used as a role model. This directly benefitted the SED's women's policy, as inherently, it represented their envisaged ideal women's image. Moreover, by smoothing over controversies and firmly embedding Zetkin in the GDR's tradition, the continuity in history that the GDR needed to legitimize the state's existence was created. As seen in this study, furthermore, a contemporary connection was often created between the historical figure and the current political situation. This supported both a memory link between the younger generation and the GDR's history, and the legitimation of current political endeavors of the SED.

Ultimately, the commemoration of Zetkin figured into the legitimization of the state system. The positive portrayal of Zetkin reflected positively on the state, as within their construction of collective memory, she was an integral part of the tradition and history of the state and its ideological mindset.

To conclude the research, it is without a doubt that the sources used have been very insightful, as they offered a glimpse inside the extensive apparatus of SED memory politics. The inclusion of certain sources and the exclusion of others naturally leads to altering perspectives, which is why no claim to completeness or general validity can be made in this study. It is also subject to its organizational and formal limitations. Nonetheless, this study is a valuable contribution to exploring the exact details of the image created of Clara Zetkin through SED memory politics. More than beforementioned literature, this study has provided a detailed analysis of a variety of commemorative elements, disclosing detailed insights on the strategy and extent of the image-reshape of Zetkin. It has made clear that while adjustments to the image of a historical

figure can be hidden within details, they can fundamentally alter one's perception of them. In the broader context, memory politics remains highly topical in today's political environment. This study thus shows that critical perception is recommendable, and one should always scrutinize the purposes the commemoration of historical figures or events might serve. As has been demonstrated in this study of the commemoration of Clara Zetkin, the lines between commemoration and glorification are easily blurred.

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Appendix

A. Photo: Postcard Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte, 1988



Figure 3 Postcard of Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte Birkenwerder, 1988, recto (FK de Groot, October 2022)



Figure 2 Postcard of Clara-Zetkin-Gedenkstätte Birkenwerder, 1988, verso (FK de Groot, October 2022)

B. Photo: Banknote 10-Mark, 1971



Figure 4 Clara Zetkin on the 10-Mark Banknote of the GDR (recto), 1971 (Source: <https://www.ddr-museum.de/de/objects/1018130> last visited 16.02.2023, 12:31)

C. Photo: Clara-Zetkin-Park Marzahn, 1987



Bundesarchiv. Bild 183-1987-0304-031 / Fotoa(r)af(in): Mittelstädt. Rainer

*Figure 5 Clara-Zetkin Bust, Marzahn 1987 (Source:
<https://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/dba/de/search/?query=Bild+183-1987-0304-031> last visited
20.01.2023, 18:39)*