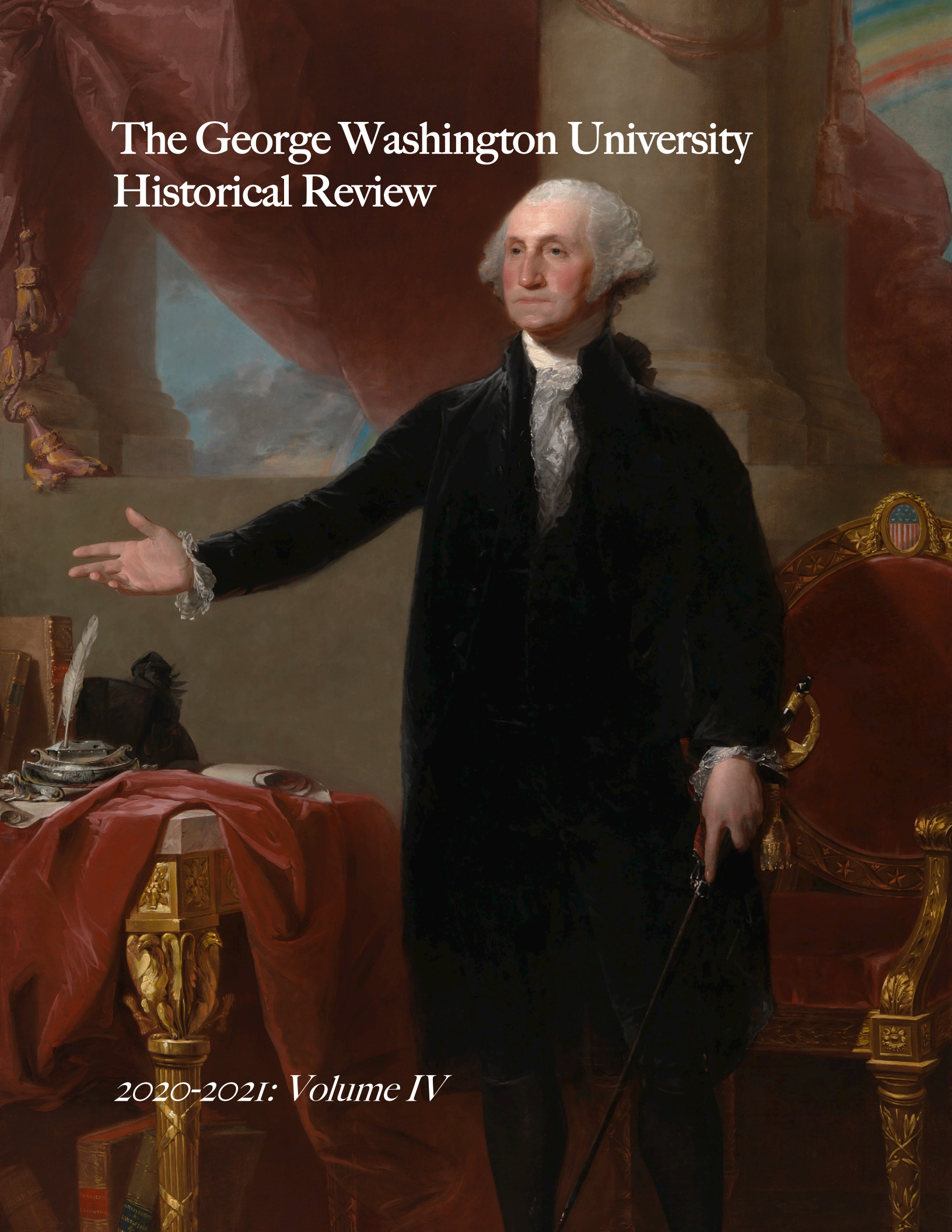


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Cover Photo: Gilbert Stuart, *Lansdowne Portrait*, 1796, Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC, http://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2001.13.

Editor's Note

We are pleased to introduce to you the fourth volume of *The George Washington University Historical Review*. Out of a number of engaging submissions, our team has selected three research essays for publication.

Our fourth volume spans three continents between the 1940s and 2000s. This issue explores the impact of China's decades-old State-Operated Enterprise (SOE) Reforms on workers, U.S. President John F. Kennedy's decision to sell the Hawk missile to Israel and its implications for the U.S.-Israel relationship, and the connection between women and nation-building in East Germany and the United States after the Second World War. The following articles add compelling contributions to the fields of business history, international relations, and gender studies.

We would like to thank the Department of History faculty for their guidance and expertise, allowing us to maintain the exceptional standard of scholarship this publication has always provided. We would also like to thank authors Jack (Xi) Yang, Varun Butaney, and Margaret D. Swenson for their diligence, flexibility, and willingness to modify work into which they had already put so much time. Lastly, I would like to thank my fellow editors for their patience, good work, and dedication to publishing a formidable volume despite the limitations the COVID-19 pandemic brought. On behalf of all contributors, in this historic moment, I hope you enjoy our 2020 edition.

Claire Vanderwood

Editor-in-Chief

UNCONSTRAINED MANAGERS AND WORKER UNCERTAINTY

The Price of China's SOE Reforms

By Jack (Xi) Yang

Introduction

In the early 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) initiated a series of economic restructuring initiatives (*gaige* or the Reforms) with the ascendance of its second-generation leader, Deng Xiaoping.¹ Before 1978, China experienced political and economic turmoil culminating in the Cultural Revolution.² With economic policies focusing mainly on collectivism and egalitarianism, the government failed to increase the productivity of the Chinese national economy. The living standard in China showed no significant improvement from the 1950s to the 1970s.³ Under Deng's leadership, the CCP undertook far-reaching economic reforms and sought to re-legitimize its rule by developing the economy and improving people's livelihoods in China. As part of the Reforms, the government began to transform China's state-operated enterprises, which later became state-owned enterprises (SOE) in 1993.

¹ The Reforms refer to the comprehensive economic restructuring of the Chinese economy. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the ruling party in China, and it dictates all major policy decisions. However, as a political party, the CCP cannot directly execute these policies. The PRC government is the legal entity that issues and implements the decisions the CCP makes. Most of the Chinese officials who serve in the government are also CCP members.

² The term "China" refers to the realm of China or the Chinese nation.

³ Andrew J. Nathan, Tianjian Shi, and Helena V. S. Ho, *China's Transition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 58.

Over the past forty years, Chinese SOEs have transformed from government-directed production units in a command economy to profit-seeking companies in a partially marketized environment. Today, SOEs in China, collectively as a robust economic force, serve as a vehicle of stability for the Chinese economy. The CCP, while reserving political control over SOEs, entrust state assets to these entities, which have become the executants of industrial policies designed by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Chinese state-owned sector experienced great hardships during the economic transition. As China's leadership intensified its economic reforms, many SOEs were privatized or declared bankruptcy. Although the SOE reforms improved the productivity of China's state-owned economy, countless SOE workers became unemployed. Under an immature social welfare system, many laid-off workers became destitute. The official record indicates that between 1995 and 2005, the number of employees working at SOEs and urban collectives dropped from 144 million to 96 million.⁴ Laid-off labor became a major destabilizing factor which threatened numerous localities and undermined the legitimacy of the CCP. While many people criticized the government for allowing the layoffs, few have investigated the tactics SOEs used to lay off their workers and the systemic causes of the massive layoffs that occurred in the mid-1990s to early 2000s. The SOE reforms, implemented between the 1980s and 2000s, weakened the relative position of SOE workers in these enterprises. Through incremental policy changes designed to improve the efficiency of SOEs, the state gradually undermined the negotiating power of the workers in the state-owned sector, facilitating a massive layoff of SOE

⁴ Albert Keidel, "China's Economic Challenge: Unconventional Success" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), typescript, 151.

workers in the late 1990s to the early 2000s.⁵ The legal reforms and changing power dynamics within the SOEs not only deprived China's urban labor of their permanent-worker status and benefits but also signified the nullification of the Chinese worker as a class of people. In effect, the welfare of the grassroots workers, a key characteristic of Chinese socialism, was sacrificed nationwide in a rush for marketization and growth.

Background: The CCP's Changing Policy Towards the SOEs

Before the Reforms, the Chinese SOEs could not lay off their workers. Providing stable employment opportunities to China's urban population had remained a core purpose of SOEs until the mid-1990s. Although requiring SOEs to employ the entire urban population appears ludicrous from a market economy perspective, in a command economy, the PRC government justified establishing such obligations for SOEs. Unlike the SOEs in China today, China had state-operated enterprises before 1993.⁶ Rather than acting as independent market entities, SOEs existed as extensions of the government, allowing the government to dictate the production of goods and services. The CCP and the government directly administered the operation of these SOEs by appointing Party cadres and bureaucrats to managerial positions. Meanwhile, SOEs relied on the government to provide them with the capital and raw material required for production. The government collected all SOE output and allocated it to different sectors of the economy. Fiscally, the government collected SOEs' profits and subsidized their losses. Between

⁵ The term "efficiency" refers to the marginal production of capital and labor.

⁶ Since state-owned enterprise and state-operated enterprise are two terms that represent mostly the same thing, the thesis uses the abbreviation SOE for both terms.

the 1950s and 1980s, SOE employees had similar statuses to government employees. Therefore, as non-profit-driven production units, SOEs rarely laid-off workers.

Renewed Political Will

The CCP leadership sought to address the issue of low productivity of SOE workers in April 1979. In one meeting, an official remarked, “the enterprises relied on the country, and the employees relied on the enterprises [to survive],” illustrating the unviability of China’s planned economy.⁷ The socialist system neither rewarded diligence nor punished idleness; the excessive emphasis on egalitarianism in China’s SOE policies created no incentives for workers to perform well at their assigned posts, lowering both the productivity of individual workers and the performance of SOEs.

Initially, the PRC government sought to address the issue of workers’ lack of motivation by providing workers with material incentives. As one of the policy measures, in the 1980s, the central government issued nationwide reforms to expand the autonomy of SOEs. The reforms sought to delegate some of the managerial power to SOEs, allowing the enterprises to dictate their own production and to exercise greater fiscal autonomy. Through these reforms, the government granted SOEs greater management flexibility, allowing them to allot part of profits to pay bonuses to workers.⁸ The 1980s reforms reflected the CCP’s renewed belief that allowing

⁷ Qingtang Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)* (Beijing Shi: She Hui Ke Xue Wen Xian Chu Ban She, 2018), 30.

⁸ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 31, 34.

SOE managers to control factory production directly would improve the performance of these enterprises.⁹

Although reforms of the early 1980s partially linked workers' material benefits to their output, they had limited success in improving the productivity of SOE workers since the management still did not have the power to dismiss underperforming workers. Additionally, since SOEs were still obligated to turn in most their profits, they had limited financial resources for creating sufficient material incentives for their workers.

While the central government issued new reforms requiring all SOEs to become self-financed, making SOEs fiscally independent from the governmental budget outlays, the government still heavily administered the operation of the SOEs throughout the late 1980s.¹⁰ By the early 1990s, when China deepened its Reforms, private enterprises burgeoned in the marketplace. With low profitability and high administrative costs, SOEs struggled to compete with these emerging enterprises, and many of them faced bankruptcy. The CCP leadership, aware of the financial predicaments of these SOEs, allowed them to downsize staff to lower costs to improve their competitiveness in the newly developed market environment.¹¹

Economic Pressure

The newly introduced price reforms of the 1980s caused significant inflation in China. The inflation forced SOEs to raise wages for their employees to cope with the price surge. The

⁹ Han Zong, *Guo Qi Gai Ge San Shi Nian Qin Li Ji* [*SOE Reform Thirty Years in Personal Experience*] (Shanghai: Shanghai Ren Min Chu Ban She, 2008), 34.

¹⁰ Zong, *Guo Qi Gai Ge San Shi Nian Qin Li Ji* [*SOE Reform Thirty Years in Personal Experience*], 83.

¹¹ Zong, *Guo Qi Gai Ge San Shi Nian Qin Li Ji* [*SOE Reform Thirty Years in Personal Experience*], 101.

wage increases for SOE workers drastically decreased the profitability of SOEs.¹² However, the egalitarian principle of SOEs' labor-management prevented the enterprises from sufficiently stimulating the productivity of the workers to a level that matched their increased wages.

In a command economy, SOEs could manage their decreased profitability by simply demanding additional government finance. However, in 1985, the government no longer directly funded SOEs; instead, SOEs made bank loans to sustain their operations. Throughout the 1980s, the Chinese state-owned banks helped SOEs to finance the majority of their losses.¹³ In 1992, the prices of meat, eggs, and vegetables in large cities such as Beijing rose by as much as 40%.¹⁴ Facing price surges, the government stopped subsidizing the food products with government budget and mandated SOEs to raise wages repeatedly, which further increased their labor costs. In the late 1990s, Chinese SOEs faced "deplorable profitability and high bank indebtedness" due to the government-mandated wage increases.¹⁵ As the gap between the marginal product of each worker and their wage increased, SOEs began to suffer severe losses.

The CCP, seeking to solve the financial predicaments of SOEs, adopted the principle of managing successful large enterprises while invigorating small ones. The principle allowed small and hopeless SOEs to become bankrupt or privatized. Eventually, the government focused on reforming large SOEs, which still possessed profit-making potential, and directed them to reduce costs. In an effort to reduce the increased labor costs, SOEs began to lay off their workers in the second half of the 1990s.

¹² Keidel, "China's Economic Challenge," 61.

¹³ Keidel, "China's Economic Challenge," 61.

¹⁴ Keidel, "China's Economic Challenge," 144.

¹⁵ Keidel, "China's Economic Challenge," 150.

Reforms and Corruption

Since the 1980s, the government had gradually delegated the managerial power of SOEs to their leaderships. However, the management of SOEs was primarily comprised of former bureaucrats. Until 2002, the PRC government appointed over 80% of SOE managers.¹⁶ Many appointees, who previously served as government officials, had minimal incentive to substantially increase the profits of their SOEs since the government could relocate them to other posts at any time.¹⁷ Moreover, with government mandates, these appointees enjoyed unchecked authority within their SOEs. No internal entities, such as lower-level managers or a workers' congress, could remove them.¹⁸ This resulted in many SOE managers embezzling state assets. Some managers colluded with local officials and auctioned state-owned assets at artificially lowered prices, in which case, the purchasers and sellers could split the profit derived from the price gap.¹⁹ The loss of state assets caused rampant bankruptcies for the mid- and small sized SOEs, which resulted in mass unemployment in some regions.

Literature Review and Methodology

Countless literature has discussed the trajectories and rationales of China's economic reforms. However, due to the sensitivity of the subject, few scholars, especially within mainland China, have systematically investigated the layoffs of SOE workers between the late 1990s and

¹⁶ Qinglian He, *Zhong Guo Xian Dai Hua De Xian Jing [China's Descent into a Quagmire]* (Sunnyvale, C.A.: Broad Press Inc., 2003), 50.

¹⁷ He, *Zhong Guo Xian Dai Hua De Xian Jing [China's Descent into a Quagmire]*, 46.

¹⁸ He, *Zhong Guo Xian Dai Hua De Xian Jing [China's Descent into a Quagmire]*, 51; Worker's Congress is a form of workers' union within an enterprise.

¹⁹ He, *Zhong Guo Xian Dai Hua De Xian Jing [China's Descent into a Quagmire]*, 52.

early 2000s. Fortunately, many scholars have devoted portions of their research to labor issues of China's SOE reforms.

When investigating the causes of SOE worker layoffs, scholars frequently adopt one of three different approaches. In the first approach, they analyze the government's changing political will and its effect on SOE reforms. Dr. Qingtang Yue, a Chinese economist, represents the first school of thought, arguing that the PRC government directed SOEs to lay off their underperforming workers to allow the SOEs to adapt to a competitive market environment.²⁰ Yue's literature also endorses most of the official rhetoric and includes minimal information on the failed cases of SOE reforms.

In the second approach, scholars focus on the economic aspect of China's SOE reforms. By examining the statistics of China's macroeconomic performance for each period, Dr. Albert Keidel investigates the structural causes of China's SOE reforms. In one of his newest studies, Keidel argues that the introduction of market mechanisms, especially price reforms, drastically increased the costs of SOEs. To reduce these increased costs, SOEs began to lay off their excess workers in the late 1990s.²¹ Keidel's research mainly focuses on economic elements that drove the reforms and omits other agency factors, such as the changes in China's political environment and power dynamics within SOEs' management.

In the third approach, scholars focus on the effects of non-transparency and rent-seeking activities on China's economic development and analyze how corruption deviated some of the reforms from their original purposes. Qinglian He, a Chinese economist who moved to the U.S.

²⁰ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 6.

²¹ Keidel, "China's Economic Challenge," 55, 59.

due to political pressure in China, represents the third school of thought. She argues that due to corruption and poor management, SOEs began to experience severe debt crises in the mid-1990s, and many declared bankruptcies which resulted in massive layoffs in the late 1990s.²² In her research, He relies on media sources, such as local newspapers, to probe the transgressions that occurred in China's SOE management.

Through macro and micro-lenses, Yue, Keidel, and He offer different explanations for the layoffs of SOE workers in the 1990s. However, since these scholars analyze China's SOE reforms using different methodologies, their analyses are complimentary. Although the present literature has comprehensively discussed the course of China's economic restructuring and explained the political and economic motivation that caused China's economic reforms, they each dedicate limited portions of their work to the massive layoffs of SOE workers during the late 1990s. Moreover, the three scholars hardly touch on the perspectives of SOE workers and managers who directly experienced these profound socioeconomic transformations.

This paper relies on a series of legal documents the central government issued in the 1980s and 1990s to analyze the effects of institutional reforms on SOE workers. From 1978 until today, different localities administered SOE reforms differently. In a relatively chaotic manner, the localities exercised discretionary power and issued administrative notices that delayed or deviated from the laws or regulations released by the central government. When analyzing the institutional changes, the research mainly focuses on the laws or regulations released by the central government. Considering that the implementation of these reforms varies significantly between localities, interviews of selected individuals become critically important to the

²² He, *Zhong Guo Xian Dai Hua De Xian Jing* [China's Descent into a Quagmire], 50-54.

investigation on the extent these central government policies influenced the experiences of SOE workers in China.

Unlike the existing literature, this research further investigates the SOE worker layoffs by incorporating analyses of the memoirs and interviews of SOE workers and managers who experienced, witnessed, or administered the labor reforms in the 1990s. The author conducted both phone and email interviews based on a series of designed questions focusing on their experience with the massive layoffs that took place in the 1990s to 2000s, and how they perceived the explanations provided by their superiors when layoffs happened to them or people around them. This research aims to uncover the causes of the layoffs and the methods used by the SOEs to lay off their workers by identifying the commonalities of these testimonies.

Since this research investigates the experiences of SOE workers to illustrate an interpersonal aspect of the Chinese SOE labor reforms and the dynamic between the managers and lower-level employees, it divides these interviewees into four background groups as shown in Table 1. The research first distinguishes whether the interviewee has worked for a survived or bankrupted SOE. Regardless of a SOE's locality or industry, large SOEs commonly undergo a higher standard of scrutiny. Since these enterprises often employ a large number of workers and possess a large amount of state assets, they frequently strive to adhere to the laws and regulations issued by the central government. On the contrary, small SOEs receive relatively little attention, so they have a higher possibility of taking advantage of their workers. The research furthermore divides the interviewees into managers and employees and compares their different perspectives on these issues. Due to the lack of large sample size, the paper also relies on published memoirs of some SOE workers or managers. It is important to note, though, that multiple former

managers who administered bankrupted SOEs did not allow the author to record of their experiences in a written format.

Furthermore, the research primarily focuses on SOEs that survived the reform era and legally executed the reform measures. The section *The Poor Practices of SOE Reorganization* discusses exceptional cases, where SOE managers engaged in illegal activities, and their effects on SOE workers.

Table 1. Interviewees.

	Survived/Large SOE	Bankrupted/Small SOE
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Zhiping Song – Manager of Beixin ● Liu – Jiangsu Julong Vice Manager ● Zheng – CNPC Karamay Drilling Company mid-level manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Li – Retired executive
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yin – CNBM human resource officer ● Zhang – CNBM Engineering retired employee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Xin – Jilin Steel Factory laid-off worker ● Yan – Jilin Real Estate Development and Management Corp. laid-off employee ● Wang – Factory worker at the Shengli oil field

The Rise of SOE Managers

Since the initiation of the Reforms in 1978, the separation of state and enterprise remained a central theme of China's SOE reforms. Seeking to improve SOE performances, the government dramatically reduced the role of central planning. The decentralization of power on the economic front resulted in the elevation of SOE managers who obtained increased latitude in

SOE management. In the late 1980s, the reforms in China's SOE managerial structures changed the power dynamics within SOEs in favor of the factory managers. Once the managers reached dominant positions within their enterprises, they began to lay off excess workers to reduce costs and ensure the survival of the SOEs.

In the first session of the Eighth National Congress of the CCP in 1956, Deng Xiaoping raised the concept of manager responsibility system under the Party leadership. Deng proposed that the government delegate the managerial responsibilities of SOEs to the managers of the factories rather than having state officials direct SOE operations. He believed that, with hands-on experience, the factory managers could achieve better micro-management; to Deng, the government or CCP officials should refrain from interfering with SOE operations. However, not until Deng's ascendance to the CCP leadership in 1978 did he realize his vision for China's SOE reforms. In 1981, the State Economic Commission released the *Opinion on the Implementation of the Industrial Production Economic Responsibility System*. According to the document, the government tangibly expanded the fiscal autonomy of SOEs and stipulated that the corresponding government agencies should experiment with new forms of power delegation to expand the power of SOE managers effectively.²³

In 1984, the third plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee of the CCP released the *Decision of the CCP Central Committee on Economic System Reform*. The Decision demonstrates the CCP's political will to deepen China's economic reforms and enunciates the many inefficiencies in China's SOE management due to cumbersome and dispersed bureaucratic

²³ P.R. China State Economic Commission, *Opinion on the Implementation of the Industrial Production Economic Responsibility System*, Government document, October 19, 1981, <http://www.reformdata.org/1981/1029/5884.shtml>.

authorities. According to the document, “due to the long-term association of state and enterprises, SOEs had become the extensions of the bureaucracy,” and only by adapting to the “factory manager responsibility system,” whereby the factory managers assume full authority of the workplace, can SOEs avoid excessive state interference and establish unified and effective management.²⁴ Statistics show that from 1985 to 1986, SOEs in Beijing, which adopted the factory manager responsibility system, experienced moderate growth. These positive results motivated the government to further the reforms and establish the contracted management responsibility system (CMRS) in SOE management. Under the CMRS, the government established contracts with individuals delegating them almost full managerial power over a SOE. Managers who signed the contract had to manage the enterprise to raise the required amount of tax and achieve the required level of technological or capital advancement.²⁵ In exchange, the managers received incomes proportional to the profits generated by the enterprises, which created monetary incentives for managers to improve the performance of their enterprises.²⁶

Starting in the mid-1980s, the CCP leadership intensified debates over SOE management. Some argued that the government, as the agent of the people to whom the ownership of state-assets belongs, should directly manage the SOEs to ensure these enterprises operated in the interests of the people. Others supported the separation of ownership and management, which would allow the managers to serve as the agents of the state to manage

²⁴ P.R. China Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, *Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Economic System Reform*, Government document, April 20, 1984, http://www.gov.cn/test/2008-06/26/content_1028140.htm.

²⁵ P.R. China State Council, *Interim Regulation on the Contracted Management Responsibility System for Industrial Enterprises Owned by the Whole People*, Government document, February 27, 1988, <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=21647&lib=law>.

²⁶ P.R. China State Council, *Interim Regulation on the Contracted Management Responsibility System for Industrial Enterprises Owned by the Whole People*.

state-operated factories or enterprises. Eventually, in 1988, the Seventh National People's Congress (NPC) passed the Law (and the Interim Regulation) of the PRC on Industrial Enterprises Owned by the Whole People. The Law supported the concept of the separation of ownership and control and formally recognized the legality and rationality of expanding the managerial power of the SOE managers and established the legal basis for the CMRS.²⁷

The Law indicated that “enterprises shall establish a system of production, operation, and management headed by the factory director” and that the government would only issue indirect and macro-level guidance to SOEs.²⁸ It granted SOE managers appointed by the competent government department unprecedented power within an enterprise to decide production plans, personnel changes, wage adjustments, and bonus distribution.²⁹ Although other institutions, such as the workers' congress, had overseeing power, these institutions provided no practical restraints to the managers, since the managers had the authority to remove disobedient individuals from their positions.³⁰

In 1994, as China continued to marketize its economy, the Eighth NPC passed the Company Law of the PRC. The Company Law, following free-market styles of corporate governance, established a legal basis for China to develop a modernized “enterprise system” for both private enterprises and SOEs. Under the Company Law, the title of factory managers or

²⁷ P.R. China National People's Congress, *Law of the People's Republic of China on Industrial Enterprises Owned by the Whole People*, Government document, April 13, 1988, <http://en.pkulaw.cn/display.aspx?id=a179deb444b275a2bdfb&lib=law&SearchKeyword=&SearchCKeyword=%d6%do%bb%aa%c8%cb%c3%fi%b9%b2%ba%cd%b9%fa%c8%ab%c3%fi%cb%f9%d3%do%d6%c6%b9%a4%d2%b5%c6%f3%d2%b5%b7%a8>.

²⁸ P.R. China National People's Congress, *Law of the People's Republic of China on Industrial Enterprises Owned by the Whole People*, Government document, April 13, 1988.

²⁹ P.R. China National People's Congress, *Law of the People's Republic of China on Industrial Enterprises Owned by the Whole People*.

³⁰ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 141.

heads of the enterprises became general managers. Although the Company Law delineated the overseeing power of the directors' board within a company, in SOEs, the head managers still faced no significant institutional constraints. Since the ownership of the company belonged to the state, the government reserved the right to appoint or replace the board directors and chairmen, who frequently served concurrently as general managers.³¹ As government appointees, the managers often had close connections with upper-level officials, which made it difficult for others within the enterprise to challenge their authority. Besides reaffirming the authority of the managers, the initiation of the Company Law also signified that SOEs had transformed their functions and status from production units governed by the state to financially independent and profit-driven market entities.

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, concomitant with the promulgation of SOE management reforms, the government also required SOEs to achieve financial independence. However, as relics of the command economy, SOEs remained unfit for a marketized environment. Although the early reforms achieved moderate success in improving SOE performances, in the 1990s, financial difficulties began to haunt SOEs. As leaders of these failing enterprises, the managers, with renewed power and responsibilities, took drastic actions to ensure the survival of their companies. Zhiping Song, a renowned SOE executive and reformer in China, served as the factory manager of the Beijing New Building Material Factory (Beixin) in 1993. Song's factory began to experience various operational difficulties in 1992. According to Song, overstaffing and low worker productivity remained two of the main encumbrances for the

³¹ P.R. China State Economic Commission, *Guiding Opinions on the Implementation Phase of the Pilot Work of the 100-House Modern Enterprise System Determined by the State Council*, Government document, November 21, 1995, <http://www.reformdata.org/1995/1121/6303.shtml>.

enterprise. Song indicates that when Beixin commenced production, it had only 1,200 workers, and “ten years later, Beixin established no additional production line; however, its employees increased by 1,000 people.”³² For more than a decade before 1996, many of Beixin’s workers, abusing their personal relationships with the hiring officers, often arranged for family members to work at the factory.³³ By 1996, SOEs in China were overstaffed by 12%. In extreme cases, some were overstaffed by 30% to 50%.³⁴ “For SOEs,” writes Song, “once a person walks into your door, the person becomes your person, and you must be responsible until the end.”³⁵ Over the years, Beixin established many servicing subdivisions to absorb these excessive and wasteful recruitments, which generated high costs for the enterprise. Moreover, many of Beixin’s employees were the children of government officials, who frequently treated working schedules and factory rules with blatant disregard.³⁶ Thus, reforms that offered wage increase had minimal effect on motivating poorly disciplined workers who mainly held positions of insignificant responsibilities.

In 1996, under the Company Law, the Beixin Factory transformed into the Beixin Corporation, and Song served as its board chairman and general manager. Under Song’s leadership, the company significantly reduced its excess workforce, especially redundant mid-level management personnel. Meanwhile, Song terminated all recruitment and transferred 550 workers to job-retraining programs.³⁷ According to Song, all 550 Beixin workers found re-

³² Zhiping Song, *Du Xing Zhi Yuan [Dedication and Achievement]* (Beijing: Zhong Xin Chu Ban She, 2017), 111.

³³ Song, *Du Xing Zhi Yuan [Dedication and Achievement]*, 111.

³⁴ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 172.

³⁵ Song, *Du Xing Zhi Yuan [Dedication and Achievement]*, 111.

³⁶ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 70.

³⁷ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 112.

employment later. Unfortunately, not every laid-off SOE worker could reenter the state-owned sector this easily. Bin Liu served as the vice manager of the Jiangsu Julong Concrete Group Corporation (Jiangsu Julong) in 1995 and oversaw worker rearrangement tasks. Liu also noted that as the market environment became competitive, the company felt heightened pressure to maintain its survival. He indicates, however, that many of the workers did not share the same sense of insecurity with the company. Seeking to increase profitability, Jiangsu Julong laid off the “incompetent workers” and “uncooperative workers” reducing the company’s workforce by over 460 people.³⁸ As the vice manager, Liu believed that the layoffs could effectively force the workers to relinquish their false sense of security and compel them to improve their productivity, which might lead to improved company performance.

Today, as a subsidiary of the China National Building Material Company (CNBM), a giant Chinese SOE, Jiangsu Julong has emerged as a market-competitive firm. Although Jiangsu Julong successfully overcame its financial difficulties of the late 1990s by laying off excess and unproductive workers, based on the accounts given by some SOE workers, merit, or its absence, was not the only factor determining their retainment or dismissal. Zhang, a retired worker from CNBM Engineering, described her experience with layoffs with frustration. In 1993, CNBM Engineering adopted the measure of dual-direction selection, which allowed the enterprise or an internal department to reconsider whether to hire an existing worker. The measure also allowed a worker to reject an offer from the enterprise and seek employment at other agencies: “Many

³⁸ Liu (Jiangsu Julong vice manager), interview by Jack Yang, February 2020.

SOEs were doing this. You could see it in newspapers, podcasts, everywhere.”³⁹ Subsequently, the enterprises had to establish labor contracts with newly hired or rehired employees.

In 1994, a new manager switched to Zhang’s department. Zhang doubted the new manager’s ability to lead the department and challenged some of his directions. A few months later, the department laid Zhang off. Fortunately, CNBM Engineering had a three-month employment waiting period, which allowed laid-off workers to seek re-employment in other departments. Eventually, at the end of the second month, a different department agreed to extend an offer to Zhang and renewed her labor contract with CNBM. The new department valued Zhang’s contribution and soon offered her a promotion.⁴⁰

Zhang believes that the manager laid her off solely because of his personal disaffection with her. In the early 1990s, most companies in China considered college graduates extremely valuable. Each year, only around 600,000 college graduates entered the workforce, and Zhang was one of them.⁴¹ If the managers sought to improve the average productivity of the department, Zhang, as valuable human capital, could easily have stayed in her post despite her minor transgression. However, in 1994, CNBM Engineering had not established enforceable regulations to guide employee recruitment, and the department managers monopolized the powers of recruitment and dismissal. “The manager had to fulfill a quota dictated by the top-level executives, which required them to dismiss a certain number of employees; however, the managers had the power of deciding whom to fire.”⁴² Today the exact cause of Zhang’s temporary

³⁹ Zhang (CNBM Engineering retired employee), interview by Jack Yang, February 13, 2020.

⁴⁰ Zhang, interview.

⁴¹ Yantu, “Statistical Table of the Number of Graduates of Ordinary Colleges and Universities in China Over the Years,” Baidu.com, March 29, 2019, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1629311661563805600&wfr=spider&for=pc>.

⁴² Zhang, interview.

layoff might never be determined; however, it demonstrates that managers had unrestrained power to dismiss subordinates who challenged their position.

In the mid-1990s, both Song and Liu faced dire circumstances as SOE managers. Unlike their predecessors, the 1990s SOE managers eventually addressed the issue of overstaffing and workers' low productivity in a market-oriented manner and laid off a significant portion of their excess workforce. From the 1980s to 1990s, the government introduced a series of reforms that effectively transferred the managerial power of SOEs from various government authorities to SOE managers. With decision-making power consolidated within an enterprise, the manager could execute difficult tasks, such as laying off workers, while facing minimal opposition. In ridding the SOEs of unproductive workers, though, some managers may have abused their power and used their authority to dismiss recalcitrant subordinates.

Moreover, the purpose and status of SOEs underwent a legal transformation in the 1990s. With the introduction of the Law on Industrial Enterprises Owned by the Whole People, Chinese SOEs became profit-seeking and financially independent entities in a partially marketized system and were no longer responsible for providing social welfare. Unlike the CCP officials who previously governed these enterprises, the managers' prime responsibility became generating profits and ensuring the survival of their companies. Thus, SOE managers made the politically costly but economically wise decision to lay off workers. With their powers consolidated and priorities shifted, SOE managers had laid off around 16.5 million workers by 1999 according to the official count; however, the actual number could be much larger.⁴³

⁴³ Yongshun Cai, *State and Laid-Off Workers in Reform China (Routledge Studies on China in Transition)* (Abingdon, U.K.: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 18, Kindle.

Transforming the SOE-worker Status

In the mid-1990s, SOEs began to lay off their workers, but laid-off SOE workers in China did not become unemployed. SOEs resorted to the policy of *xia gang*, meaning leaving the post. The policy allowed SOEs to discharge some employees from the workplace while maintaining their SOE-worker status. The *xia gang* or laid-off workers received stipends from the enterprises while seeking re-employment, although such re-employment opportunities were limited.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, not all laid-off SOE workers received the *xia gang* treatment.

From the 1990s to the early 2000s, many SOEs experienced difficulties implementing worker layoffs. Although the official rhetoric continued to stress the importance of protecting workers' benefits and securing re-employment opportunities for laid-off workers, many SOE employees remained pessimistic about their futures outside the state sector. By the mid-1990s, after a series of labor reforms, SOE workers had become more vulnerable. As the SOE-modernization reforms deepened, the government also encouraged SOE leaderships to incorporate market mechanisms into their labor management, which required the workers to relinquish their SOE-worker status.⁴⁵ In the 1990s, the enterprises provided the workers with short-term economic incentives in exchange for their compliance. Through tactful persuasion and intimidation, SOEs cajoled their employees into renouncing their SOE-worker's status, allowing SOEs to remove the surplus workforce from the state-owned sector.

Before the Reforms, China implemented a centralized labor allocation system for the urban sector, whereby the government assigned employments for all its urban labor force. The

⁴⁴ Keidel, "China's Economic Challenge," 151.

⁴⁵ The status for urban SOE workers with lifelong employment and social services guarantees.

system made it extremely difficult for workers to change their occupation or employer after the initial assignments. Additionally, the enterprises did not have the authority to lay off their workers, regardless of the workers' performances; in effect, an employee could work at an enterprise as a *permanent worker* until he or she retired.⁴⁶ Although minor wage differences existed between different levels of employees, SOE workers tended to underperform, since the government guaranteed their employment.⁴⁷ In the early 1980s, as the government began to delegate managerial power of the SOEs to the manager, it also allowed them to exercise greater autonomy in managing their workers. In 1986, the State Council issued the Provisional Regulations on the Institution of Labor Contract System in SOEs. Under the labor contract system, SOEs could hire *contracted workers*, with whom they had to establish labor contracts. The regulations stipulated that SOEs and workers could modify or terminate labor contracts if the two parties agreed, empowering employees to switch their jobs after they became employed. Finally, they allowed SOEs to terminate contracts with their workers in rare circumstances.⁴⁸ When SOEs terminated contracts with their contracted workers, the workers became laid off. However, the laid-off contracted workers could not retain SOE workers' status or receive the *xia gang* benefits, such as monthly stipends and social services, as only permanent workers were entitled to these benefits.⁴⁹ In the same year, the State Council issued the Provisional Regulations on the Dismissal of SOE Workers. According to the regulations, an enterprise

⁴⁶ Permanent workers possessed SOE-worker status.

⁴⁷ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 151.

⁴⁸ P.R. China State Council, *Provisional Regulations on Institution of Labor Contract System in State-Owned Enterprises*, Government document, October 1, 1986, <http://en.pkulaw.cn/display.aspx?cgid=5e781efabfd7a18bdfb&lib=law>.

⁴⁹ P.R. China State Council, *Provisional Regulations on Institution of Labor Contract System in State-Owned Enterprises*.

could dismiss permanent workers who repeatedly violated production rules, such as by stealing, fighting, or vandalizing, and caused significant economic losses.⁵⁰ Fortunately, in the 1980, the SOEs had not experienced the severe financial difficulties they later faced in the 1990s. When the government first introduced these new labor regulations empowering the employers, SOE managers did not utilize these measures to lay off workers on a systematic scale.

These regulations also had several defects. First, the autonomy of SOEs concerning human resource management remained limited. Second, while new workers hired after 1986 demonstrated improved performances, many old workers, whom the enterprises hired before the introduction of the 1980s regulations were unaffected and thus remained unproductive.⁵¹ Recognizing the defects of the SOEs' labor management, the State Council issued the 1993 Provisions on SOE Employee Unemployment Insurance, which expanded the authority of SOEs to lay off workers. The Provisions recognized the right of SOEs to lay off permanent workers when the enterprises "declared bankruptcy," "faced bankruptcy," or "ceased production in order to be streamlined."⁵² The Provisions show that the CCP remained reluctant to allow the SOEs to freely lay off their workers. The government also sought to limit the scale of layoffs. Still, some SOE managers and many of the local oversight agencies interpreted these notices as permissions for the enterprises to shake off the burden of supporting their overstaffed workforce.

In 1994, the Eighth NPC issued the Labor Law of the PRC, which reaffirmed the previous reforms and created a legal basis for SOEs to lay off workers by terminations of labor

⁵⁰ P.R. China State Council, *Interim Provisions for Dismissal of Disciplinary Workers by State-owned Enterprises*, Government document, July 12, 1986, http://www.pkulaw.cn/fulltext_form.aspx?Gid=2904.

⁵¹ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 154.

⁵² P.R. China State Council, *Regulations on Unemployment Insurance for Staff and Workers of State-owned Enterprises*, Government document, May 1, 1993, <http://www.chinalawedu.com/new/23223a23228a2010/20101216shangfi45436.shtml>.

contracts.⁵³ In 1994, the Ministry of Labor (MOL) issued the Notice on Full Implementation of the Labor Contract System, which required SOEs to convert all their permanent workers to contracted workers.⁵⁴ The reform sought to terminate the dual-track labor system that had existed since 1986. By retaining only contracted workers, SOEs obtained the right to dismiss any of their workers without having to shoulder the responsibility of providing them unemployment stipend or services.

In the mid-1990s, the profitability of SOEs decreased significantly, and many approached bankruptcies. While large SOEs sought to lay off workers to reduce costs and ensure their survival, many small and midsized SOEs began to lay off their workers to prepare for bankruptcy. The local governments, fearing an outbreak of collective labor unrest, forbade SOEs from declaring bankruptcy without compensating the workers.⁵⁵ Although the Labor Law of 1995 allowed SOEs to terminate contracts with their employees, many SOEs could not legally dismiss their employees who still possessed SOE-worker status. Although the MOL required the SOEs to convert all permanent workers into contracted workers by 1995 to 1996, many SOEs did not achieve the requirement until the early 2000s.⁵⁶ Due to incompleteness of the labor contract reform,

⁵³ P.R. China Ministry of Labor Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, *Labor Law of the People's Republic of China*, Government document, January 1, 1995, <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?id=705&dlib=law#menu2>

⁵⁴ P.R. China Ministry of Labor, *Notice of the Ministry of Labor on Full Implementation of the Labor Contract System*, Government document, August 24, 1994, <http://www.reformdata.org/1994/0824/8498.shtml>.

⁵⁵ Dequn Wang, "The Research for the Reform System State-Owned Enterprise" (diss., Hua Zhong Normal University, 2004), 18; Local government refers to provincial, municipal, and county authorities that are responsible to the central government in Beijing. Collectively, the central government and these local governments constitute the PRC government.

⁵⁶ Wang, "The Research for the Reform System State-Owned Enterprise," 18; Yanmei Huo, Shuyun Sun, Yanhua Xie, and Zengjun Jia, "A Tentative Study of the Change of Identities of Staffs in State-Owned Enterprises of Hebei Province," *Journal of Hebei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 28, no. 4 (July 2005): 71-73.

in the mid-1990s, many SOEs could not legally lay off workers through contract termination, since these enterprises had not established labor contracts with their workers.

From the 1980s to 1990s, the localities chaotically executed the economic reforms planned by the central government. As a geographically large country, discernable development gaps existed between the different localities in China. While some areas, such as the south-east coastal zones, swiftly implemented economic reforms, others, such as the industrial heartland in the north-east, experienced significant lags. Although the central government's ministries issued laws and provisions to guide the Reforms, the local governments exercised considerable discretionary power and controlled the implementation of the reform measures.⁵⁷

In the late 1980s, when SOEs attempted to convert permanent workers to contracted workers, many workers demanded compensation. Before the Reforms, China's urban sector, which employed both SOE workers and government employees, implemented the policy of "low income, low consumption."⁵⁸ While employers offered low incomes to all employees, they provided them with adequate healthcare and retirement benefits.⁵⁹ When SOEs attempted to change the status of their workers from permanent to contracted, they deprived them of their social benefits, which the old system had guaranteed. Then, when workers demanded compensation for the loss of their SOE-worker status, many SOEs did not have adequate funding to compensate the workers.⁶⁰ Recognizing the different financial statuses of these SOEs,

⁵⁷ Choŋg Chae-ho, *Central Control and Local Discretion in China: Leadership and Implementation during Post-Mao Decollectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ Qinglian He, *Zhong Guo Xian Dai Hua De Xian Jing*, 15.

⁵⁹ Jingru Zhang, *Congresses of the Communist Party of China* (Shi Jia Zhuang, He Bei: He Bei Ren Min Chu Ban She, 2012), 2:348.

⁶⁰ "The Conflict of Interests and the Invalidation of Law," China Labor Bulletin, November 2004, 17, <https://clb.org.hk/zh-hans/content/%E3%80%8A%E5%88%A9%E7%9B%8A%E7%9A%84%E5%86%B2%E7%AA%81%E4%B8%8E%E6%B3>

the local governments encouraged SOE managers to reach separate agreements with their workers rather than requiring all SOEs under their jurisdiction to compensate workers according to a uniform set of rules. Due to these differing constraints, at enterprises where managers could not reach agreements with workers, the labor contract reforms became delayed indefinitely.⁶¹

In the late 1990s, many SOEs, seeking to reduce costs further, intensified their efforts to persuade their workers to renounce their SOE-worker status and transition to contracted worker status. Many SOEs offered to buy out their workers' SOE-worker status with finite monetary compensation. Oftentimes, in the forms of informal agreements, the workers who accepted compensation renounced their SOE-worker status and related social benefits. Through these negotiations, SOEs paid buyout money in exchange for permanent workers to voluntarily transition to contract workers, which allowed SOEs to legally lay them off. The compensation a worker received depended on various factors, including the worker's age, position, and length of service. SOEs did not follow a unified set of rules in calculating buyout compensations, so the amounts workers received varied significantly.

According to some workers who left SOEs from the 1990s to 2000s, some SOEs used aggressive tactics in buyout negotiations, pressuring workers to relinquish their SOE-worker status. SOE workers who experienced buyouts frequently expressed profound frustration with the exercise. Many said that their former superiors made beguiling and intimidating statements to pressure the workers into agreements. Wang, a factory worker at the Shengli oil field, chose

%95%E5%BE%8B%E7%9A%84%E5%A4%B1%E6%95%88%E5%BC%9A%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%8A%B3%E5%B7%A5%E6%9D%83%E7%9B%8A%E5%88%86%E6%9E%90%E6%8A%A5%E5%91%8A%E3%80%8B.

⁶¹ Huo, Sun, Xie, and Jia, "A Tentative Study of the Change of Identities of Staffs in State-Owned Enterprises of Hebei Province," 72.

the buyout option in the early 2000s. When asked why he agreed to the buyout option, Wang replied, “how dare we not [agree]?”⁶² Wang said that at the general workers’ meeting, the manager threatened that if the workers rejected the buyout option, the enterprise could become bankrupt any day, in which case the workers would also lose any compensation altogether.⁶³ Intimidated by this extreme scenario, Wang and many of his colleagues took the compensation and discharged themselves from China’s state-owned economy.

Conflicts also occurred during these buyout negotiations. Yan, an employee of the Jilin Real Estate Development and Management Corporation, left the SOE in 2002. Yan said that local policies allowed workers to exit the enterprises through “voluntary application.”⁶⁴ Yet, the Corporation bought-out almost half of the enterprise’s employees, who were mainly low-skilled or old.⁶⁵ Yan expressed that although many of the older employees were worried about their retirement benefits and refused to be bought-out, the managers used “radical methods” and forced them to leave.⁶⁶ According to Wang’s and Yan’s accounts, the workers who labored at these SOEs at the time understood that the managers offered buyouts to enable the enterprise to lay them off. Despite the workers’ unwillingness to leave the SOEs, the managers pressured the workers into acceptance.

Zheng, an employee at the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) Karamay Drilling Engineering Company, also confirmed that SOEs used aggressive tactics in buyout

⁶² Mu Xi, “Mai Bu Duan De Going Ling [Working Years That Cannot Be Bought-out],” *Zhong Guo Jing Ji Zhou Can*, August 15, 2004, 9.

⁶³ Xi, “Mai Bu Duan De Going Ling [Working Years That Cannot Be Bought-out],” 9.

⁶⁴ Yan (Jilin Real Estate Development and Management Corporation laid-off employee), interview by Jack Yang, February, 2020.

⁶⁵ Yan, interview.

⁶⁶ Yan, interview.

negotiations. Zheng, having held a mid-level management position, indicated that the enterprise managers painted “beautiful blueprints” for the workers who remained reluctant to accept the buyout option.⁶⁷ They frequently told the workers that with the buyout money, they could open a business and become wealthy. In reality, few laid-off workers succeeded outside the state-owned sector.⁶⁸

From 1986 to 1995, the PRC government introduced a series of reforms to transform China’s labor arrangement from the centralized labor allocation system to the labor contract system. By converting permanent workers to contracted workers, SOEs acquired greater autonomy in labor management, which allowed them to hire high-quality workers, following the principle of open competition. However, these labor reforms also established a legal basis for SOEs to lay off their redundant workforce. Without uniform and articulate regulations, SOEs relied on negotiations to pressure their workers to terminate their SOE workers’ status through buyouts. Many workers, with minimal negotiating power, agreed under duress and left the state-owned sector.

The Poor Practices of SOE Reorganization

China’s SOEs experienced their most challenging time in the late 1990s. From 1987 to 1997, their profits decreased by 42%, and many SOEs could no longer afford to pay their workers’ salaries.⁶⁹ Seeing no better policy option, the government began to direct non-profitable SOEs to conduct reorganization and policy-mandated bankruptcies. From 1995 to 2002, around 131,700

⁶⁷ Zheng (CNPC Karamay Drilling Engineering Company mid-level manager), interview by Jack Yang, February 2020.

⁶⁸ Zheng, interview.

⁶⁹ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 102.

SOEs exited the market.⁷⁰ Many small and mid-sized SOEs remained in the market through mergers and acquisitions. However, other enterprises that did not survive the reform era became privatized or bankrupted and laid off large numbers of workers.

In 1999, the fourth plenum of the Fifteenth CCP Central Committee issued the Decision on the Major Issues Concerning the Reform and Development of SOEs. The Decision advocated the establishment of a “competitive mechanism of survival of the fittest,” and claimed that “bankruptcy and closing are the only options for enterprises that cannot find any market for their products.”⁷¹ In boldly positive language, the CCP explicitly emphasized the role of the market in China’s economy. The Decision encouraged the closures and sales of small-sized and unprofitable SOEs and approved the exercise of “[increasing] efficiency by downsizing staff.”⁷²

By the mid-1990s, after a series of SOE governance reforms, SOE managers had achieved dominant positions within the enterprises. Although the ownership of SOEs belonged to the state, the managers, representing the state, became the practical administrators of state assets. In the 1993 PRC Constitution, the government officially switched the terminology for these organizations from state-operated enterprises to state-owned enterprises.⁷³ The change reflected the government’s decision to resign from directly managing SOEs and to serve instead as the regulator of state-owned assets. From the late 1990s to 2000s, as the government directed small

⁷⁰ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 100.

⁷¹ P.R. China Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, *The Decision of the Central Committee of The Communist Party of China on Major Issues Concerning the Reform and Development of State-Owned Enterprises*, Government document, September 22, 1999, <http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=991&CGid>.

⁷² P.R. China Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, *The Decision of the Central Committee of The Communist Party of China on Major Issues Concerning the Reform and Development of State-Owned Enterprises*.

⁷³ “National People’s Congress, 1993 Amendments to the PRC Constitution,” USC US-China Institute, March 29, 1993, <https://china.usc.edu/national-peoples-congress-1993-amendments-pre-constitution-march-29-1993>.

and midsized SOEs to reorganize, many managers abused their power and embezzled the state assets under their administration.

Some local officials supported the idea of selling small and midsized SOEs. According to Liu, an official serving at the Shandong State Assets Administration Bureau (SAAB) in 1996, “an enterprise can be easily invigorated once it is sold.”⁷⁴ Liu claimed that once an individual assumed an asset’s ownership and liability, its management became more risk-aware, allowing the enterprise to better perform.⁷⁵ Liu’s remark reflects that some local governments encouraged the sales of SOEs. Before sales, each enterprise conducted self-valuation based on the company’s balance sheets, using the simple method of subtracting liabilities from assets. However, since many of these small and midsized SOEs had large debts, the valuations frequently delivered low numbers. If a manager chose to purposely not record an enterprise’s intangible assets, such as land use rights, the final values of these SOEs frequently became extremely low. When Liu was asked whether the self-valuations correctly recorded the intangible state assets, Liu answered “people [were] too busy.”⁷⁶ Considering Liu’s equivocation over the issue, it can be assumed that the local SAAB in Shandong knew that people conspired to devalue state assets. According to Li, a retired SOE executive, many SOE managers artificially devalued their enterprises and subsequently sold the ownerships of the SOEs to themselves and their close associates through negotiated tenders.⁷⁷ Indeed, it was not until 2004 that the central government began to prohibit these insider management purchases.⁷⁸ Many former SOE managers transferred large sums of

⁷⁴ Zong, *Guo Qi Gai Ge San Shi Nian Qin Li Ji*, 192.

⁷⁵ Zong, *Guo Qi Gai Ge San Shi Nian Qin Li Ji*, 192.

⁷⁶ Zong, *Guo Qi Gai Ge San Shi Nian Qin Li Ji*, 192.

⁷⁷ Li (retired SOE executive), interview by Jack Yang, March 2020.

⁷⁸ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 110.

state assets into their private accounts. According to the Supreme People's Procuratorate Work Reports, from 1998 to 2002, 84,395 people were suspected of embezzling state-assets.⁷⁹

Occasionally, a manager pledged to keep all the employees after an enterprise became privatized in exchange for their collective agreement to renounce their SOE-worker status without proper compensation.⁸⁰ However, after the enterprise became privately owned, the new owners could create unreasonable company rules and force the workers to leave.⁸¹ In these instances, many workers only received small amounts of compensation. In 1997, the Jilin Steel Factory became privatized. The enterprise evaluated and liquidated its assets and forcefully bought-out and dismissed most of the workers despite their common objection.⁸² Xin, a laid-off worker at the Factory, said that SOE reforms should have had better policy preparation. The government should “oversee the managers’ actions ... and arrange re-employment opportunities for the workers.”⁸³ When an SOE became privatized or was declared bankrupt, the workers had minimal protection from unemployment.

In 1999, the CCP reaffirmed the principle of “managing successful large enterprises while invigorating small ones.”⁸⁴ While the government focused on ensuring the survival of large enterprises, it overlooked the management of the small and unprofitable ones. Seeing many of the small and midsized SOEs as non-performing assets, the government prioritized removing them

⁷⁹ He, *Zhong Guo Xian Dai Hua De Xian Jing*, 77.

⁸⁰ Dahong Deng, “An Zhi Zhi Gong Ming Yi Xia ‘Gua Fen’ Guo Zi [Carving Up State Assets in the Name of Arranging Workers],” *Zhong Guo Shang Bao*, August 17, 2004.

⁸¹ Deng, *An Zhi Zhi Gong Ming Yi Xia ‘Gua Fen’ Guo Zi [Carving Up State Assets in the Name of Arranging Workers]*.

⁸² Xin (Jilin Steel Factory laid-off worker), interview by Jack Yang, February 2020.

⁸³ Xin, interview.

⁸⁴ P.R. China Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, *The Decision of the Central Committee of The Communist Party of China on Major Issues Concerning the Reform and Development of State-Owned Enterprises*.

from the state-owned sector. However, as hundreds of thousands of SOEs left the umbrella of the state-owned economy, the government issued few practical policy solutions to protect the interests of SOE workers. With a relatively weak rule of law, many SOE employees who worked at small or mid-sized enterprises could not effectively defend themselves against unemployment or obtain adequate compensation in the wave of poorly conducted SOE bankruptcies and privatization.

Conclusion

From 1978 until today, China's economic reforms have revitalized China's state-owned sector. The profits SOEs generated increased eightfold from 1995 to 2002.⁸⁵ Many SOEs successfully improved their performance and moved from net-losses to net-profits. However, concomitant with China's economic success, millions of SOE workers became unemployed. The policy changes drove many old and low-skilled workers away from the state-owned economy.

From 1978, the PRC government implemented a series of laws and regulations seeking to improve the efficiency of SOEs. In the 1980s and 1990s, the government entrusted SOEs to their managers. However, as SOEs became profit-seeking, the managers, unlike the bureaucrats who previously directed the SOEs, prioritized profit-making over ensuring workers' welfare. Besides consolidating the authority of the managers, through incremental policy measures, the government directed the SOEs to deprive the workers of their SOE-worker status and benefits, which allowed the managers to lay off workers to reduce costs. In the late 1990s, the government directed unprofitable SOEs to conduct reorganization or declare bankruptcy to remove the non-

⁸⁵ Yue, *Zhong Guo Guo You Qi Ye Gai Ge Fa Zhan Shi (1978-2018)*, 151.

performing state assets. The private contractors who purchased these state assets frequently abandoned their commitment of keeping former employees. Exploiting the inadequate labor protection measures, the private owners forced workers to leave without offering fair compensation.

The laid-off workers who became unemployed and destitute bore the uneven burden of China's modernization. In 1997, half the 12.74 million laid-off workers failed to become reemployed, and over 3 million received no subsistence subsidies due to the incompleteness of China's social welfare system.⁸⁶ In the same year, almost 11 million former SOE employees became poverty-stricken, with over 27% falling below the subsistence level of their localities.⁸⁷ SOEs in China, seeking to transform into profit-seeking market entities, no longer provided social services to China's urban workers. During the hectic transition, the government did not fully assume the social responsibility relinquished by the SOEs. Today, the topic of laid-off SOE workers remains a political taboo. In the late 1980s to early 2000s, the reconstruction of China's social welfare system lagged significantly behind other aspects of China's economic reforms. Without sufficient social services, former SOE workers who failed to find re-employment became marginalized in Chinese society.

⁸⁶ Cai, *State and Laid-Off Workers in Reform China*, 26.

⁸⁷ Cai, *State and Laid-Off Workers in Reform China*, 26.

ESTABLISHING THE “SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP”

Kennedy’s Decision to Sell the Hawk Missile to Israel

By Varun Butaney

Introduction

The American decision to recognize Israel immediately after the country declared its independence in May 1948 was not a simple one. Despite the steadfast relationship the United States and Israel have today, prior to Israel’s independence, President Truman agreed with then Secretary of State George Marshall’s position not to recognize Israel but to instead support a trusteeship over the territory of Palestine to implement the United Nations Partition Plan.¹ However, Truman either lied to Marshall or changed his mind because the United States recognized the government of Israel as the de facto authority in Palestine two days later on May 14. Since then, the United States has supported Israel in three ways: (1) economically: Israel is the greatest recipient of United States foreign assistance, having received \$142.3 billion since the Second World War; (2) militarily: the United States and Israel signed a continuation of their Memorandum of Understanding in 2016 in which the U.S. pledged \$38 billion in military aid to Israel over the next ten years; and (3) diplomatically: out of the eighty-five times the United States

¹ The United States Partition Plan for Palestine, UN General Assembly Resolution 181, passed in November 1947. It created two states, Israel and Palestine, and left Jerusalem under the control of an international entity. The proposal represented an equal separation of the territory between the two factions. The Arab States rejected this proposal believing they deserved the entirety of the territory, under the mandate of self-determination, while the leaders of the Jewish movement accepted it. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “United Nations Resolution 181,” accessed August 17, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations-Resolution-181>.

has used its veto power in the United Nations Security Council, forty-three were to defend Israel.²

The relationship between the two countries before John F. Kennedy's presidential victory in 1960, though, was not as strong as one would expect. Truman did not follow his early recognition of Israel with additional support. Instead, the United States was forced into a more neutral stance towards both its Arab and Israeli partners. A premier event in the American-Israeli relationship during Kennedy's presidential tenure was his sale of the Hawk missile to the Israelis. While some scholarship on this material exists, it deals with this issue primarily from a military standpoint without considering other potential impacts on Kennedy's decision. The changes made to American foreign policy towards Israel during this period reflect the administration's relationship with the "Jewish Lobby," Kennedy's personal affinity with Israel, and the administration's desire to maintain an equal balance of power with Soviet-supported Arab states. Most significantly, the administration's decision to sell to Israel the Hawk missile set the foundation for the subsequent "special relationship" between Israel and the United States. The Kennedy administration used this sale to affect other parts of the American-Israeli relationship.

Background: Eisenhower's Relationship with Israel

The Eisenhower administration was reactive to events taking place in the developing world. The New Look foreign policy mostly concentrated on Western Europe and the Pacific, while in the Middle East, Eisenhower attempted to bring Egypt into an alliance with the West

² "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel," Congressional Research Service, EveryCRSReport.com, August 7, 2019, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33222.html>; MEE Staff, "The 43 Times US Has Used Veto Power against UN Resolutions on Israel," *Middle East Eye*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/43-times-us-has-used-veto-power-against-un-resolutions-israel>.

as part of an effort to keep the Soviet Union out of the region. During Eisenhower's tenure, the Cold War swung into full effect, forcing countries to choose sides between the United States and Soviet Union. The Western focus on the Middle East was in part due to reliance on Arab oil which required at least a neutral relationship with the Arab World. After the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, President Gamal Abdel Nasser wished to develop his country through initiatives like the Aswan Dam, and to build a post-colonial army to confront the Israeli threat.³ Nasser actively attempted to pit the two superpowers against each other, but Eisenhower steadfastly maintained the American policy in the region dictated by the Tripartite Declaration of 1950.⁴

Attempting to ride the line between the Israelis and the Arabs, Eisenhower also wanted to prevent an arms race that would raise tensions in the Middle East. Even in the wake of the Egyptian purchase of Soviet-bloc weapons from Czechoslovakia, the administration refused to sell the MIM-23 Hawk surface-to-air missile to Israel.⁵ The 1956 Suez Crisis forced the Eisenhower administration to act more impartially towards the region.⁶ Eisenhower did not

³ Egypt and Israel had been adversaries from Israel's independence in 1948. Egypt had led the war against Israel in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. As Egypt became a leader in the Arab world, this relationship worsened due to Nasser's anti-imperialist and anti-Western rhetoric. Both the United States and the Soviet Union wanted increased influence over the Arab World and Egypt's location, size, and role as a leader made it a country primed for competition between the two superpowers.

⁴ The Tripartite Declaration of 1950 was a joint statement by the U.S., UK, and France to guarantee the territorial status quo to show their opposition to the use of force in the Middle East. In 1952, they limited their own arms sales to the region to ensure states only had sufficient military for internal security and self-defense. The U.S. sold very little arms to the area and quasi-officially set its Arms Embargo for the region. The UK and France sold arms whenever it was in their best interest. The Tripartite Declaration fell apart after the 1955 Czech Arms Deal. See Shlomo Slonim, "Origins of the 1950 Tripartite Declaration on the Middle East," *Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 2 (1987): 135-49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208708700696>.

⁵ David Tal, "Symbol Not Substance? Israel's Campaign to Acquire Hawk Missiles, 1960-1962," *The International History Review* 22, no. 2 (2000): 304-17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2000.9640900>.

⁶ The British, French, and Israelis instigated the Suez Canal Crisis to retake the Suez Canal and weaken an increasingly ambitious Egypt led by Nasser, who had nationalized and seized the canal from joint British and French control. Conspiring with Britain and France, Israel invaded Egypt, and the two European powers "stepped in" to stop the conflict, retaking the canal in the process. Egypt's military was roundly defeated, but the scheme among Britain, France, and Israel was clear. In a rare event, the United States and Soviet Union agreed and forced Israel, Britain, and France to return the land to Egypt. The West was humiliated, and Nasser's anti-imperialist

blame Israel directly for the crisis; he understood that Israel believed a pre-emptive strike was necessary because of the Egyptian security pacts with both Syria and Saudi Arabia. However, after the Suez Crisis and the series of Arab-Israeli disputes that followed, the United States did not want to exacerbate its imperialist reputation by being partial towards Israel—even as American allies solidified their own. As the United States distanced itself from the British, French, and Israelis, it prioritized its relationship with the Arab World. This led to an understanding between the United States and Israel. A memorandum from the Secretary of State's Special Assistant for Intelligence to the Secretary of State describes that

Given the siege-mentality of the Israelis and the Israeli belief that US desires to preserve a peaceful status quo in the Near East favored a policy of “appeasement” of Nasir, Israel shifted rapidly away from the US . . . France supported this Israeli readjustment and largely made it possible by supplying Israel with aircraft and arms.⁷

Eisenhower did not modify his position on selling the Hawk missile to Israel. Indeed, a letter from Secretary of State Christian Herter to Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion indicates that because of French military support of Israel, the administration believed that:

While the Hawk system is purely defensive, it is easy to imagine that some other outside power, anxious to exacerbate tensions in the Near East, would yield to the importunities of Israel's apprehensive neighbors and equip them with missile weaponry, including perhaps missiles with surface-to-surface capability. In this event, since the Hawk system cannot defend them against a missile attack, Israel's acquisition of Hawk missiles would be largely wasted time and a heavy expense.⁸

rhetoric was vindicated across the world. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Suez Crisis,” last modified July 19, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Suez-Crisis>.

⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, Volume XVI, Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 637.

⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960*, Volume XIII, Arab-Israeli Dispute, United Arab Republic, North Africa, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 163.

Even in 1960, when the Soviets increased their supply of arms to the newly-created United Arab Republic (U.A.R.), a union of Egypt and Syria, the United States worried that selling the Hawk missile to Israel would increase the chances of conflict between Israel and the U.A.R. and worsen their own tensions with the Soviets. In a letter to the Israeli Ambassador in Washington, Secretary of State Herter made it clear that the United States would not take sides in the Middle East and would “oppose any aggression in the Near East and render assistance to the victim of aggression.”⁹ After the Suez Crisis, Eisenhower’s administration attempted to gain further traction with the Arab World by propping up the monarchy in Jordan, giving aid to Syria, and placing troops in Lebanon to ensure the continuation of its government against suspected communist aggression.

The “Jewish Lobby” and Kennedy’s Affinity with Israel

Two of the factors behind Kennedy’s policy towards Israel were the influence of the “Jewish Lobby” and his personal affinity with Israel. The “Jewish Lobby” --then officially known as the American Zionist Council, and later renamed the American Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC)--had contributed to Kennedy’s election campaign in 1960. The Kennedy Administration was aware of the Council’s potency, especially in light of the alleged influence it exerted on the Truman administration in 1948 during the debate on whether to recognize Israel’s declaration of independence.¹⁰ While there is no direct evidence to suggest that the “Jewish Lobby” influenced Kennedy’s decision to sell the Hawk missile to Israel, as a major donor and

⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957*, Volume XVI, Suez Crisis, July 26–December 31, 1956, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 639.

¹⁰ Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy’s Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

demographic, its influence on the Democratic Party as a whole is evident. It is notable that Kennedy ultimately decided to sell the Hawk Missile in August 1962, a few months before the midterm elections, cementing the support of the “Jewish Lobby” for the cycle. Furthermore, Kennedy staffers and American Jewish leaders met shortly after the administration finalized the sale.¹¹

Kennedy’s overall affinity for Israel, however, likely influenced the dramatic shift in the American-Israeli relationship more heavily than did the “Lobby.” Zachary Goldman argues that Kennedy connected

on both a personal and political level with the young Jewish state, and the values that drove its rapid social, economic, and political development in its early years of independence. Since Israel’s animating political philosophy was consonant with his own views about the importance of liberal democratic political systems and his rugged self-image.¹²

Israel’s advancement since independence confirmed Kennedy’s broader opinions about political economy, economic development, and modernization; to Goldman, Kennedy drew parallels between Israeli progress in Palestine and American progress a century earlier. In addition, Kennedy believed in the long-term security of Israel and its potential as an outpost of democracy. Positioned against communism, Israel espoused Kennedy’s own values and priorities.¹³

Selling the Missiles

As soon as the Kennedy administration took office in 1961, the Israeli government reignited its campaign for the Hawk missile. The reasons behind the refusal during the

¹¹ Zachary K. Goldman, “Ties That Bind: John F. Kennedy and the Foundations of the American-Israeli Alliance,” *Cold War History* 9, no. 1 (2009): 23–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740802170941>.

¹² Goldman, “Ties That Bind,” 26.

¹³ Goldman, “Ties That Bind,” 33.

Eisenhower administration did not seem as relevant as they did during the 1950s. In 1961, showing support for Israel had become geopolitically advantageous for the United States due to the Soviets' support of and friendship with the U.A.R., Israel's counterweight. Further, because of the Czech Arms Deal in 1955 and the continued Soviet armament of Nasser, Kennedy indicated that the United States needed to step in to level the playing field in the arms race. And finally, the Hawk missile was a surface-to-air missile, purely defensive, and thereby symbolically less aggressive than the weapons the Soviets had already supplied to the region.

These changes and the realization that there were to be new priorities under Kennedy gave the Israelis new hope. Instead of attempting to seem impartial in the Middle East, the Kennedy administration chose to befriend Israel further, while maintaining a balance of power between Israel and the Soviet-backed U.A.R.. Furthermore, Israeli Ambassador Avraham Harman explained the current situation to Kennedy's staffers, writing, "The United States had expressed reluctance... to introduce a missile of any kind into the area, but had assured the Israelis that if new factors emerged this decision could be reconsidered."¹⁴

This new factor, which ultimately ensured the missiles' sale, was the Egyptian acquisition of Soviet MIG-19 fighter jets. These jets were considerably better than their Israeli counterpart, the French "Super-Mystere."¹⁵ Air superiority was key for Israel's security, as its tiny landmass was vulnerable to a surprise air attack that could incapacitate its air force and leave it at a disadvantage for the remainder of the conflict. The superior MIG-19 fighter jets, inherently offensive weapons, could be directly countered by the defensive Hawk missile. Kennedy's Special

¹⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 15.

¹⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Document 15.

Assistant for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy thus felt “very little personal desire to deny the ‘Hawk’ to the Israelis, whose professions of vulnerability to surprise air attack he seems to accept at face value.”¹⁶ However, Bundy was still wary as he knew that other allies, namely Pakistan and Iran, would subsequently demand missiles without the payment that Israel would provide. The sale would also break the existing arms embargo to the Middle East that began under President Truman in December 1947 as part of the enforcement of the UN Partition Plan.¹⁷ The embargo capped arms sales at \$1 million, yet the sale of the Hawk missiles would total \$50 million.¹⁸ Kennedy remained hesitant about the Hawk missile sale, as he knew the Arab World might interpret it as further Western imperialist intervention in the region and support for their enemy. The administration continued to fear that selling the Hawk missile “would [also] introduce a new, dangerous and very costly phase in an already desperate arms race.”¹⁹ To forestall its final decision, the United States pointed out that the Israelis had already ordered more advanced fighter jets from France. They suggested Israel instead procure additional advanced weaponry from other European channels, in the hopes that Israel’s reception of military aid from other sources would balance the region. This Kennedy administration suggestion was a continuation of Eisenhower’s policy, ensuring the Arab World did not view the United States as an ally of Israel.²⁰

¹⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 43.

¹⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, Volume V, The Near East and Africa*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 907.

¹⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Document 43.

¹⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 55.

²⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*, Document 55.

Between May 1961 and May 1962, Israel repeatedly requested the missiles, as well as a public security guarantee from the United States. Finally, in a May 1962 report from the U.S. Embassy in Israel, Israel's Deputy Defense Minister Shimon Peres alleged that Nasser was going to attack Israel when he achieved military superiority, and ominously announced that the U.A.R. was nearing this goal. Peres demanded that the United States sell Israel the Hawk missiles to create the balance of power it supposedly supported.²¹ The Kennedy administration continued to believe that a public guarantee was too extreme, but considered that the "President might write a secret letter to Ben Gurion along the following lines: (1) the US recognized Israel's security preoccupations; (2) Israel should be reassured that in event of clear-cut Arab aggression the US would take whatever steps were necessary to make sure that the attack could not succeed."²² They predicted this would placate Israeli demands. Regardless, the administration believed that American public declarations in the past would deter any attacks and gave sufficient precedence to defend Israel in the event of an invasion.²³ As late as July 9, the State Department opposed the sale of the missile. It argued that it could not recommend the sale of the Hawk missile due to the "existence of effective deterrents to UAR action absence of conditions requiring or favorable to UAR attack undesirability of assuming responsibility for the initial introduction of missiles into the Arab-Israel arms race . . . [and] a strong preference first to seek Nasser's reaction to a proposal for an arms limitation arrangement."²⁴ While the

²¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 275.

²² *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 259.

²³ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 143.

²⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 2.

Department understood the Hawk missile would give Israel a stronger air defense against the advanced MIG-19 fighters and diminish the likelihood of another Israeli preemptive strike in an effort to achieve aerial superiority, they deemed the ramifications of the missile's sale too large to overcome.²⁵

The calculus changed irrevocably in August 1962. The United States discovered that the Soviet Union was shipping weapons similar to the Hawk missile to the U.A.R.. On August 7, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk advised the president that

Since Israel has a military requirement for the Hawk, since the Hawk is a defensive weapon only and since United States intelligence clearly indicates that the UAR is in the process of obtaining comparable missiles from the USSR, we recommend that if within the next two months there is no serious prospect of an arms limitation arrangement we offer the Hawk to Israel after consultation with the British and discussion with the UAR.²⁶

Kennedy's administration recognized that the Soviets had provided weapons of the Hawk missile's caliber to the U.A.R., and that giving the Hawk missile to Israel would not worsen the situation in the region. The U.S. finalized its decision to sell the missile.

Leveraging the Missiles

The United States used its sale of the Hawk missiles to Israel to reduce Israeli calls for a security guarantee. Hawk missiles not only provided better security for Israel against the U.A.R.'s advanced MIG-19 fighters but also demonstrated to the world that the United States supported the country. The sale advanced the public defense of Israel beyond the region-wide Tripartite Declaration of 1950.

²⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Document 2.

²⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 14.

Beyond using the sale as demonstrable support of Israel, Kennedy looked for ways to gain leverage in other aspects of the American-Israeli relationship, in particular, the Johnson Plan and Israel's nuclear program.²⁷ The Johnson Plan, as part of the United Nations Palestine Conciliation Commission, was a priority for the administration, as they hoped to gain its approval from Israel and its neighbors. The plan started the process of solving the Arab-Israeli dispute, specifically the Palestinian refugee crisis. Israel and Arab nations objected to this initiative, so the administration intended to use the sale of the Hawk missiles to pressure Prime Minister Ben-Gurion into supporting the plan. Kennedy's Deputy Special Counsel Myer Feldman advised the president that "we should not, in the meantime, defer for too long our offer to Ben-Gurion, for I should like to be in the position of notifying him that we will provide Hawks at the time we request his acquiescence in the Johnson Plan."²⁸ Kennedy agreed, yet the Johnson Plan quickly fell apart as American officials had already confirmed the sale of the Hawk missiles before again asking Israel to support the initiative.²⁹

Israel's development of its nuclear program was more significant to American-Israeli relations than the Johnson Plan. Israel's new reactor at Dimona, which it created with help from the French, had the power to develop nuclear weapons. Kennedy pushed for inspections of the site to ensure its use for peaceful purposes only, fearing that Israeli possession of nuclear weapons would deteriorate relations with the Arab World, make conflict more likely, and ensure

²⁷ Another sticking point between the two governments had been Lake Tiberias. However, the Americans had already decided to allow the Israelis to take further control over the water source.

²⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 18.

²⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 41.

proliferation by Arab states, making the world a more unsafe place.³⁰ Then, a report by two American scientists after a visit to Dimona reported “no present evidence that the Israelis have weapon production in mind.”³¹ This report alleviated Kennedy’s concerns shortly before his meeting with Ben-Gurion on May 30, 1961. During this session, Ben-Gurion assured the President that Israel’s nuclear program was intended for solely peaceful purposes. Kennedy also made sure that Ben-Gurion knew how highly his administration prioritized nuclear non-proliferation.³²

President Kennedy continued to worry about the Israeli program. The scheduled visits by American scientists, while helpful, did not remove the possibility of Israeli nuclear capability in the near future. In August 1961, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the administration to “attempt by all feasible means, official, quasi-official and private, to convince Israel and France that the acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability by Israel would be against the best interests of the Free World, the Middle East and of Israel.”³³ The United States used a variety of methods to ensure the absence of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, including leveraging the Hawk missile to curb Israeli desire for a nuclear weapon. This proved unsuccessful.

Israel’s nuclear program became important again in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Later reports that confirmed the program had been developing nuclear weapons since its onset resulted in the now-infamous showdown between Kennedy and Ben-Gurion in the summer of

³⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 179.

³¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 53.

³² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 95.

³³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East, 1961-1962*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 57.

1963.³⁴ Despite Kennedy's best efforts to convince the Israelis to stop developing nuclear weapons, Ben-Gurion believed that nuclear capability was necessary for Israel's safety and continued to hide the extent of his program from the Americans. To Israel, the Hawk missile would never have been able to deter their security concerns enough to remove the need for the security nuclear weapons provided.

Conclusion

The evolution of the American-Israeli relationship during the Kennedy administration occurred because of the influence of the "Jewish Lobby," the President's personal affinity for Israel, and the desire to balance power between Israel and the Soviet-backed U.A.R.. After Kennedy's decision to break with Eisenhower's impartial approach to the Middle East and sell the Hawk missile to Israel, Kennedy attempted to use it as a bargaining chip in other aspects of the U.S.-Israeli relationship. While the decision to sell the Hawk missile defined the relationship with Israel for the first year and a half of Kennedy's presidency, when realized, the sale created the basis for the American-Israeli "special relationship," a term Kennedy coined in a private conversation with Foreign Minister Golda Meir.³⁵

During Kennedy's administration, the United States committed further to this relationship by promising that the United States would provide Israel with sophisticated military hardware to stay ahead of its neighbors. During Johnson's presidency, the United States sold offensive weaponry, like the F-4 aircraft, for the first time, and it was during the Nixon

³⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 200.

³⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, Near East, 1962-1963*, eds. Daniel J. Lawler and Erin R. Mahan (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 121.

administration that the United States first rearmed Israel during war.³⁶ With time, the military-based relationship between the two governments grew from the foundation set by the sale of the Hawk missile. American military support for Israel from Kennedy onwards returned to typical American policy during the Cold War as it armed an ally in conflict with a Soviet-supported state to deter any future attack and communist expansion. American military aid to Israel was simply an extension of this once the United States decided to fully ally with Israel and end its impartial approach to the Middle East.

³⁶ Goldman, "Ties That Bind."

RECONSTRUCTING THE NATION

Images of East German Women and American Women in the Post-WWII Period and Nation-Building

By Margaret D. Swenson

Introduction

What does it mean to build a nation, and who gets to be a part? During the twentieth century, the limits of identity, heritage, and nationhood were contested, arising in the devastating upheavals of the two world wars. Until very recently, however, traditional scholarship of the post-war era has left out the multi-faceted role of women in national rebuilding. By comparing images used or created by the state to testimonies and written records from the period such as newspapers, books, and government documents, this study challenges the dominant cultural memory of 1945-1955 East Germany and the United States. Additionally, by reexamining the impact of a top-down imposition of gender roles, this study attempts to reinterpret collective national memories of women and their place in nation-building.

Both the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and U.S. states used images to disseminate a carefully constructed image of an idealized, fictional woman. Through these images, they attempted to imbue society with their desired gender roles in order to stabilize and rebuild society after the Second World War. In America, women were told to leave the workforce and return to the domestic sphere, while in East Germany, women were commanded into the factories and emancipated from above. In both countries, women adapted, fought

against, and used the state's narratives for their own benefit. To understand how dominant state-created cultural narratives were, this paper challenges two commonly held beliefs about the era: that women willingly left the workforce in significant numbers and that women were passive actors in the imposition of new gender ideologies.¹

Historiography

In general, there has been little scholarship analyzing images in the post-war period, especially related to gender politics. Most academic work concerns the latter half of the 1950s and the 1960s with a great deal focused specifically on the United States and the burgeoning feminist movement. At the same time, there is a general dearth of scholarship on East German culture in the early post-war years, aside from Leonie Treber's groundbreaking work on the legacy and realities of the "Trümmerfrauen" in her book *Mythos Trümmerfrauen: Von der Trümmerbeseitigung in der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit und der Entstehung eines deutschen Erinnerungsortes*. East German scholarship mostly centers political and economic history. Any cultural history research scholars undertake on East Germany tends to be from the 1960s and beyond.

Some scholars have conducted research on the early post-war period, centering the gender and cultural aspects of the era. Andrea Kalas, Laura Jae Gutterman, and Lisa Smârs all have published works arguing that women in the post-war United States had far more diverse

¹ I wish to show my deepest regards to my advisor, Professor Hugh Agnew, for his support and guidance through the writing process of this study. Thank you for introducing me to a new area of history and pushing me to be a better historian. I also wish to acknowledge my gratitude to my friend, Shea Savage, for her continuous encouragement, patience, and unending willingness to be my sounding board. This work would not have been possible without their input.

experiences than is generally accepted, and examining the double standards to which patriarchy subjected women. For instance, Kalas and Rhona Berenstein write:

On the one hand, the woman was cast as the guardian of the home, a domestic soldier who protected her sacred fortress at all costs. On the other hand, the contemporary woman of 1946 ventured into unknown territories—attempted to negotiate an assumed chasm between the public and private spheres, while privileging women's status in the home.²

Expanding on the research of these scholars, this work argues that the dominant class enforced the double standard of the post-war era and disseminated it through images to the point where its narrative became the most accepted version of the period.

In East Germany Pamela Fisher, April Eisman, Erik Huneke, and Susanne Kranz are all part of the narrow field of scholars researching the culture of early post-war East Germany. Aside from Treber and Huneke, who analyze the complex feelings of East German women regarding state-dictated emancipation, the scholars merely describe the impact of the state's actions on women rather than women's social navigation. This work argues that East German women developed various responses to top-down emancipation, including a level of discomfort with being forced into the public sphere.

Together, this cross-cultural analysis broadens historians' perspectives regarding the post-war period in both countries while acknowledging the variety in women's experiences. It explores how the state and dominant culture utilized the image to reinforce and legitimize their existences. The following images were selected for analysis because the East German and U.S.

² Andrea Kalas and Rhona Berenstein, "Woman Speaks: Representations of Working Women in Postwar America," *Journal of Film and Video* 48, no. 3 (1996): 30-45.

governments produced or used them, or they prominently showcased the gender ideologies each country was trying to impose.

The Image-World and Women

Susan Sontag, in her seminal work *On Photography*, wrote that “a society becomes ‘modern’ when one of its chief activities is producing and consuming images, when images that have extraordinary powers to determine our demands upon reality and are themselves coveted substitutes for firsthand experience become indispensable to the health of the economy, the stability of the polity, and the pursuit of private happiness.”³ This study is chiefly concerned with her essay, “The Image-World,” as a framing device for understanding how post-war Germany and the United States used images to create two separate narratives of nation-building for women.

Photographs are a hyperextended form of record-keeping, a way to control the historical narrative.⁴ For many, photographs are preferable to written and oral first-hand accounts; a photograph of the 1968 DNC uprising is preferable because human memory is faulty and subject to bias. People do not tend to believe that photographs are manipulated for a means to an end. Likewise, photographs both capture and create reality. The two are, in effect, mutually reinforcing. As Sontag wrote, “people in industrialized countries seek to have to have their photographs taken—[they] feel that they are images and are made real by photographs.”⁵ The

³ Susan Sontag, “The Image-World,” in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983).

⁴ Sontag, “The Image-World.”

⁵ Sontag, “The Image-World.”

photograph makes people known to both themselves and others. To borrow from Rene

Descartes: “I am photographed, therefore I exist.” Sontag goes on to write:

Photographs are a way of—of making [reality] stand still—One can’t possess reality, one can possess (and be possessed by) images. Paintings invariably sum up; photographs usually do not. Photographic images are pieces of evidence in an ongoing biography or history—what photography supplies is not only a record of the past but a new way of dealing with the present—Photographs give mock forms of possession: of the past, the present, even the future.⁶

Photographs provide a way to possess an amorphous, ever-evolving reality. In the neoliberal sense, with each individual at constant work, photographs allow people to consume what they see around them in substitute of first-hand experiences. This has profound implications for the dominant culture. In Western culture, the dominant class is made up of white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual men and power diminishes the farther from this ideal an individual is.⁷ If photographs and reality are mutually reinforcing as earlier illustrated, and they allow individuals to possess reality, then logic follows that the dominant culture is further entrenched through images.

Sontag continues:

A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to simulate buying and anesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex—The camera’s twin capacities, to subjectivize reality and to objectify it, ideally serve these needs and strengthen them. Cameras define reality in the two ways—as a spectacle (for the masses) and as an object of surveillance (for the rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself.⁸

⁶ Sontag, “The Image-World.”

⁷ Cisgender describes a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. It opposes transgender, a term that describes a person whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth.

⁸ Sontag, “The Image-World.”

Here is the crux of the framework for this piece: the ruling class utilizes images to justify and encourage the status quo. If people root their existence in the ability to be photographed (“I am photographed, therefore I exist”), then they allow the ruling class to determine what that existence looks like. If social change *is* replaced by a change in images, then people are fed a singular historical narrative. A teleological story tells, at least in the American sense, that there are winners and losers in capitalism, and one need only work hard enough to become a winner. This disguises the systemic inequalities that prevent many from ascending to the dominant class.

In applying this to post-war East Germany and the United States, this study asks how their respective governments used photographs of women at the end of the Second World War to rebuild their nations. John Fiske, though speaking specifically about television, calls photographs and film “polysemic”; polysemy is the coexistence of multiple meanings for something. Fiske writes, “The multiple meanings of a text that is popular in that society can be defined *only by their relationships (possibly oppositional) to the dominant ideology as it is structured into that text* [emphasis added].”⁹ Interpretations of the image are directly related to and limited by the viewer’s relationship to patriarchy. People synthesize and rationalize what photographs tell them by their own lived experiences, which are informed by living in patriarchy, which thus reinforces the dominant culture. By using images, it is possible to discern the intent and pervasiveness of East Germany’s and the United States’ fictionalized women. Images likewise allow scholars to better understand how women navigated the restrictions and expectations placed on them from above.

⁹ John Fiske, “Television: Polysemy and Popularity,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3, no. 4 (1986): 391-408.

Women and Work in the Post-War Period

The first image (see figure 1) is a group photograph of the women and girls who helped rebuild Berlin, both east and west, who became collectively known as “Trümmerfrauen” or rubble women.¹⁰



Figure 1. Women and men clearing rubble in Berlin.

This photograph depicts nine women and two men in a line cleaning bricks and other debris in Berlin. Behind them, the city street is empty as they stand on a mountain of rubble yet to be touched. The girls wear practical dresses and shoes, with their hair short, up, or out of their faces. Most notable, however, is both the lack of makeup and look of joy and laughter on their faces.

Compare figure 1 to a similar image of American women in Tinian in October of 1945 (figure 2).¹¹ In this photograph, five women stand in their uniforms on Tinian of Northern

¹⁰ “Dismantling the German myth of “Trümmerfrauen,”” Deutsche Welle, accessed March 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/dismantling-the-german-myth-of-tr%C3%BCmmerfrauen/a-18083725>.

¹¹ “American Red Cross Women on Tinian in October 1945,” World War II Online, accessed March 2020, <https://www.ww2online.org/image/american-red-cross-women-tinian-october-1945>.

Mariana, the site of the Battle of Tinian that occurred just two months earlier. These women look remarkably similar to the image of the rubble women. In practical work clothing, short hair, and bright smiles, these five individuals showcase the grace and camaraderie working women exhibited during the Second World War.



Figure 2. American Red Cross women on Tinian in October 1945.

Beneath the veneer of these photographs, however, lies deeper messaging about the expectations of women on both sides of the Atlantic during and after the war. Figures 1 and 2 depict the dichotomy that was expected of women throughout the war: to look pretty so as to keep morale up, but not so much as to be conspicuously consuming precious resources like nylon or wasting effort on frivolous tasks like makeup. To be a part of the war effort—including getting blood and dirt on their hands—while still remaining feminine; photographs or propaganda

artwork like “Rosie the Riveter” showcased glamorously made up women hard at work.¹² These two photographs mark the starting point of two diverging paths of post-war nation-building. Though both East Germany and America began at relatively similar points regarding gender expression and roles, conceptions of self-sacrifice, which had come to define the entirety of their generation, resulted in two distinct representations of women.¹³

By the end of the Cold War, contemporary ideas of “nation-building” became the central tenet of international peacemaking. One of the most dominant theories of institutionalism posits that state-building was derived from the “creation of new governmental institutions and the strengthening of existing ones.”¹⁴ The onus was placed on external actors to create a broad-spectrum of institutions from free and fair elections to establishing national free trade policies. Conceived as apolitical, this theory had roots in European scholarship concerned with forging a political community that revolves around shared identity and a common destiny to avoid ethnic or sectarian conflicts.¹⁵ However, this scholarship itself was based in the post-Second World War belief that post-war rebuilding was “the reconstruction of the conditions of the assets and infrastructure—to the same or similar state in which they were found before the outbreak of hostilities.”¹⁶ Simply put, post-war Euro-American reconstruction focused on building an *imagined* national identity centered around a shared group of values and history and derived from the government structure; physical rebuilding of buildings, institutions, and

¹² Ellen Skinner, *Women and the National Experience: Primary Sources in American History* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 1996); Thomas A. Bailey and David M. Kennedy, *The American Pageant* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1990).

¹³ Susanne Kranz, “Women’s Role in the German Democratic Republic and the State’s Policy Toward Women,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 7, no. 1, (2005): pp. 69-83.

¹⁴ Vesna Bojicic-Dzeliliov, Denisa Kostovicova, and David Rampton, “State-Building, Nation-Building and Reconstruction,” in *The Handbook of Global Security Policy* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

¹⁵ Bojicic-Dzeliliov, “State-Building, Nation-Building and Reconstruction.”

¹⁶ Bojicic-Dzeliliov, “State-Building, Nation-Building and Reconstruction.”

familial/communal life were conflated with establishing state legitimacy, stability, and growth and development.¹⁷

The work of historian Leonie Treber reveals that the legacy of the Trümmerfrauen is inflated. Women in actuality played a relatively minor role in the physical rebuilding of Berlin, with around 60,000 participating, and neither men nor women were enthusiastic about the task.¹⁸ During the war, the Nazis made soldiers, Hitler Youth, forced laborers, Allied prisoners of war, and concentration camp prisoners clear rubble after Allied bombing raids. After the end of the war in 1945, Axis prisoners of war and former Nazi party members took their place.¹⁹ When that proved insufficient, the government asked the population to help. The workers' negative association of hard labor made the job humiliating.

The smiling girl in figure 3 is similar to those in figure 1, with her hair tied in a kerchief, wearing masculine-style clothes, and actively working.²⁰ Images like these were part of a campaign to draw in women and other workers so extensive that the images became deeply ingrained in the German consciousness and collective memory.²¹ East Germany saw the most immediate success with the campaign as they also offered the second-highest ration cards to rubble-clearing workers. The government very deliberately sought to bring women into the workforce as part of their de-Nazification and nation-building plan.²²

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹⁸ Leonie Treber, *Mythos Trümmerfrauen: Von der Trümmerbeseitigung in der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit und der Entstehung eines deutschen Erinnerungsortes* (Essen, Germany: Klartext Verlag, 2015).

¹⁹ Treber, *Mythos Trümmerfrauen*.

²⁰ Marco Bertram, "Rubble women at work in East Berlin in the early 1950s," ddr-fotos.de, accessed March 2020, http://www.ddr-fotos.de/ddr_17.htm.

²¹ Treber, *Mythos Trümmerfrauen*.

²² April Eisman, "From Economic Equality to 'Mommy Politics': Women Artists and the Challenges of Gender in East German Painting," *Journal for History, Culture, and Modernity* 2, no. 2 (2014): 175-213.



Figure 3. Rubble woman in East Berlin.

In comparison, figure 4 shows a glamorously made-up woman who stands surrounded by a “typical housewife’s weekly duties” taken for a news article on women in America.²³ In the foreground are silverware, foodstuffs, plates, and teacups. Behind her are bedsheets, while above her are clothes. She is dwarfed by the enormity of the household items that surround her. Yet she, like the Trümmerfrau above, has a large smile on her face. In contrast, her hair is down in a fashionable style for the era; she is wearing a dress that accentuates her waist and chest and posing for the camera—not actually working.

²³ Nina Leen, “A week’s housework, 1947,” in *Eyewitness: 150 Years of Photojournalism in TIME* (New York: Time Books, 1995).



Figure 4. "A week's housework," 1947.

Figures 3 and 4 perhaps are the strongest examples of the diverging paths between the United States and East Germany regarding women's spaces in the post-war world. The naturalness of the German woman versus the put-togetherness of the American woman attest to the fictionalized woman the GDR and U.S. governments held up as desirable and best for the nation. In East Germany, women and the socialist family were central to the development of a post-war identity; it was crucial that the family be integrated into social life and that family not be perceived as a limitation. Both married partners were expected to work; indeed, it was their duty appointed by the state to be employed.²⁴ In America, the family was central to post-war reconstruction. It was women's duty to be in the home.

²⁴ Pamela Fisher, "Women and Employment in East Germany: The Legacy of GDR Equality," *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law* 32, no. 4 (2010): 401-409.

Figure 4 illustrates the complex atmosphere surrounding American women. Both men and women felt demobilization: it entailed the struggle to find meaningful employment, reestablish familial and friendship ties, and regain a sense of purpose outside of defeating a common enemy.²⁵ A rash of strikes swept the country from 1946 to 1947 with over 4.6 million workers joining in, the CIO's "Operation Dixie" failed at its attempt to unionize southern textile and steelworkers in 1948, and the government's swift passage of both the 1946 Employment Act and Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill of Rights) all spoke to a general cultural malaise and sense of social dislocation.²⁶ Though the post-war period was seen as a period of homogenization, this image suggests the true nature of the era—that American women were reluctant, or at least ambivalent, about returning to pre-war ideals where women were relegated to the private sphere. In the same image of the objects of her labor, the woman's body is rendered into an object as well. Since she is placed far away from the camera and off-center, the image informs the viewer that she is not a focal point—the objects of her labor are of greater worth. They are given far more visual representation and thus are more worthy of viewing, of consuming, and of remembering. The woman's body becomes part of the background, turning her into an object the eye does not comprehend as distinct. As the composition renders her equal to the products surrounding her, her body is commodified like these products—nothing more than an object to consume and be consumed. What Betty Friedan later called "the problem that has no name," this discomfort with patriarchy relegating American women to the private sphere

²⁵ Bailey, *The American Pageant*.

²⁶ Bailey, *The American Pageant*.

once more was reflected in magazine articles and TV features about women in the workforce during the period.²⁷

For example, in an article about women in the workplace, a photograph depicted scientist Nan Songer inside her laboratory alongside her children.²⁸ The public sphere, in a traditionally masculine space surrounded by test tubes and scientific instruments, became feminized. Not once was Songer referred to by her professional title (i.e., a biologist), and all of her scientific work was couched in terms of the maternal.²⁹ By doing so, this article juxtaposed the comforting (maternalism) with the disturbing (women in men's traditional spaces), making the reality more palatable. If a young woman read this article, she might have been encouraged to find employment outside of the home but affirmed in the knowledge that motherhood must be a part of that reality.

This situation was similar yet distinct from that of East Germany. War widows with dependent children suffered particularly from increasing competition in the labor market; the GDR made explicit that they expected war widows to seek full-time employment. By withholding welfare payments and pensions from widows under the age of 60, the government tried to force widows into the labor market.³⁰ Yet women who accepted this new policy found themselves under increased financial strain during times of high unemployment. From 1948 to

²⁷ Betty Frieden, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).

²⁸ Kalas and Berenstein, "Woman Speaks," 30-45.

²⁹ Kalas and Berenstein, "Woman Speaks," 30-45.

³⁰ Christine von Oertzen and Almut Rietzschel, "Comparing the Post-War Germanies: Breadwinner Ideology and Women's Employment in the Divided Nation, 1948-1970," *International Review of Social History* 42, no. 5 (1997): 175-196.

1949, skilled female workers still had a chance of finding work, but many war widows were qualified only for untrained work, for which there was little demand.³¹

Because East Germany had been part of a capitalist economy after the Second World War, its surviving infrastructure, inherited skills, and scientific and technical education gave it an edge over several other Soviet-bloc countries.³² However, this was followed by a decline in the market for domestic production, an industry in which many war widows had previously worked. The First Five-Year Plan (1951-55) introduced centralized state planning with an emphasis on high production quotas in heavy industry and increased labor productivity.³³ The quotas were so high it led to an exodus of citizens to West Germany, and by 1953, one out of every five industrial companies had relocated to West Germany.³⁴

Many widows turned to clearing rubble as they had children, could not be gone for eight hours a day in factories, and lacked highly valued skills.³⁵ The East German emphasis on women's equality reflected both the practical economic needs of the post-war nation and an effort by its leaders to implement socialist ideals. This concern for women's equality, however, did not reflect the beliefs of the general public; most people at the time would have agreed that a woman's place was in her home.³⁶ Gender equality, especially the idea of a mother working outside the home, was an ideal propagated from above, requiring effort and time before the people adopted it. Art

³¹ von Oertzen and Almut Rietzschel, "Comparing the Post-War Germanies," 175-196.

³² Kenneth Barkin, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Germany: The East German System," accessed March 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Germany/The-East-German-system>.

³³ Stephen R. Burant, *East Germany: A Country Study* (Washington DC: The Division, 1988).

³⁴ Hartmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier, *The East German Economy, 1945-2010: Falling Behind or Catching Up?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁵ von Oertzen and Rietzschel, "Comparing the Post-War Germanies," 175-196; Fisher, "Women and Employment in East Germany," 401-409.

³⁶ Eisman, "From Economic Equality to 'Mommy Politics,'" 175-213.

and photographs played an important role in this process, helping to visualize a reality that did not yet exist.

Additionally, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) knew that the future of the GDR lay in reconstruction, not only of physical buildings, but also in the creation of a new identity distinct from Nazism or West Germany. The history of a German nation-state is difficult and, at times, amorphous to capture. There was no unified “German” state until Otto von Bismarck became Minister President of Prussia and used great power politics to secure the unification of Prussia and the various German kingdoms in 1871, which was ultimately a revolution from above. Arguments made for the existence of a German nation—a group of people joined together by a shared heritage or customs—date as far back as the Holy Roman Empire but were more clearly distinguishable by the eighteenth century. Bismarck and Adolf Hitler both relied on carefully crafted historical narratives of a long German heritage; for Hitler, one that (erroneously) dated back to 2000 BCE. SED leaders, aware of Hitler’s manipulation of history, knew the immediate necessity of breaking with any sense of historical continuity and creating an entirely new German identity as part of de-Nazification.³⁷ Socialism was perhaps the best vehicle to accomplish this as its origins were relatively recent, it was intensely future-focused, and many of its most famous ideological figures were German. To make a clean break, the SED needed East German men and women to cooperate to create stability and enable the dual reconstruction the state sought.³⁸ Figure 3 symbolizes the SED’s vision of the idealized New German Woman.

³⁷ *Sozialistische Bildungshefte* 5, no. 6 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1950), accessed from “The Tasks of Party Propaganda,” German Propaganda Archive, Calvin University, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/sedprop.htm>.

³⁸ *Sozialistische Bildungshefte*.

In the United States, women upset with the changes occurring in demand in the education and labor markets had their distress cast as a misplaced desire to interact with the public sphere. The devaluing of women's labor assuaged men's fears that women were coming for their skilled and physical jobs and, in effect, their privilege. It is no coincidence that in the post-war period in the U.S., a top-down narrative of women dutifully returning to the homes coincided with the rising tide of the Cold War and anti-communism.³⁹ The war was no longer against a foreign other in a foreign country—the war was at *home*, and the enemy could be anyone.⁴⁰

Imagery praising the heteronormative nuclear family and women as homemakers often utilized coded messaging of protecting the home and children and, by effect, the nation. The rise of science fiction was a thinly-veiled reflection of anxieties about the Cold War. *War of the Worlds*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* all feature disruption of family life and threats to white womanhood. *War* and *The Creature* both end with a white damsel being rescued by a white hero who vanquishes the threat, while *The Day* ends with the white female lead standing with the aliens. The former reflected patriarchy's aim: while men actively protected women from infiltrating threats, women were safer at home, and together this protected the nation; the latter reflected patriarchy's fear: that women given autonomy were far more susceptible to outside threats, which constituted a destabilizing force. The fact that WWII, which had so disrupted traditional gender spaces, was followed by the Cold War indicated that further disruption was occurring, and the media—the image—reflected the

³⁹ Skinner, *Women and the National Experience*.

⁴⁰ Bailey, *The American Pageant*.

patriarchy's anxieties about a loss of control over women and their place in the new society, and, therefore, over the state itself.⁴¹

As exemplified in figure 4 and Songer's story, attempts to curtail the blurring of gender roles were encouraged by top-down pressures to return to "stability" and "normalcy." Film and media in East Germany were largely anti-capitalistic in nature, many of them being dramas, operatic musicals, comedy, or crime thrillers. As discussed by John Urang, all East German media, even romances, were subjected to "socialist realism's characteristic politicisation of any and all intimate interpersonal ties."⁴² If the Nazis coopted German folk-culture (the *Volksgemeinschaft*), then the GDR coopted socialist realism in their own propaganda—the girl's headscarf in figure 3, her masculine clothing, and her bare face all call to hallmarks of the genre: optimism, youth, and industry.⁴³ To further illustrate this point, compare figures 5 and 6.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Laura Jae Gutterman, "Another Enemy Within: Lesbian Wives or the Hidden Threat to the Nuclear Family in Post-War America," *Gender and History* 24, no. 4, (2012): 475-501.

⁴² John Griffith Urang, "Realism and Romance in the East German Cinema, 1952-1962," *Film History* 18, no. 1 (2006): 88-103.

⁴³ Andrew Ellis, *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting 1920-1970* (Milan, Italy: Skira, 2012); Lawrence H. Schwartz, *Marxism and Culture* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1980).

⁴⁴ "Poster Celebrating International Workers Day, 1953," Pinterest, accessed April 2020, <https://preview.tinyurl.com/yceepw4r>; "The Woman Who Votes," 1951, Posters Distributed in Asia, ca. 1950-1955, Records of the U.S. Information Agency, Record Group 306, National Archives and Records Administration, <http://research.archives.gov/description/5730163>.



Figure 5. Poster celebrating International Workers Day.



Figure 6. Suffragist leaflet.

Figure 5 is a poster celebrating International Workers Day (IWD), while figure 6 is a leaflet produced by the League of Women Voters and the National Movement for Free Elections. The IWD poster places the woman front and center in her kerchief carrying flowers. Behind her is Germany's flag as well as the flags of Soviet-bloc nations and the images of famous Communist leaders. The leaflet features a woman voting at a ballot box while a man sleeps against a tree; her hair is neatly done, and she is dressed in explicitly feminine clothes and high heels. In both scenarios, a woman's strength is derived from her contributions to the home front in political ways. However, the East German woman takes on an almost gender-neutral aspect while the American woman is explicitly female. In the leaflet, there is dual messaging to American women: in the same words where it encourages women to vote, to outdo men, it cloaks the message in femininity. Women in East Germany, in order to support the state, are given an androgynous appearance, while American women were to support the state as feminine women.

Power comes from political participation in these images, but how women should present themselves indicates two different visions for women's roles in the post-war political space. As discussed earlier, post-war rebuilding focused on reconstructing pre-war institutions. For Americans, this centered around the idealized image of a shared history: a cis-heteronormative, white nuclear family with a breadwinner husband and homemaker wife. Though this image never existed universally in America, the government and patriarchal institutions promoted it as figures 4 and 6 exemplify. Even if a woman was political—something transgressive of her gender space—she must have been shrouded in femininity to be perceived as non-threatening to the sociopolitical regime.

The longevity of and aggression with which this narrative has permeated Americans' collective consciousness of their history indicates its potency and the power with which the government pushed it in the post-war period. However, evidence from the era challenges this fictionalized, romanticized history. American women, for the most part, did not dutifully or willingly return to the feminized private sphere. A report from the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor states:

Prospective post-war women workers did not—contemplate out-migration from their areas of wartime employment. Over 90 percent of them—looked forward to continued employment after the war—In the Detroit area, for example, for every 100 women who were working in 1940—155 women will want postwar jobs—94 percent or more of the Negro or other non-white women who were employed in the war period planned to continue after the war—out of every 100 married women—11 said they were the only wage earner supporting the family group.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, "Women Workers in Ten War Production Areas and Their Postwar Employment Plans," Bulletin 209 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1946).

This quote illustrates several key aspects of the American fictionalized woman: it highlights racial and class dynamics—while all women were expected to move into the private sphere, in reality, mainly wealthy white women had the ability to do so. Likewise, it reveals the reality of family life in America—women have always been central to and desired employment. This includes women's involvement in the cottage industry, traditional industrial employment, as well as the unpaid labor of housework and childcare.⁴⁶

While the percentage of working women decreased from 37% in 1945 with nearly six million women joining the workforce throughout the war to 32% in 1950, the number of married women in the workforce rose dramatically throughout the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁷ Women's participation grew 2.4% *annually*, compared to 0.6% for men.⁴⁸ This rise in workforce participation was not simply catalyzed by the war but was part of a long-term trend involving growth in female-dominated sectors and lowering barriers of entry into employment.⁴⁹ In spite of this, women faced continuous employment discrimination practices, including lower wages, marriage bars, being fired or not hired due to pregnancy, and sexual harassment, all of which lowered the number of women working.⁵⁰ All of these are systemic, top-down practices intended

⁴⁶ Mary M., Schweitzer, "World War II and Female Labor Force Participation Rights," *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (1980): 89-95.

⁴⁷ Leila Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Annette McDermott, "How World War II Empowered Women," History.com, July 2, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/how-world-war-ii-empowered-women>; Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (London: Verso, 1988).

⁴⁸ Mitra Toossi, "A Century of Change: The U.S. Labor Force, 1950-2050," *Monthly Labor Review* 28 (May 2002): 15-28, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2002/05/art2full.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Mary M. Schweitzer, "World War II and Female Labor Force Participation Rights," *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (1980): 89-95.

⁵⁰ Claudia Goldin, "Gender Gap," The Library of Economics and Liberty, 2015, accessed April 2020, <https://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/GenderGap.html>; Nicholas Pedriana, "Discrimination by Definition: The Historical and Legal Paths to the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 21, no. 1 (2009): 1-14; Mary Bularzik, *Sexual Harassment at the Workplace: Historical Notes* (Somerville, MA: New England Free Press, 1978).

to push women into the margins of society and into the home, reducing their presence in the public sphere and thereby reducing their threat to post-war stability. The truth is that American women did not leave the workforce in droves, and the cultural narrative that they did so was one patriarchal institutions crafted in an attempt to reconstruct the nation after the Second World War. The lie and illusion of the post-war American neoliberal family is that working women were a new phenomenon, that working and motherhood were inherently incompatible, and thus women should focus on staying at home and being mothers for the betterment, stability, and rebuilding of the nation.

In East Germany, a near opposite narrative developed. GDR leadership faced distinct post-war reconstruction challenges as Germany's physical, political, and social institutions laid in ruin after two world wars and a devastating depression. As discussed above, the GDR needed to create a national identity that would rehabilitate the new nation away from Nazi fascism. The East German emphasis on women's equality indicates both the practical economic needs of the post-war nation and an effort by its leaders to implement communist ideals. From its inception, the GDR made gender equality central in its rhetoric and mission. Article VII of the GDR Constitution stated, "Men and women have equal rights. All laws and regulations which conflict with the equality of women are abolished"; and importantly, article XVIII stated that "Men and women, adults and juveniles, are entitled to equal pay for equal work—The laws of the Republic shall provide for institutions enabling women to co-ordinate their tasks as citizens and workers

with their duties as wives and mothers.”⁵¹ Within several years, the most common family structure was two employed parents with two children under the age of 16.⁵²

The SED created a Central Women’s Section attached to the Central Secretariat that devoted a significant amount of money and resources to publishing the government’s program for women’s rights. Known as *Frauenpolitik*, the program the GDR created sought to change traditional bourgeois gender divisions along the public/private spectrum.⁵³ However, some scholars argue that the GDR’s gender policies were derived from a state paternalism with women assumed to be apolitical at best, regressive at worst, religious, and blinded by short-term, family-bound concerns.⁵⁴ Therefore, women needed the state to make them into good socialist workers in order to rebuild. The gender imbalance between men and women was seen as a class issue that could be solved with gender liberation. While many East Germans in the immediate post-war period did not desire radical gender equality, SED field reports from women’s meetings suggested that the meetings were well attended, and attendees seemed interested in everything, especially politics. The reports also noted that women were more concerned with basic essentials like food than the specific differences between Marxism and socialism.⁵⁵ As evidenced by calls for East German men to relinquish their traditional privileges in the name of equality, East German women used their new political opportunities to secure better treatment for themselves and their

⁵¹ Const. of the German Democratic Republic, art. VII, pt. I; Const. of the German Democratic Republic, art XVIII, pt. I.

⁵² Fisher, “Women and Employment in East Germany,” 401-409.

⁵³ Fisher, “Women and Employment in East Germany,” 401-409; Kranz, “Women’s Role in the German Democratic Republic and the State’s Policy Toward Women,” 69-83.

⁵⁴ Donna Harsch, “Approach/Avoidance: Communists and Women in East Germany, 1945-9,” *Social History* 25, no. 2 (2000): 156-182.

⁵⁵ Harsch, “Approach/Avoidance,” 156-182.

families.⁵⁶ This indicates that, like American women, there was an interest among East German women in working and providing for families alongside a desire for political involvement.

Through comparing the images to the reality of the post-war period, it becomes evident that women in both the United States and East Germany neither wanted to nor actually left the workforce in droves as is commonly believed. In the U.S., this narrative was purposefully created by the state in the face of the Cold War and a desire to reconstruct the state in a false image of the past, one rooted in patriarchy. In East Germany, the state by necessity pushed women into the workforce through national policy to create a new identity not rooted in Nazism or Germany's past. While East German women and men may not have initially been ready for radical gender change, they participated in their new roles and grew into them. So much so that by reunification in 1990, East German women expressed deep unhappiness with the West's inequalities and are widely seen to be the "losers" of the initial reunification process.⁵⁷

Women and Social Navigation in the Post-War Period

Images were critical to the GDR's dissemination of new gender roles as it helped visualize their desired reality that did not yet exist. In one example, the Third German Art Exhibition in Dresden in 1953 showcased women as 15% of the total artists, with women appearing as equals in a majority of total paintings. Sixteen paintings depict women alongside

⁵⁶ Katrin Sieg, "Equality Decreed: Dramatizing Gender in East Germany," *Women in German Yearbook* 9 (1993): 113-126.

⁵⁷ Fisher, "Women and Employment in East Germany," 401-409; Dinah Dodds, "Five Years after Reunification: East German Women in Transition," *GDR Bulletin* 25, no. 1 (1998): 31-37; Katrin Bennhold, "20 Years After Fall of Wall, Women of Former East Germany Thrive," *The New York Times*, Oct. 5, 2010, accessed May 1, 2020.

men in meetings and demonstrations.⁵⁸ This, alongside figure 5, reflects the necessity of images in the GDR's nation building. Consider figure 7, a pamphlet from the GDR entitled *Unser Fünfjahrplan des friedlichen Aufbaus* [*Our Five Year Plan for Peaceful Reconstruction*].⁵⁹



Figure 7. "Our Five Year Plan for Peaceful Reconstruction."

Issued on November 1, 1951, this pamphlet by Walter Ubricht detailed the government's plan for economic and political rebuilding. The cover depicts a German family dressed in plain clothes and visibly happy, signaling optimism about the future. The child is the focal point, indicating the importance of the next generation. One of the most defining statements in the pamphlet is, "For

⁵⁸ Eisman, "From Economic Equality to 'Mommy Politics,'" 175-213.

⁵⁹ *Gesetz über den Fünfjahrplan zur Entwicklung der Volkswirtschaft der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1951-1955* (Berlin: Amt für Information der Regierung der DDR, 1952), accessed from "Our Five Year Plan for Peaceful Reconstruction," German Propaganda Archive, Calvin University, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/5yrplan.htm>.

the first time in German history our fatherland is guided by a plan that *considers only the needs of the people* and aims at building prosperity and *reconstructing of our fatherland* [emphasis added].⁶⁰ In conjunction with the GDR's other stated policies of *Frauenpolitik*, images like this pamphlet, where children (i.e. the future of East Germany) were prioritized, and neither women nor men were at "the top," were crucial to disseminating the idea of the benefits of the new social structure.

Within the study of humanitarianism, a great deal of scholarship focuses on victimhood with women and children portrayed as passive recipients, both of violence and aid. Recent research challenges this—such as the work of Mats Utas, Joris van Wijk, and Aisling Swaine, which reexamines the ways women are depicted as passive recipients of violence and change in historical contexts.⁶¹ For both the United States and East Germany, images reveal that women were not passive victims of or unwilling participants in the top-down imposition of post-war gender ideologies. In figure 8, a poster from the NSA showing a picnicking family with the slogan "Security Means This and More," national security is not attributed to either men or women, but rather the image and text place the burden of state security on both.⁶² In contrast to

⁶⁰ *Gesetz über den Fünfjahrplan zur Entwicklung der Volkswirtschaft der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1951-1955*.

⁶¹ For further reading, see Mats Utas, "Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's Social Navigation of the Liberian War Zone," *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (2005): 403-430; Joris van Wijk, "Who is the 'little old lady' of International Crimes? Nils Christie's Concept of the Ideal Victim Reinterpreted," *International Review of Victimology* 19, no. 2 (2013): 159-179; and Aisling Swaine, "Enabling or Disabling Paternalism: (In)attention to Gender and Women's Knowledge, Capacity, and Authority in Humanitarian Contexts," in *Paternalism Beyond Borders*, ed. Michael N. Barnett (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁶² National Security Agency poster, "Security Means This and More," National Security Agency (NSA) security/motivational posters from the 1950s and 1960s, FOIA Case #83661, Doc ID: 6614797, National Security Agency, Washington, DC, https://www.governmentattic.org/28docs/NSAsecurityPosters_1950s-60s.pdf.

figure 7, where the couple supporting the child are supported by the state, figure 8 informs the viewer—man or woman—that *they* are responsible for supporting the state.

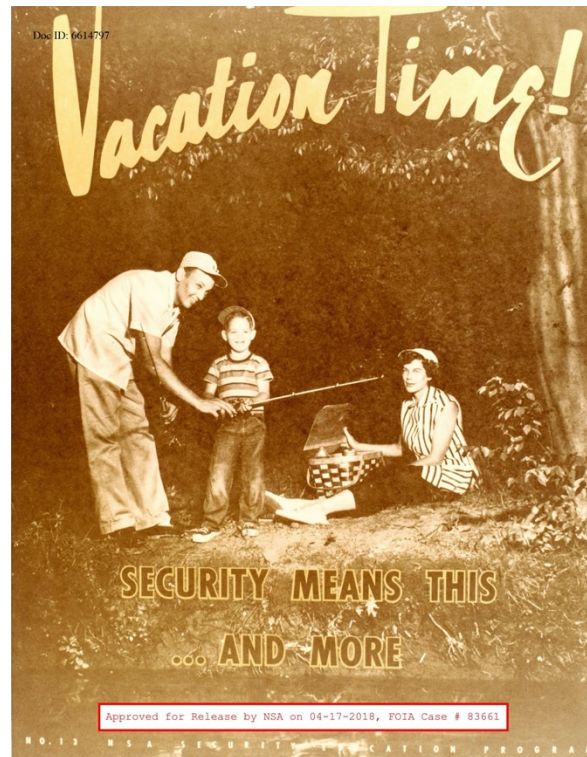


Figure 8. "Security means this and more."

Upon closer reading, this implies that there was an American social order worth protecting and that the social order was represented by a white, heteronormative nuclear family. Both men and women have a responsibility to adhere to their "correct" role in order to protect the state from outside infiltration and from disruption of the stability the state was attempting to achieve.

Women in America and East Germany in the post-war period utilized a vast array of tactics to navigate the new socio-political landscapes of their countries. For example, compare the rising fascination—and revulsion—with the "lesbian wife" in the United States to the reality of

the lives of queer women in the era.⁶³ A lesbian wife was a woman in a heteronormative relationship who could not resist her homosexual longings and preyed on other wives.⁶⁴ Actual queer women had no place in this new post-war country. During the war they worked, formed relationships with women, and remained single without suspicion, but they faced enormous societal pressure to adapt afterwards.⁶⁵ The queer woman was othered as an infiltrator, a corruptor.

The lesbian wife became symbolic of patriarchy's fears of the ramifications of homosexual subversion of gender. As Laura Gutterman wrote,

Almost always white, middle-class and conventionally feminine in appearance, the imagined lesbian wife suggested that although a household might appear 'normal' on the outside, it could shelter perversions imperceptible even to those within it. While the 'aggressive dyke' could, at worst, seduce or do violence to individual women, the lesbian wife imperilled her children's welfare, her marriage's future and the household's sanctity: the building blocks of the nation's post-war political and economic systems.⁶⁶

Fears of this subversion were out of proportion when viewed in light of Alfred Kinsey's 1953 report *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in which married women who had engaged in homosexual activities remained negligible at 1%.⁶⁷ However, scientists like Edmund Bergler and Frank Caprio published studies that reviled lesbian wives as disturbed, frigid, and nefarious. The real danger of lesbianism, Caprio argued, was not homosexual sex, but "homosexual attitudes toward life," illustrating the underlying patriarchal fears that homosexuality, a rejection of the state's assigned gender roles, threatened the state itself.

⁶³ Queer is used here as a catch-all for lesbian, bisexual, and pansexual women. During the post-war period, "lesbian" referred to all women with homosexual feelings.

⁶⁴ Gutterman, "Another Enemy Within," 475-501.

⁶⁵ Gutterman, "Another Enemy Within," 475-501.

⁶⁶ Gutterman, "Another Enemy Within," 475-501.

⁶⁷ Gutterman, "Another Enemy Within," 475-501.

The reality of the post-war period reveals that queer women were networking and more visible than ever before. One Inc. (est. 1952), the Daughters of Bilitis (est. 1955), and *Vice Versa: America's Gayest Magazine* (1947-8) all gave queer women connection to a greater community. At the same time, some organizations referred to gays and lesbians as "homophiles." Homophile organizations were assimilationist. That is, in order to be accepted by heterosexual society, they sought to dispel stereotypes of gays and lesbians as non-normative and subversive by framing themselves as adhering to normative social roles.⁶⁸ For women, this was done by dressing and behaving as feminine and non-threatening as possible and eschewing butch/femme culture.⁶⁹ Again, women juxtaposed the disturbing (homosexuality to the straight public) with the comforting (traditional femininity). This gave some queer women the ability to act on their feelings without upsetting the post-war order, utilizing patriarchy for their benefit.

For all women considered to be subverting their gender roles, literature was their primary mode of connection. The Daughters of Bilitis, for example, began publishing their magazine *The Ladder* in 1956, which went on to be one the longest-running lesbian magazines in the U.S. Visual media like film and television, in contrast, were the domain of patriarchy, utilized and regulated by governments to enforce desirable behavior. Figure 9 is a scene from the East German comedy *Jacke wie Hose* (*Jacket like Pants*), released in 1953 by DEFA, the GDR's state-run film studio, as a way to make socialist ideas palatable after a string of poorly received, highly ideological dramas.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Abbie E. Goldberg, "LGBTQ Social Movements (Assimilation vs. Liberation)," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of LGBTQ Studies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2016).

⁶⁹ Goldberg, "LGBTQ Social Movements."

⁷⁰ *Jacke wie Hose*, directed by Eduard Kubat (1953; German Democratic Republic: DEFA), accessed April 2020, <https://www.defa-stiftung.de/filme/filmsuche/jacke-wie-hose/>.



Figure 9. Scene from *Jacke wie Hose* [Jacket like Pants].

The film tells the story of a group of factory workers, both men and women, in an East German steel mill. When the government decrees that women are prohibited from operating the mill's heavy machinery and carrying more than 250kg of weight, they resist losing their jobs by challenging the men, claiming they can carry the same amount of weight. While the men rely on sheer strength, the women work together to create a cart that carries the weight, winning them the competition and respect of their fellow workers. The government overturned the law.⁷¹

Stylistically, the film is classical socialist realism, focusing on “true life” and the proletariat. To quote the East German film critic Leo Menter, “It is no gangster film, no opium for the masses.”⁷² The film's decidedly feminist themes, with the women as competent, capable, and willing workers, illustrate the intensity with which the GDR sought to imbue their *Frauenpolitik* in East German women. Propagandistic films like this purposefully showed women what the

⁷¹ *Jacke wie Hose*.

⁷² Presse-und Informationsamt, Bundesrepublik Deutschland, *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, 1230.

government expected of them while also giving them tools for social navigation. East German women utilized the new opportunities afforded by the GDR to express their own tumultuous experiences and emotions dealing with post-war reconstruction. Much of this was accomplished, similar to American homophile organizations, by utilizing their new roles. Within the SED grew a women's activist movement. These *Fraunaktivs* championed their fellow women workers to accept work commissions as well as traditional feminine concerns like kindergartens, true wage equality, and a paid monthly "housework day" for women.⁷³

Additionally, after the SED passed a Marriage Ordinance in 1954, raising the nubility age to 18, many young women petitioned the government for an exception. Those who couched their appeal in terms of relieving burdens on parents or being able to work often found more success than their counterparts. For example, Helena W., an underage girl who had gotten pregnant, was forbidden to marry until she turned 18 and gave birth; in her petition to President Pieck, she emphasized not securing her future husband's financial support but the importance of relieving the emotional burden that a loss of respectability would place on her mother. Her mother, she claimed, would be able to care for the child while Helena continued on to vocational training.⁷⁴ Getting married would allow her to avoid the outdated, bourgeois moral taint of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy *and* allow her to more fully participate as a worker in rebuilding the nation.

American women used similar tactics. The hit TV sitcom *Father Knows Best* showcased the trials and tribulations of a classic, heteronormative white family called the Andersons. Figure

⁷³ Harsch, "Approach/Avoidance," 156-182.

⁷⁴ Erik G. Huneke, "Morality, Law, and the Socialist Sexual Self in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1972," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2013).

10 shows a scene from the third episode of season one, “The Motor Scooter.”⁷⁵ Left is the mother, Margaret Anderson, dressed in the typical clothing of a suburban housewife; right is the daughter, Betty, wearing a low-cut dress that creates a minor conflict in the episode when her father Jim refuses to let her wear it. Betty heartily exclaims, “But father! This is the 20th century!” Jim says to Margaret, “Margaret, do I seem old fashioned to you?” to which she replies, “Not in the least. Do I to you?” After Jim says no, Margaret finally remarks, “Well, I guess that means we are and don’t recognize it.”



Figure 10. “The Motor Scooter.”

This short, two-and-a-half-minute clip illustrates the underlying tension women experienced in the United States during the post-war era and their tactics for social navigation. In a show where the main woman, Margaret, plays the American fictionalized woman straight, she cheekily acknowledges the reality of women subverting gender roles through clothing, music,

⁷⁵ *Father Knows Best*, season 1, episode 3, “The Motor Scooter,” directed by William D. Russell, written by Harry Clork et al., aired October 17, 1954, CBS, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x56uetg>.

and other pop culture elements—all reflections of a growing presence of women in the public sphere. In reality, women's participation in Congress remained steady and increased by the end of the post-war period: in 1945, there were eleven female members; by 1953 to 1955, there were fifteen members.⁷⁶ Though these numbers are small in comparison to the total composition of the House and Senate, they indicate this increasing female presence in the public consciousness. The Beatnik movement featured large numbers of women writers and artists who rejected the state's vision of an idealized woman and wrote on their experiences with sexuality, violence, and liberation. The patriarchy's influence, however, affected the Beats' legacy, erasing the contribution of women and leaving nearly their entire literary canon to white men.⁷⁷ Similar to 1950s sci-fi films, even TV shows that upheld the state's vision of post-war American womanhood reflected real anxieties about women's continued and rising presence in the public sphere. Political cartoons, comics, and art ridiculing working women or their fashions, as far back as the 18th century, are reflections of anxieties about women's place in society.

Conclusion

The implications of this study are centered around perceptions versus realities of the post-war period in each country. In the United States, where nation building after the Second World War focused on returning to an idealized shared history, the top-down imposition of gender roles

⁷⁶ "Women Members by Congress, 1917-Present," U.S. House of Representatives: History, Art and Archives, accessed April 2020, <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/WIC/Historical-Data/Women-Representatives-and-Senators-by-Congress/>.

⁷⁷ Lisa Smårs, "Female Conditions, Distance and Beatnik Culture in Joyce Johnson's novels *Come and Join the Dance*, *Bad Connections* and *In the Night Café*," (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2012).

did not, in reality, radically alter women's behavior. Women's place in the workforce rose, their presence in Congress rose, they built and participated in subcultures, and above all, continued living and thriving and evolving. After all, the civil rights movement began in the post-war period and was largely run off the labor of black women.

In examining the pervasive legacy of the American fictionalized woman, the top-down approach, using images, constructs a historical narrative that scholars have substituted for the testimonies and written accounts of the era. As Sontag wrote, doing this submits people to the patriarchal narrative, allowing people to tell themselves that the current inequalities have always existed, that they are inherent and not imposed from above, and that patriarchy cannot be fought because this is how society has always been. Using images to understand how the patriarchy imposes its will allows us to break free from the false historical narrative, and in turn, systemic inequalities.

For East Germany, post-conflict reconstruction centered around creating a new, future-focused identity, one in which men and women by necessity needed to be equal in order to justify and propagate the state's existence. As evidenced by the written records of SDP members, women were enthusiastically participating in women's organizations and lobbying for better childcare, food availability, and the status of women in German society.⁷⁸ Images and unexamined valorization of Trümmerfrauen and women of the post-war era diminish the realities of the unequal division of household labor and contested feelings of women about state-defined emancipation.

⁷⁸ Kranz, "Women's Role in the German Democratic Republic and the State's Policy Toward Women," 69-83.

It is crucial that scholarship going forward reexamines the sources it uses, pays closer attention to the testimonies of those who lived through the period and challenges state-defined narratives of historical events or narratives from any ruling group. To refrain from doing so dismisses the lives of historically marginalized people and willfully ignores the historical events that affect the present. When we see a sculpture of a proud Trümmerfrauen or an ever-smiling housewife, we must remember the tumultuous and diverse array of experiences of the women of the post-war world.

Appendix



Figure 1. Women and men clearing rubble in Berlin.



Figure 2. American Red Cross women on Tinian in October 1945.



Figure 3. Rubble woman in East Berlin.



Figure 4. "A Week's Housework," 1947.



Figure 5. Poster celebrating International Workers Day.



Figure 6. Suffragist leaflet.



Figure 7. "Our Five Year Plan for Peaceful Reconstruction."

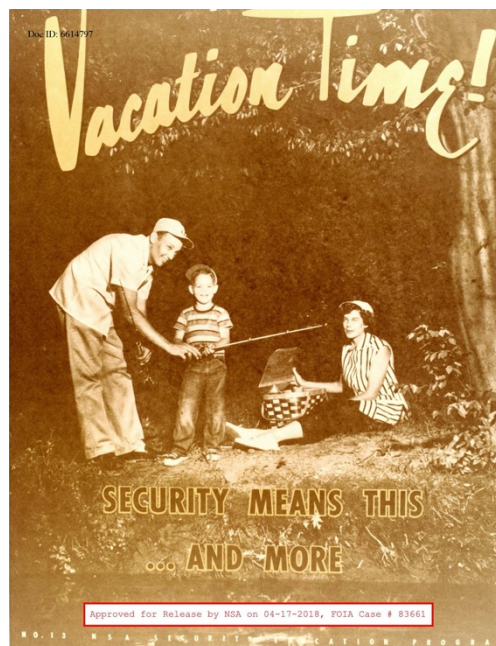


Figure 8. "Security means this and more."



Figure 9. Scene from *Jacke wie Hose* [*Jacket like Pants*].



Figure 10. "The Motor Scooter."