In early 1957, R&L and the JHI also discussed the preparation of a photo and document compilation on the destruction and resistance of Polish Jews during Nazi occupation. The volume was a thoroughly revised and extended version of the Polish *Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej* (The extermination of Jews on Polish lands during the Nazi occupation), which the JHI published in 1957. The contract between R&L and the Institute was signed in late 1957 and the publication planned for autumn 1958. It contained more than 450 items of source material—photographs; reproductions of posters and announcements made by the German occupiers and the Jewish Councils; letters from within the German administration; excerpts from diaries of Jews; other materials from the Ringelblum Archive; and an introduction. Yet, the cooperation between the Institute and the history section of R&L was not as smooth as with the literature department during the production of *Im Feuer vergangen*. The publication, entitled *Faschismus—Getto—Massenmord*, did not appear until autumn 1960. The first edition had a print run of 3,000 copies and was quickly sold out. The book appeared only months after the capture of Adolf Eichmann, fueling discussions on German war crimes. In reaction to the enormous public interest caused by the Eichmann trial, the second edition of 1961 had a print run of 11,000 copies. A West German edition followed in 1962 with the leftist Röderberg Verlag in Frankfurt in 1962.

The Censors’ Verdict on the Polish Books

GDR publishers had to apply for printing permission at the Central Office for Publishers and Book Trade (Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel) at the Ministry of Culture for every book they intended to publish. Censorship was an

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AŽIH 310/200AR R&L to JHI, November 6, 1957.


Bundesarchiv (hereafter, BArch), Ministerium für Kultur, Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel, Druckgenehmigungsvorgänge, DR 1/5795, fol. 185–92.

integral part of this so-called print approval process (*Druckgenehmigungsverfahren*). During this procedure the publisher had to send in the manuscript and two opinions, one written by an editor of the publishing house, and the other by an external reviewer designated by the publishing house. Both reviews had to include an ideological assessment of the book’s content. Usually, lacking both time and competence to assess the manuscript on their own, the censor decided whether or not to give permission for publication of the manuscript based on these reviews.\(^{40}\)

Translations, even if already published in other state-socialist countries like those discussed here, also had to undergo this procedure. An exception was Ber Mark’s book on the Ghetto Uprising, because it appeared with Dietz Verlag, which was in fact a part of SED. An office at the SED’s Central Committee took care of printing permissions and censorship.\(^{41}\) Mark’s book thus appeared with the Party leadership’s blessing, though the book’s approach to the Holocaust and German perpetrators apparently differed from other GDR publications.\(^{42}\) Publishing with Dietz Verlag gave Mark the status of a renowned foreign author that was helpful in his other publication projects.\(^{43}\)

The two other books, published with R&L, had to undergo the usual procedure. According to the documents of the review process, the focus on the Holocaust was not a problem at all for *Im Feuer vergangen*. The publisher’s statement on the book mentioned the authors’ Jewishness only marginally and instead interpreted the book consistently as part of an ongoing East German propaganda campaign against West Germany, which presented the Federal Republic of Germany as a “paradise for war criminals.”\(^{44}\) The closing remarks read: “Only two of the five

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\(^{41}\) Christoph Links, *Das Schicksal der DDR-Verlage: Die Privatisierung und ihre Konsequenzen* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2009), 168.

\(^{42}\) A recent study on Nazi perpetrators in GDR historiography highlighted Mark’s book for its unusually complex characterization of perpetrators as well as for its focus on lower and middle rank perpetrators. Fabian Wendler, *NS-Täter in der Geschichtsschreibung der SBZ und der DDR bis in die 1960er Jahre* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2017), 237–39, 263.

\(^{43}\) To reject texts of such authors by an East German publishing house was an affront, as I was told by Hubert Witt, who worked as editor at the publishing house Reclam Leipzig since 1959. According to Witt, the mere fact that Mark authored an introduction to Witt’s edited volume *Der Fiedler vom Getto* (1966) on Yiddish poetry secured its production. Author’s interview with Hubert Witt, November 1, 2015, in Leipzig.

\(^{44}\) On the title of the pamphlet published by the *Ausschuß Deutsche Einheit* [Commission of German Unity] and the coordinating body of the campaign in 1956, see *Die Bundesrepublik: Paradies für Kriegsverbrecher, Dokumente über die Durchdringung des westdeutschen Staates mit militaristischen, nazistischen und antisemitischen Elementen* (Berlin: Ausschuß f. Deutsche Einheit, 1956).
authors are still alive. They warn us together with the dead through their diaries to never forget the cruelties of German fascism. And we know what all five authors would have never believed: The beasts are still alive and mock their victims!”45

The external reviewer, however, who also “strongly recommended” the publication, openly referred to the Holocaust. She described the diaries as “shocking and warning accounts of fascist atrocities against the Jews.” As such, she argued, they possessed “high political value” and were “suitable for a broad readership.”46 The censorship shared this opinion in the cover letter of the printing permission, stating that the evaluation shows the book “as extraordinarily important and worth a broad distribution. We thus ask you to consider this book as a priority for your publishing house.”47 So, while the publishing house followed the official propaganda line, which did not emphasize the suffering of Jews as an important part of the antifascist struggle, the external reviewer’s positive evaluation of the fact that the book dealt with the Holocaust was highlighted by the censor as an argument for its publication. Thus, for the censor, highlighting the horrors of the Holocaust was obviously not in competition with the antifascist struggle, but a part of it.

Similarly, the document compilation Faschismus—Getto—Massenmord did not raise any ideological problems during the printing permission procedure. The R&L editor stated in his comments that the published documents “testify, in a shocking way, to the crimes German fascists committed against the Jews in Poland during World War II and the emerging antifascist resistance.” Again, this com-

45 BArch DK 1, HVB, DR 1/5120, Druckgenehmigungsvorgang “Im Feuer vergangen”: Bemerkungen des Verlags, 153.
46 BArch DK 1, HVB, DR 1/5120, Druckgenehmigungsvorgang “Im Feuer vergangen”: Gutachten Hanna Baum, 153.
47 BArch DK 1, HVB, DR 1/5120, Druckgenehmigungsvorgang “Im Feuer vergangen”: Brief HA Literatur und Buchwesen an Rütten & Loening, September 5, 1958, 153.
ment ended with a gesture towards East German propaganda goals, describing it as R&L’s “small contribution to the struggle against neo-fascism in West Germany.”48

The external reviewer underscored the importance of the book because it “allows to quite accurately follow the stages of the extermination of the Jewish population of Poland” and “to see the extermination of Jews in Central, West, and South-Eastern Europe by the fascists in broad outlines.”49 The review praised the manuscript for its vivid portrayal of Germany’s exploitation of the Jewish workforce, showing the Jews as skilled workers on the one hand, and for emphasizing organized Jewish resistance and armed struggle on the other. All this, the reviewer concluded, was also “a strike against antisemitism, by far not yet overcome in Germany, existing in a number of residual imaginations even in our GDR.”50 To be sure, the external reviewers of both books argued from a thoroughly antifascist, communist perspective. Still, in their view, acknowledging the Holocaust as a central feature of Nazi crimes did not contradict this perspective, but confirmed it.

The Intended Role of the Books in the East German Press Debate and their Effect

So far, I have discussed how GDR publishers and state and Party administrators evaluated these books against the background of antifascist ideology. All this, however, happened before these books were printed. But how did the state-controlled media present them to East German readers? To answer this question, I analyze press reviews and reporting on these books.51 Hardly surprising, press coverage situated the books in an antifascist narrative and in the already mentioned campaign portraying West Germany—not totally unreasonably52—as a safe haven for Nazi criminals.

48 BArch DK 1, HVB, DR 1/3390a, Druckgenehmigungsvorgang “Faschismus—Getto—Massenmord”: Bemerkungen des Verlags, 151.
49 BArch DK 1, HVB, DR 1/3390a, Druckgenehmigungsvorgang “Faschismus—Getto—Massenmord”: Gutachten Andre Grevenrath des Verlags, 395.
50 BArch DK 1, HVB, DR 1/3390a, Druckgenehmigungsvorgang “Faschismus—Getto—Massenmord”: Gutachten Andre Grevenrath des Verlags, 398.
51 My analysis is based on three newspapers: Neues Deutschland (New Germany), the SED national organ; Neue Zeit (New Time), the national organ of the East German Christian Democratic Party (loyal to the SED); and Berliner Zeitung, the SED organ for Berlin.
52 On the personal continuities of Nazi perpetrators in West Germany, see Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes, and Moshe Zimmermann, Das Amt und die Vergangenheit: Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik (Munich: Blessing, 2010); Frank Bösch and Andreas Wirsching, eds., Hüter der Ordnung: Die Innenministerien in Bonn und Ost-Berlin nach dem Nationalsozialismus (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2015).