
Interview Perspectives in Historical Reconstruction: Insights from Two German Totalitarian Systems

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I came across this song (see Table 3.1) while conducting the *Polyphonie der Kulturen* [Polyphony of Cultures] project together with the Rostock-based civil initiative *Bunt statt braun* [Colourful instead of brown] (see Figure 3.1). The project was a response to a Neo-Nazi arson attack on a house that hosted asylum seekers and Vietnamese contract workers in a suburb of Rostock, formerly East Germany, in 1992. In the course of this project – which was undertaken between 2005 and 2008 – we first recorded a CD with local migrant performers, Rostock-based world musicians, and intercultural artists. The subsequently produced CD-ROM with background material also included a didactic aid to support teachers dealing with Neo-Nazi music in the classroom that was requested by Mecklenburg-West Pomerania’s Ministry of the Interior – one of the financial sponsors of the project.¹

The song clearly reflects the subtle strategies of current German right-wing extremism, but also illustrates some challenges of historical (ethnographic) research on music in totalitarian systems. While the song seemingly echoes the traumatic experiences of many war refugees, it actually belongs to the repertoire of the right-wing extremist group Noie Werte. Led by the lawyer Steffen Hammer, the band – that also runs the label and distribution ser-

¹ Other sponsors were the Hansa City Rostock, the Federal Ministry of the Interior (Family, Senior Citizens, Women, and Young People), as well as the *Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* and the *Norddeutsche Stiftung für Umwelt und Entwicklung*. See also Sweers (2010) for further details concerning the actual project.

Table 3.1 *Noie Werte, 'Vertriebenenballade' (CD Am Puls der Zeit, G.B.F. Records 2000)*

<p>Noie Werte: 'Vertriebenenballade' 'Es ist genug', sind nur drei Worte, der Schrecken hat so viele Namen. Ein kleines Lächeln, ein starker Blick, Doch das seh ich nicht an ihr. Sie nimmt mich traurig in die Arme, Versteckt den Kummer, zeigt ihn nicht. Ein Leben lang hat sie es verborgen, Auch wenn ihr Herz zerbricht.</p>	<p>['Ballad of a displaced person'] 'It is enough', are just three words The terror has so many names A tiny smile, a steady gaze, But this is not what I see here Sad, she takes me into her arms, Hides the sorrow, does not show it. She has been hiding it all her life long Even though her heart is breaking.</p>
<p>Refrain: <i>Die Mutter hat es mir oft erzählt, Die Hölle selbst miterlebt Die Trauer steht ihr im Gesicht, So viele Jahre nur gequält. Und nur das nackte Leben zählt Was sie sah, vergisst sie nicht, Vergisst sie nicht, vergisst sie nicht. Es war eine Zeit, über die man nicht spricht. Als das Licht von der Erde verschwand Das Böse kam und wollte nehmen, Den Hof, die Heimat und das Land Brennende Häuser, schreiende Kinder Teuflisches Lachen lag in der Luft. Sie wurden gefoltert, sie wurden erschlagen, Doch das Flehen der Menschen verhallt im Wind.</i></p>	<p>Refrain: <i>My mother often told me She had lived through hell sadness is written on her face So many years just suffering And only the naked life counts She will never forget what she saw She will never forget, she will never forget. It was a time one doesn't speak about When light disappeared from the earth The Evil came and wanted to take The farm, the homeland, the country Burning houses, crying children A devilish laughter was in the air They were tortured, they were beaten to death But the pleading of these people died away in the wind</i></p>
<p>Refrain Ein dunkler Nebel, vor dem ich fliehe, Dahinter warten die Bilder von einst. Ich hasse sie und will sie vergessen, Doch am Ende zwingen sie mich auf die Knie. <i>Die Frauen entehrt, die Frauen geschändet In jedem Dorf, an jedem Tag. Ein kleines Mädchen bettelt um Gnade, Die sie bis heute nicht bekam.</i></p>	<p>Refrain A dark fog which I escape from Behind it are pictures waiting from that time. I hate them and want to forget them But they force me on my knees in the end <i>The women dishonoured, the women raped In that village, on that day A little girl begs for mercy, which she never got up to now.</i></p>
<p>Refrain</p>	<p>Refrain</p>

vice 'German British Friendship Records' – released albums such as *Kraft für Deutschland*, which was blacklisted in 1992. The group's guitarist Michael Wendland was regional party leader of the right-wing extremist party NPD



Figure 3.1 *The CD cover of the Polyphonie der Kulturen [Polyphony of Cultures] project*

[Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands].² However, taken out of its initial context, it is difficult to identify this specific piece as a right-wing extremist song or to find any legal justification to blacklist the song. The language gives only vague references – except for a few key phrases used by the German Second World War generation (marked in *italics*) and one or two am-

² See also Arbeitsstelle Neonazismus und Argumente & Kultur gegen Rechts e.V., Argumentationshilfe gegen die 'Schulhof-CD' der NPD. 2005. http://www.arbeitsstelle-neonazismus.de/news/36{_}Argumente-gegen-NPD-CD2.pdf.

bivalent – because outdated – phrases (also marked in italics like ‘geschändet’ [raped]). Likewise, the music itself (which can be described as American singer/songwriter style) is not distinguishable as explicitly right-wing extremist.

The text’s vagueness also illustrates the difficulty of obtaining valid data for music in totalitarian systems on various levels – not only with regard of how approach these systems at all, but also concerning historical reconstruction. The latter often requires dealing with nostalgia and traumatic experiences likewise – which, in this case, was instrumentalized by a right-wing extremist group. Before analysing the ‘Vertriebenenballade’ further, I will provide some background necessary for a deeper understanding of right-wing extremist strategies, of which this song has also been part.

Right-wing Extremism in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania

While Rostock – particularly due to the work of the civil initiative *Bunt statt braun* – developed several successful counter-strategies in the aftermath of the Lichtenhagen events (see also Sweets 2010), the region has nevertheless been in the focus of right-wing extremist activities for a long time. This became especially apparent during the elections of the years 2005 (*Bundestag*) and 2006 (county parliament of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania). From a right-wing extremist perspective, Germany’s northeastern county Mecklenburg-West Pomerania – of which Rostock is the largest city with 198.000 inhabitants – has become exemplary, as these groupings managed to set up, almost unnoticed, a functioning right-wing extremist network. Particularly the eastern regions close to the Polish border have been characterized by high unemployment, weak economic power, regional emigration, and a deterioration of rural and urban structures – even in the new millenium. Rural areas like Postlow (election share (NPD) in 2006: 38%), Blaswitz (32%), and Bargischow (31%), but also cities like Anklam and Ueckermünde thus became centres of right-wing extremist activities (see Geisler 2007).

The success of the right-wing extremist party NPD in the regional election in Mecklenburg West-Pomerania in 2006 was grounded on a multi-layered

strategy. Against a background of the local population having become tired of politics and democracy, the election propaganda cleverly triggered everyday fears, such as school closures, economic emigration, unemployment, the loss of social status, and the fear of foreignization. Issues such as criticism of the new (more restricted) unemployment support system, demands for better maternity protection and job training strongly resonated with this population. Foreign migrants – who were actually scarce in the region that only had a total share of 2.3–2.4% of migrants in all – became the central scapegoats. As Ohse and Pingel-Schliemann (2007: 12) pointed out, the NPD propaganda ‘suggested to voters that this could all be financed, if one developed a different migrant policy.’³ Providing simple answers to complex problems with slogans, such as ‘tourists welcome, asylum swindlers out,’ the party also presented itself as close to the public. Right wing extremist symbols or the iconic combination of army boots and bald head were rarely ever seen, party members rather invited to cycling tours.

Also other factors contributed to the success of the party during the 2005 elections. These included (a) the impression of political competence (presentation of programmatic alternatives to the established democratic parties); (b) a broader network backing; (c) a strong public presence through the mass media; and (d) the NPD also profited from the weakness of the established parties that had started their election campaigns with vague programs (see Ohse and Pingel-Schliemann, 2007 for further details).

The election success was also grounded on the integration of the so-called *Vorpommerschen Kameradschaften* [West Pomeranian Camaraderies] into the NPD. During a period of ten years – yet almost unnoticed by politics and the public – right-wing extremist groupings had managed to set clear foundations within the local municipalities. After the arson attacks that occurred between 1990 and 1993, various right-wing extremist organizations and parties were blacklisted. The right-wing extremist groupings thus developed new strategies on the basis of smaller, nearly invisible structures. The aim was ‘to set up *Kameradschaften*, which, being regional groups without orga-

³ [...] suggeriere den Wählern, dass dies alles finanzierbar sei, wenn man eine andere Ausländerpolitik betreibe.’

nizational and party-like structures, continued the political work of the forbidden organization' (Hoffmann 2007: 21).⁴ The organization of demonstrations, army sport activities and political training, particularly with regard to democratic issues, were part of these activities. The course of action regarding the common population was carefully elaborated, as this text from the *Nationaldemokratische Hochschulbund* from the 1990s reveals:

One can help old people to fill in forms, one can help them with their shopping [...], one can clear up their garden, keep the streets clean and safe by having regular night patrols... One has to act in such a way that one swims in a sea of sympathy, so that the 'ordinary' citizens would vouch for us (quoted in Hoffmann 2007: 21).⁵

Music has been playing a central role in right-wing extremist activities (see also Staud 2006: 157–158). The boom of right-wing extremist rock started after German reunification. While only few albums had been released before 1989, 15 albums were released in 1990, and in 1992 one already counted 26 in Germany (these are only official numbers). The music of groups like *Störkraft* and *Noie Werte*, yet also non-German groups could almost be read as a macabre soundtrack to the attacks in Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen: The British band *No Remorse*, for instance, released a song with the title 'Barbeque in Rostock' after the arson attack.

Ethnomusicological Fieldwork on Right-Wing Extremist Music: Some Considerations

Analyzing the role of music within right-wing extremist groupings can pose a dilemma for an ethnomusicologist used to applying established fieldwork methods, such as *in situ* observation, observant participation, or interviews in order to obtain first-hand data (see also Emerson 2001). Not only can it

⁴ 'Kameradschaften zu gründen, die als regionale Gruppen ohne Vereins- bzw. Parteistrukturen die politische Arbeit der verbotenen Organisationen fortführen [sollten]'.

⁵ 'Alten Leuten kann man beim Ausfüllen von Formularen helfen, sie beim Einkauf unterstützen [...], man kann den Garten in Ordnung bringen, die Straßen sauber halten und durch regelmäßige Nachtpatrouillen sicher halten... Man muss so handeln, dass man in einem Meer der Sympathie schwimmt, dass die 'normalen' Bewohner für uns 'die Hand ins Feuer legen' (in Hoffmann 1991: 21).

be extremely difficult (and dangerous) to gain access in these scenes, particularly if one represents a different political attitude (which is already reflected in the scope of the discipline) – participation in these groupings and in right-wing extremist activities is also illegal in Germany.

The following incident concisely illustrates the difficulty of undertaking even distanced observations on these groupings. In the course of the *Polyphony of Cultures* project, I conducted a seminar on right-wing extremist music together with my historical musicology colleague Hartmut Möller during the summer semester 2006. When the NPD staged a demonstration in Rostock on May 1, 2006, we hoped to get some first-hand insights within a legal framework (e.g. observing the demonstration, listing songs that were chanted, and maybe talking to NPD representatives at supposed information stalls).

However, in order to prevent *any* violent activities – that were particularly incited by encounters with (autonomous) left-wing extremist groupings – the police set fences along in the whole demonstration route. It was nearly impossible for us to hear whether anything was chanted at all from a distance of 20–50 metres. Moreover, anyone who had actively participated in (often musical) counter-events on the market square was suddenly locked inside the city. After having sung in a joint church service of the catholic, protestant church, and the Jewish community, I also found myself likewise stuck inside for several hours. Encountering my colleague with a group of students from the seminar, we nevertheless tried to approach the demonstration route – only to figure out that we were not only kept away, but also filmed and photographed by police officers. Some other students who had participated in the initially peaceful counter-demonstrations found themselves trapped between some leftist extremist groupings and came close to a violent encounter with the right-wing groupings. While we thus collected material of how music is used in counter-events, we gained little material (with the exception of a few, anonymously distributed leaflets) on the actual study object at all.

Research on right-wing extremist groupings is mainly undertaken by the *Verfassungsschutz* [Office for the Protection of the Constitution] in Germany – a police section on the county and also state level. Our seminar later also

invited one officer who was specialized in analysing the confiscated material for possible blacklisting. This not only included sculptures, ordering brochures that even offered Hitler perfume, but predominantly numerous CDs each of which had to be checked for offensive content. Undercover agents of the *Verfassungsschutz* also conducted what might come close to a participant observation of right-wing extremist events, although, of course, with the clear purpose of discovering illegal actions. Given the lack of alternatives, the applied *Polyphony of Cultures* project thus had to fall back on these second-hand insights.

The Role of Music within Right-Wing Extremist Activities

As the German federal *Verfassungsschutz* (2004) pointed out with regard to Skinhead concerts – and this can also be transferred to other right-wing extremist groupings – music is the medium that clearly attracts the attention and interest of teenagers, not least because it is forbidden. Particularly the texts that also convey right-wing extremist images seem to have a strong impact on novices on the scene and often set the path for the way into these subcultures. As the *Verfassungsschutz* (2004) pointed out further, concerts serve as a trans-regional solidarity factor, particularly in the remote parts of the predominantly rural county of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. Concerts also provide the space for the sale of (illegal) material, the distribution of extremist propaganda material. Yet, the police can only intervene if a music event can indeed be classified as illegal on a juridical basis. One reaction to the increasing focal role of music and music events was therefore the so-called *Konzserterlass* [concert verdict] in 1999, which regulated the police actions against events organised by right-wing extremist groupings in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania.

As the *Konzserterlass* pointed out (here quoted from the revised version from Nov. 10, 2004), the police has frequently been observing a so-called conspiratorial behaviour; for instance, the events are often disguised as birthday parties or alumni school meetings, and the meeting place is often kept secret. In the era of cell phones, messages are mostly sent via SMS, which often in-

clude information of alternative meeting places in case of police intervention. The *Verfassungsschutz* could observe the following behaviour among concert visitors:

- singing of right-wing extremist slogans (element of offence: propaganda);
- racist, anti-Semitic songs (element of offence: incitement of the people);
- alternating singing between bands and audiences, who mutually stir each other up to sing right-wing extremist slogans. The bands often leave it to the audiences to sing the forbidden phrases.

The *Verfassungsschutz* – and also academic researchers – observed a direct connection between right-wing extremist violent crime and music. As Thoralf Staudt (2006: 159) remarked in his study on *Modern Nazis*,

When two Vietnamese were nearly trampled to death in the West Pomeranian Eggesin in 1999, the culprits shouted loudly the refrain of a well-known song, ‘Fidji, Fidji,⁶ have a good journey.’ The three Neo-Nazis who murdered the Angolan Alberto Adriano in Dessau in the summer 2000, reported at court that they had listened to a song of the group Landser shortly before the deed.⁷

The *Verfassungsschutz* (2005: 24) pointed to a direct connection between the actual music and aggression-stimulated effects: ‘The aggressive rhythms and violence-glorifying, Neo-Nazi and racist texts of the Skinhead music ‘hammer’ the message of the music into the brains of the followers during the extremely loud concerts.’⁸ One could indeed also frequently observe violent activities in the immediate aftermath of the concerts. However, the *Verfassungsschutz* has been careful to set up a direct connection between a specific group (or song) and violent activities.

⁶ ‘Fidschi’ [Fidji] is a swear word with origins in East Germany. Used to describe Asian (particularly Vietnamese) contract workers in East Germany, it was applied to foreigners in general after 1989. Further details can be found on the following website: *Netz-gegen-Nazi: Mit Rat und Tat gegen Rechtsextremismus*. <http://www.netz-gegen-nazis.de/artikel/warum-ich-das-nicht-mehr-hoeren-will-teil-4-fidschi>.

⁷ ‘Als 1999 im vorpommerschen Eggesin zwei Vietnamesen fast totgetreten wurden, grölten die Täter lautstark den Refrain eines bekannten Liedes, ‘Fidschi, Fidschi, gute Reise.’ Die drei Neonazis, die im Sommer 2000 in Dessau den Angolaner Alberto Adriano ermorden, gaben vor Gericht an, sie hätten kurz zuvor ein Lied der Gruppe Landser gehört.’

⁸ ‘Die Skinheadmusik ‘hämmer’ mit ihren aggressiven Rhythmen und Gewalt verherrlichenden, neozaistischen und rassistischen Texten bei den extrem lauten Konzerten die Botschaft der Musik in die Köpfe der Anhängerschar.’

The observations of the *Verfassungsschutz* (2004) concerning the central social role of music in right-wing extremist contexts were also confirmed by a study undertaken by Kurt Möller, a professor dealing with social work, and political scientist and criminologist Nils Schuhmacher, who interviewed 40 Skinheads between 2003 and 2005. As Möller and Schuhmacher (2007) demonstrated, the music constitutes the basis for communal experiences and a differentiation from others for this group, while aesthetics play only a minor role. The study also confirmed observations of the *Verfassungsschutz* that the music indeed influences the thinking and behaviour of its listeners, while the specific bands immediately lose their focal position after the interviewees have left the subcultures.⁹

Music also played a central role during the *Bundestag* elections in 2005 and then particularly in the county parliament elections in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania in 2006. During the months of election, the NPD distributed free copies of the so-called *Schulhof-CD* (*Schoolyard-CD*; see also Figure 3.2). This *Schulhof-CD* – from which also the introductory example was taken – clearly reflects the altered, more subtle strategies of modern right-wing extremism described above. In tune with the current strategy of a ‘normal’ middle-class outfit, the CD was presented in an almost leftist design and the subtitle ‘Hier kommt der Schrecken aller linken Spießler und Pauker!’ [Here comes the threat of all leftist pedants and teachers!].

Insider right-wing extremist material is often blacklisted – as, for instance, are the recordings of Landser, one of the focal bands of the scene. Founded in 1992, the group was the first band declared as a criminal organization by the German Federal Supreme Court of Justice in 2005, due to ‘incitement of the people’, insults on democratic declarations and public calls for crime acts. The material of Landser – and other groups like Spreegeschwander and Zillertaler Türkenjäger – is clearly anti-Semitic, often highly violent and often also includes Nazi slogans.

In contrast to these bands, the *Schulhof-CD* aims at an outer level – i.e. potential (teenage) novices to the scene; particularly insecure teenagers who are in search of leading figures or peer groups. Part of the strategy is the inclu-

⁹ See also a review by Hartmut Möller in Fastnacht and Sweets (2008).



Figure 3.2 *The 2005 Schulhof-CD [Schoolyard-CD]*

sion of exclusively legal material. Backed by an own set of lawyers, the right-wing extremist party NPD chose songs with mollified phrases or phrases that contain a subtle double meaning. For example, what appears like a criticism of capitalist Europe (song 1: 'Europa, Jugend, Revolution' [Europe, Youth, Revolution] by the band Carpe Diem) contains, in fact, the ideology of the 'Neue Rechte' that tries to establish a trans-European extremist network, which, again, only becomes visible through contextualization. Other topics include anti-Americanism (song 7: Odem: 'Frieden durch Krieg' [Peace

through War]) – which had been a central issue during the era of George W. Bush; still, it was also combined with a hidden anti-Semitism.

A central statement of the CD can be described as ‘we at the bottom of the society’ against ‘those up there’. The texts (see also Table 3.2) accuse the state, the system, and politics in general, while propagating values like freedom and justice that are repeatedly emphasized. Many songs also contain key words like ‘protest’, ‘revolution’, and ‘rebellion’, although none of these texts offers any solutions.

The inversion of cultural relativism is also part of the strategy of the ‘Neue Rechte’ (see Brodkorb (2002: 34–37) for a detailed analysis). Rather than continuing with the biological racism of the Nazi Era, this new approach employs a perspective termed *ethnopluralism*, which is also reflected in song 11 (Annett, ‘Zeit zu rebellieren’ [Time for rebellion]). Initially also set against the Eurocentrism of western colonialism, *cultural relativism*, as shaped by Franz Boas’ pupil Melville J. Herskovits, argued that a culture can only be understood in its own terms. Thus – so the inverted *ethnopluralist* argument – if a culture can only be understood in its own terms, it is impossible to integrate a foreign (or diasporic) culture into its host nation. Likewise, if cultures can only be understood in their own terms, it is also impossible to evaluate the Nazi Era or Neo-Nazi activities as ‘bad’ or ‘evil’, because they have to be understood as coherent cultural systems in their own terms. Within this context, as also Brodkorb (ibid.) emphasized, human rights – i.e. universals that are valid for any culture however different on the surface level – become a central argumentative means.

The music is often relatively simple (simple harmonic structures; narrow melodic range; low singing quality: the music is predominantly performed by male singers and, in accord with presenting the image of masculinity and strength, is often shouted; yet various songs often include catchy refrains). However, one can also again observe a lingering ambiguity here: The musical arrangements often include styles that either copy leftist music bands, Punk rock, and even the American singer/songwriters (see Table 3.2).

The strategy – as far as we sorted it out in self-experiments during the seminar – can be described as such: Curious teenagers start to listen to these

Table 3.2 *Overview of the songs of the 2005 Schulhof-CD*

Track No.	Group	Title	Text (content)	Associations and comments on music and text ^a
2.	Faustrecht	'Die Macht des Kapitals' [The Power of the Capital]	Criticism of capitalism; economy vs. population	Punk sound; text difficult to understand
3.	Nordwind	'Leb dein Leben' [Live your Life]	Declaration of war against government & democracy; call for protest & system change	Acoustic guitar melody; also medieval-style rock
4.	Sleipnir	'Rebellion'	The system (not politics) need to change; call for protest/counter-activities	Text difficult to understand
5.	Faktor Widerstand	'Wenn der Wind sich dreht' [When the wind turns]	Bad social conditions (key-words: politics; bigwigs, taxes)	Associations with punk rock
6.	Noie Werte	'Wer die Wahrheit spricht, verliert' [Who speaks the truth, loses]	Against free press which only tells lies about right-wing extremists (hidden threat)	Sound of the Oi scene
7.	Odem	'Frieden durch Krieg' [Peace through War]	Anti-Americanism; anti-war propaganda; criticism of capitalism	Punk-sound; howled text; slogan 'peace through war' clearly stands out

^a This is a summary of the analyses undertaken during the seminar on right-wing extremist music.

Table 3.2 Continuation

8.	Nordwind	'Bürokrat II'	Bureaucracy against the common man	Piece to relax (not to forcefully yelled as other pieces)
9.	Nahkampf	'Ein Krieger' [A Warrior]	Warrior hymn (emphasizes violence; against Christian values)	Medieval style; hymn-like
10.	Noie Werte	'Vertriebenenballade' [Ballad of a Displaced Person]	Traumatic experiences of war refugees	Singer/Songwriter style
11.	Annett	'Zeit zu rebellieren' [Time to Rebel]	Bad social conditions (slogans calling for a racially clean Germany)	Ballad character
12.	Sleipnir	'Wille zum Sieg' [The Will to Triumph]	Prophesies end of Germany; salvation only through system change	Artificial folk song atmosphere
13.	Frank Rennicke	'Das Mädal mit der Fahne' [The Girl With the Flag]	Connection to ideology of Neo-Nazism	Ballad character, yet also 'schlager'
14.	No group titled	Deutschlandlied	All three verses of the National Anthem	The first two verses are not forbidden, but are not sung as they represent a connection to the aggressive National Socialism.

freely distributed CDs as background music on their MP3 players. While the complete texts can often not be fully understood (also against background noises), the refrains and specifically emphasized phrases (partly unconsciously) stick in the minds of the listeners, who thus become more open and adaptive to right-wing extremist ideology.

This analysis was based on the 2005 version. In the revised version that was used for the county elections in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania in 2006, four songs were replaced and two new ones added. The CD hereby became more radical, yet still had to be classified as legal. Both CD versions are concluded by the three verses of the German national anthem. The first verse (like the second one) has not been sung since the end of the Second World War, because – having served as the National Anthem of Nazi Germany – it is considered offensive against other nations. Yet, it has never been officially forbidden. The presentation on this CD can thus be considered a conscious provocation, as these first two verses are connected with the ideas of the aggressive National Socialism.

The strategy of subtle ambiguity applied by modern right-wing extremism is also apparent in the introductory example. This highly sentimental song apparently describes the traumatic war experiences of a mother. Yet, neither does the text mention a specific war (though the Second World War is obviously meant), nor a specific group of people (although it is, due to the chosen key phrases, clearly obvious for German listeners that it refers to the experiences of German refugees), nor is it further specified who is meant by ‘the Evil’ (verse three; in italics).

The song’s extreme vagueness illustrates the difficulty of finding the right counter-arguments, and the vagueness also works on the imagination of teenagers not *completely* familiar with the actual background. When developing the didactic aid for the *Polyphony of Cultures* project, we initially planned to use the predominantly already existing argumentative support material that also served as the basis for the text analyses above. As was pointed out in the central argumentative commentary with regard to the ‘Vertreibenenballade’:

The band leaves out any historical context and ‘forgets’ that it was Nazi-Germany that ‘started the fire’ and carried it to Eastern Europe, which finally returned to Germany. The right-wing extremists continuously bemoan that the issue of flight and enforced

resettlement has been made a taboo subject in Germany. In fact, however, there is almost no topic that has been more intensively dealt with (in terms of publication and didactic approaches) by Post-War Germany than this issue.¹⁰

This quotation concisely illustrates a central argumentative counter-strategy that is based on rejecting right-wing extremist arguments by also applying a very authoritative tone. However, reconstructing – also with the aid of local teachers – a possible encounter of a teacher with pupils who might have already come into contact with right-wing extremism, we found this counter-argument too blunt for the new, more subtle right-wing extremist strategies of the new millenium. Moreover, the recent wave of German TV documentaries and journalistic interviews created the impression that the issue had indeed long been suppressed. This would have made it difficult for a teacher to argue with teenage schoolchildren who had listened to this song within the context of the public discussion. Particularly the last part of the counter-argument against the ‘Vertriebenenballade’ (however correct) would not have worked with teenagers unfamiliar with the larger historical context – which called for a deeper psychological understanding of the memorization process.

The Reconstruction of Historical Events in Totalitarian Systems: Some Considerations

The song’s text and the *Schulhof-CD* clearly illustrate how right-wing extremist groups jump on the bandwagon of a public discussion on suppressed issues from a totalitarian system and how these groups add up subtly distorted interpretations within a musical context. Yet, the text also elucidates some problems of historical reconstruction through interviews – particularly considering the fact that the reconstruction of music practices, persecution, and censorship during the Nazi Era have reached a central turning point since the beginning of the new millenium. Research institutions and groups

¹⁰ Arbeitsstelle Neonazismus und Argumente & Kultur gegen Rechts e.V. 2005. *Argumentationshilfe gegen die ‘Schulhof-CD’ der NPD*. 2005.
http://www.arbeitsstelle-neonazismus.de/news/36{_}Argumente-gegen-NPD-CD2.pdf.

(such as Hamburg's *Arbeitsgruppe Exilmusik* [Study Group Exile Music] that was founded by Peter Petersen in 1985) still contribute to the rediscovery of Jewish musicians, for instance. However, as the central primary sources – the eyewitnesses – have become extremely old or died already, the sources of information will be reduced to exclusively written, printed, and recorded material within the next few years. In retrospect, one might thus wonder whether we have indeed documented this past well enough – and from a sufficient number of perspectives.

An interviewer encountered specific challenges already during the previous decades, and I would like briefly to refer to my own completed project on the alteration and instrumentalization of German folk music during the Nazi Era (see also Sweers 2005). It initially started out as private research on the totality of surviving remnants of folk music in Northern Germany. Yet, upon talking informally to several older informants, it quickly became apparent that it would be difficult to get beyond music associated with the events of that era that occupied a large part of their memories.

This also reflects the role and importance of oral history – here understood as the historical reconstruction of events through retrospect interviews (see also Richie 2003). Described as a hermeneutic method, oral history has frequently been challenged by historians, due to its subjectivity, particularly due to the actual interview methods – which also indicates a need for further collaboration between anthropological/social and historical sciences. I subsequently would like to focus on some problems regarding the historical reconstruction through the memories of contemporary eyewitnesses who experienced totalitarian systems and traumatic experiences.

While many issues of the so-called oral history clearly resemble ethnographic methods (see also Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) and Emerson (2001)), a comprehensive theoretical reflection on historical work in ethnomusicology still seems to be rare. This impression is also confirmed by Bohlman's (2006) and Noll's (2006) reflections in Barz/Cooley's seminal publication on fieldwork in ethnomusicology, *Shadows in the Field* (2006). Focusing on the Jewish presence and past in Burgenland, Bohlman, for instance, clearly realized that 'the ethnomusicological past is not one past, but many' (2006:

141). Bohlman subsequently illustrated various possible issues of ethnomusicological historical work, such as how things were remembered, the history, fieldwork in the past, and the past as another or as oral tradition. Bohlman's multi-dimensional historical picture was also corroborated by Noll's analysis of historical ethnographic research in the Ukraine. As Noll realized, there is not one picture that emerges from the past; rather the question is how to interpret past material (2006: 168). Taking this a step further, I would like to argue that it is also important to ask how to deal with the actual recollection process of the interviewees.

Had my interviews on the Nazi Era been undertaken shortly after the Second World War, I presumably would have obtained much more precise descriptions and answers. I already made these observations of memory losses in a less political context when interviewing musicians about the history of Electric Folk or Folk Rock in England in the 1990s. The major body of authentic interview material stemmed from journalistic writing from the 1960s/70s. It left many gaps in the history, also concerning the validity of the statements. However, with events already 30 years in the past, personal recollections often remained on a comparatively superficial level in the 1990s interviews. Likewise, particularly important figures of the scene like the Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span members, Martin Carthy, or Shirley Collins had constantly been interviewed about central issues and thus often repeated a superficial or summarized version of their original narratives (see also Sweets 2005: 16–18).

Yet even similar descriptions of central events not necessarily indicate the truth, as became apparent with the tragic death of singer/songwriter Sandy Denny (1947–1978) who had also been a member of Fairport Convention. While journalistic accounts and interviews repeatedly described how she died as a result of falling down a flight of stairs at a friend's house, the actual reason for her death had been concealed until her biography was published by Clinton Heylin in 2000. As became apparent here, Sandy Denny – who seemed to have been an alcohol and medication addict at that time – most likely had this accident at her parents' house and then – also after her embarrassed parents had refused to drive her to the hospital – suffered from in-

ternal bleeding some time, before she fell into a coma at her friend's house. Several of these issues, like her actual psychological situation at that time, had been completely covered up by the music scene around Denny.

Moreover, that even on site reports might not necessarily describe the actual incident is also well exemplified by Bob Dylan's performance on the electric guitar at the Newport Festival 1965, which has become known as the beginning of folk rock. As has repeatedly been written – and also described in contemporary reports – Dylan was booed by the audience when he appeared with an electric guitar on the stage, as it represented a betrayal of the anti-commercial ideals of the acoustic performers. Yet, as a transcription of the tapes – that re-appeared in 2000 – revealed, the booing audience requested Dylan to return to the stage, because he had only played a set of three songs (see also Jackson 2002).

One could assume that the distortion of the actual reality is even more apparent with regard to events in totalitarian systems, as these are even more strongly tied to layers of shame, embarrassment, and trauma. As a contemporary account of an American officer – Saul K. Padover (1946–2001) – who conducted interviews with Germans between 1944–45 revealed, almost none of his interviewees was willing to talk openly at this point (which extended into the first two post-war decades). With regard to music, the biography of the *Comedian Harmonists* by Eberhard Fechner (1988) provides another good example. One of the most popular male a-cappella groups in the 1920s, the *Comedian Harmonists* consisted of six (Jewish, German, one Romanian) singers – the Bulgarian tenor Ari Leschnikoff, the Jewish second tenor Erich Abraham-Collin, the Jewish tenor-buffo and group founder Harry Frommmermann, the Polish-Jewish baritone Roman J. Cycowski, the German bass Robert Biberti, and the German pianist Erwin Bootz. The original group disbanded around 1934–35 when the Jewish members could not perform in public any more, migrated to either Australia or the United States and were replaced by the German singers Alfred Grunert (second tenor), Fred Kassen (tenor-buffo), and Herbert Imlau (baritone).

Fechner interviewed the singers and family members between 1969 and 1974 and became increasingly aware of the fact that some interviewees tried

to cover-up their role during the Nazi-Era, while others – as in the case of Collin’s widow – were very reluctant to talk about the difficult period in exile and afterwards. He thus not only introduced the personal portraits with an interview description, but also responded to this increasingly contradictory situation by contrasting the self-presentations with other interview parts. One could thus read completely different versions of the events during the Third Reich – because each interviewee described the behaviour of the band members towards the Jewish members in clearly different light.

Some German historians therefore even question the reliability of personal interviews recollecting this period (see Plato 2000) – and this particularly applies to the events depicted in the introductory song. It nevertheless seems that by not undertaking interviews also many chances of documenting these events have been missed. Precise accounts on musical practices are still scarce, leaving many open questions. Concerning school music, for instance, it seems that the execution of the Nazi directives was not uniform, but depended strongly on the individual teachers (in *both* directions). However, the *patterns* that evolved approximately 60 years in retrospect (see Sweets 2005 for exact details) were still highly illuminating regarding the long-term psychological effects of musical instrumentalization under a totalitarian system (the oldest of my interview partners had been teenagers at that time):

- The teenage generation was part of Nazi youth organizations (membership was compulsory after 1939) in which hiking, campfires and singing played a central role. A major portion of the song material had been taken from pre-existent sources and were ordinary folk and seasonal songs. By using the songs in a new context, however (increasingly early-morning drills, marching events, and medleys alongside Nazi propaganda songs), these unaltered songs took on a second, political layer of meaning – which was still associated with the songs by this generation several decades later.
- At kindergarten, one could observe the insertion of propaganda and war songs alongside traditional children’s songs such as ‘Hänschen klein’ [Little Jack]. Especially this material was perceived as folk songs by some informants. One informant, for instance, recalled that she felt unable to tell

those songs from the other material. She was therefore later corrected by her children – and, completely confused, stopped singing at all.

- With regard to long-term effects, marching songs had the most lasting impact, partly because of the marching exercises themselves, partly because they could also be heard constantly during Nazi events in the city. Not only could these songs still be recalled in exact detail; as Tomi Ungerer – a well-known graphic artist from Alsace – recalled 20–30 years after the War, music from that time also still had a soothing effect on him when he was upset.

The obstruction of memorization processes due to traumatic experiences has been well reflected in psychology and psychotherapy. As psychological studies like Kuwert et al. (2006) reveal, symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were clearly apparent among that generation nationwide, partly (as in Germany) being further combined with defence mechanisms, such as repression and denial. Also sixty years later, interviews were still partly overshadowed by traumatic recollections. One informant, for instance, started talking about her childhood memories but got stuck when she recalled how young (civilian) girls were asked to sing (children's) folk songs for the entertainment of wounded soldiers hosted in the barracks of her hometown. She still associated these tunes with the smell of decaying flesh and the feeling of frozen ears. This observation also confirmed recent psychological and psychopathological studies on late-life sequelae of war experiences, and particularly war childhood. For example, as Kuwert et al. (2006) observed, symptoms of PTSD were still apparent even sixty years after the Second World War.¹¹

The strategy of the 'Vertriebenenballade' of the band Noie Werte is clearly grounded on the instrumentalization of these highly complicated psychological mechanisms. Similar to the election propaganda, the song promises simple solutions to a highly complex issue. Responding to these strategies of current right-wing extremism, we therefore added a more psychologically informed segment in the *Polyphony of Culture's* didactic aid (see also Fass-

¹¹ Schultz (2005) offers an interesting insight into the possible impact of the experiences of the First and Second World War into western post-war avant-garde music.

nacht and Sweets 2008). It explained that while the issue of these refugees has indeed been dealt among the German public, this had only scarcely happened within more private contexts. Few of the refugees have ever openly talked about these experiences with their families – until the present day. This not only occurred due to political reasons, one can also find mechanisms of what Freud called memory repression, partly combined with traumatic repression – and few of that generation would have attended psycho-analytical support at that time and likewise at present.

The Investigation of Musics in Other Totalitarian Systems: A Possible Transfer

How far can this psychological-methodological knowledge be applied to the research on more recent totalitarian systems, such as former East Germany (GDR)? My interest in this topic was stimulated when, after having moved from Hamburg to Rostock, I joined a church choir of approximately 60 members in 2002. As I was slowly integrating into the choir, subtle cultural differences from the west became increasingly apparent, be it the ritual of extensive hand shaking, a slightly different everyday language ('Kaufhalle' instead of 'Supermarkt'), or remnants of a different social system (in contrast to the context of my former choir, many members married and had children at a relatively early age; a large share of the female singers were also working full-time).

Yet, another, more subtle layer became apparent when we sang a (from my western perspective) historical and politically neutral church song – 'Sonne der Gerechtigkeit' (Sun of Justice)¹² which excited my neighbours who immediately shared memories of the so-called Evening Prayers and demonstrations of which this song had been part. East Germany has been described as one of the most 'de-churched' regions of Europe (see also Wittenberg and Wolle 2008: 117–228), which had been the result of an Anti-Christian (as a representation of the old bourgeois system) policy of the state party SED

¹² Melody: Bohemia 1467 / Nuremberg 1556; Text: Christian David (1728), Christian Gottlob Barth (1827), Johann Christian Nehring (1704), compiled by Otto Riethmüller (1932).

[Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)]. Yet, especially the Evangelical-Lutheran churches played a significant role in the 1989 revolution, as the Peace Prayers resulted in increasingly semi-public meetings that finally led to the major Monday Evening demonstrations in 1989.¹³

During the GDR era, churches – while still focal points within the city’s architecture¹⁴ – had become increasingly marginalized within the East German society. Yet, they thus also provided alternative spaces that could not be completely controlled by the state. As Wittenburg and Wolle (2008: 117) pointed out: ‘The everyday noise fell silent within the cool and badly lighted church nave. [...]. The world of the ringing phrases and brass march music remained outside the church door.’¹⁵

Not only were the churches the founding spaces for several democratic parties, they also often provided an alternative performance sphere for music that was officially not fully approved (meaning that the band members had difficulties in obtaining the permission to perform in public). This included rock and punk concerts or blues church services, but also folk revival music (see also Wittenburg and Wolle 2008: 117–119). As became also apparent when interviewing some Rostock-based folk musicians during the *Polyphony of Cultures* project, while they had mostly not been church members, they strongly acknowledged the importance of the churches that had constituted a central space for the strongly interconnected folk network.¹⁶

In contrast to these ‘guest musicians’ – who were sometimes also greeted with suspicion by the actual church members (Wittenburg and Wolle 2008:

¹³ In the case of Rostock’s St. Marien Church, particularly the Monday Evening Prayers of parish priest Joachim Gauck should be mentioned. Gauck would later become Germany’s first federal commissioner for the *Stasi* documents.

¹⁴ Although buildings were also systematically destroyed or blown up. Too close to the new Stalinist representative street, the ruins of Rostock’s protestant church St. Jakobi, which was badly damaged during the Second World War, were blown up in 1958, while the catholic *Christuskirche* was blown up to make way for a never realized street project in 1971.

¹⁵ ‘In dem kühlen und schlecht beleuchteten Kirchenschiff verstummte der Alltagslärm. [...]. Die Welt der tönernen Phrasen und blechernen Marschmusik blieb vor der Kirchentür.’

¹⁶ Rostock’s folk network consisted of a small number of groups who had partly taken their musical material and inspirations from western radio stations, occasionally visiting Anglo-American students, combined with their own research work on local traditions (see also Fassnacht and Sweers 2008).

119), as they raised a lot of public attention to these alternative spaces – many choir singers had to take systematic political repressions into account. This not only included limited access to university education for their children, but also a stronger surveillance by the Stasi [*Staatssicherheitsdienst*: ‘state security service’ of the former GDR] – even inside the choir, which was usually perceived as a more open (retreat) sphere.

The informants revealed that, also in this case, twenty years in the past, one could observe some similar, yet likewise highly differentiated mechanisms that serve as an important framework for further investigations:

Some informants, who were 11–14 years old at the time of reunification, could still remember exactly the political songs they had learnt as folk songs at kindergarten, school, or – in the case of those who joined the choir after reunification – in the youth organization FDJ. As one informant of the latter group pointed out, she had accepted pioneer songs like ‘Pioniere voran! (Hell scheint die Sonne)’ [Pioneers forwards! (The sun shines brightly)] or ‘Der kleine Trompeter’ [The little trumpet player] as part of her natural childhood environment. As her parents also gave her access to church activities, she developed a more balanced picture already as teenager, which was further strengthened through increasingly political background data after reunification.

Another informant – the daughter of a Baptist preacher – refused to sing political songs from the beginning, due of her parents’ impact, although it carried the risk of getting bad grades. While almost becoming an outcast at school, she nevertheless recalled that it was through music that she was still integrated, up to being asked to sing at political events (which she refused to do). As she later discovered, not only had her family been on the list of deportees who should have been transported to ‘work camps’ shortly before reunification; the family had also strongly been invigilated *Stasi* informants. This reflected another general issue – many interviewees had often been denounced by good friends or closest neighbours, which has also led to repressive behaviour (on both sides).

Various singers would have liked to write down their memories shortly after reunification, yet the political – and most significantly, the economic –

changes forced them to focus on other issues. It also seems that the economic changes might have led to a form of extreme disappointment taking the form of traumatization – many lost their jobs or had to adapt to an overwhelmingly new (western) situation.¹⁷ Therefore, while many church members had experienced suppression during the GDR period, some nevertheless have started to re-evaluate the past more positively with growing economic difficulties, yet others (as in the case above) more negatively. This has also led to an altered account of the events.

Outlook

As in the case of oral history, some of the findings of this article are already well established within their own disciplinary framework. Yet, as this article illustrated, it is worth exploring further this combination of oral history, psychology, and ethnomusicology, particularly with regard to music in totalitarian systems. While I only presented the first preliminary impressions from my fieldwork on the role of choir music in former East Germany, one can nevertheless again discover highly differentiated stages here.

The first general impression with regard to historical recollection through interviews might thus be summarized as such:

- While the most precise historical accounts occur most closely to the actual events, one will also find the strongest suppression mechanisms here.
- The evaluation of the events will constantly alter over the years.
- Long-term retrospective interviews (e.g. 40–60 years after the events) might be least precise, yet they might also provide the strongest insight into the manipulative use of music.
- In those cases where traumas have been integrated, the long-term perspective might also offer a chance of getting a more balanced (and re-evaluated) impression of past events. In cases of suppressed trauma, however, the

¹⁷ This also affected my role as interviewer from an *emic/etic* balance: While having indeed joined the choir as an outsider – detached from historical and local events, I was nevertheless a westerner, thus also representing this new – heavily criticized – system.

memory often seems to re-emerge at an older age. Despite the combination with processes of re-traumatization, this can also be – in less severe cases – another (maybe final) chance for a rebalanced perspective.¹⁸

Observations like these (that will be subject to further differentiation in the future) seem to confirm the importance of a long-term perspective in order to gain a fuller historical picture (I am avoiding the word complete) of music in totalitarian systems. As might have become apparent with the introductory example, one danger of this so seemingly harmless modern musical-textual material lies in the instrumentalization of information gaps and psychological long-term effects that can only be counterbalanced by a profound historical-psychological-ethnographic background knowledge. Yet, as this example should have demonstrated – it is highly necessary to undertake this work at all, because it otherwise might become increasingly difficult to counter-act current and future conservative or right-wing extremist groupings at all.

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¹⁸ See, for instance, Hartmut Radebold, *Die dunklen Schatten unserer Vergangenheit. Ältere Menschen in Beratung, Psychotherapie, Seelsorge und Pflege.* Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005.

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