

Introduction

Unlike the priest with the poor sinner remote from the world in the secrecy of the quiet confessional, A.M.G. [American Military Government] sends its questionnaire into my home and, like an examining judge with a criminal, barks its one hundred and thirty-one questions at me: it demands, coldly and flatly, nothing less than the truth; it even threatens twice – once at the beginning and once at the end – to punish me, and the nature and scope of the punishment envisaged I can only too vividly imagine.¹

—Ernst von Salomon, 1951

The bestselling book in West Germany during the 1950s was an 800-page memoir written by a fanatical right-wing nationalist and convicted criminal.² Ernst von Salomon's 1951 *Der Fragebogen* (The Questionnaire) sold a quarter of a million copies in its first year alone.³ The densely written autobiographical novel is a literary assault on the American military occupation, which had begun in 1945, and a scathing critique of the Allied nations' messianic campaign to

¹ Ernst von Salomon, *Der Fragebogen* (Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 1951), 9.

² In 1922, von Salomon was convicted as an accessory to the murder of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, for which he received a five-year prison sentence. Despite his ultranationalism, von Salomon never joined the NSDAP, as he considered its ideology too "western" and "capitalist" but also as a "more advanced" form of bolshevism. Ernst von Salomon, *Fragebogen (The Questionnaire)*, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 238; Jost Hermand, *Ernst von Salomon. Wandlungen eines Nationalrevolutionärs* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 2002), 14.

³ Axel Schildt, *Medien-Intellektuelle in der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020), 372. The book was translated into English in 1954 under the title, *The Answers of Ernst Von Salomon*, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (London: Putnam, 1954), and then for an American readership as, *Fragebogen (The Questionnaire)*, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: Doubleday, 1955). Italian and French editions were also produced. The book was sold in East Germany, although not in the same numbers. The Soviets originally banned all von Salomon's titles, but the anti-American sentiment of *Der Fragebogen* must have changed minds in Berlin. A 1965 literary studies review counted the book among the "anti-fascist autobiographies." See Hans-Georg Werner, *Deutsche Literatur im Überblick* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1965), 295. In 2011, Rowohlt published its nineteenth edition of *Der Fragebogen*.

“ideologically cleanse” the defeated population of National Socialism. The “Fragebogen” itself was well known to von Salomon’s readers; this was the widely distributed and much despised political screening instrument used by the occupying armies to identify, categorize, and punish Nazi Party members and sympathizers. The questionnaire asked for information on family, education, military service, and most importantly, membership in Nazi-affiliated groups. As a prerequisite for employment in jobs deemed influential, including most civil servant positions, millions of German civilians and returning soldiers completed the form. With a hyperbolic tone, von Salomon uses the questionnaire as a synecdoche for the entire denazification project and employs it for the narrative framework of the book – he recounts his life story by “responding” to the survey’s 131 questions, while intermittently denouncing the force-fed politics of defeat. He describes the form as an absurd bureaucratic blunder and a self-righteous “examination of conscience” (*Gewissensforschung*).⁴

The stunning success of *Der Fragebogen*, and the flurry of letters, lecture tours, and discussion panels that followed its publication, demonstrates that von Salomon’s emotional diatribe resonated with Germans, who were, by the early 1950s, collectively opposed to any remnant of denazification. Many viewed themselves as victims of both the war and the subsequent occupation; they were, according to a popular entertainer of the time, “*fragebogenkrank*” (questionnaire sick).⁵ However, the novel should not be interpreted as sensationalist literature, subject only to a brief burst of popularity. Literary critics of the time professed that von Salomon’s words were paradigmatic for an entire generation of Germans.⁶ Commenting on the general reception of *Der Fragebogen*, one British reviewer wrote:

⁴ As quoted in Werner Sollors, “‘Everybody Gets Fragebogen Sooner or Later’: The Denazification Questionnaire as Cultural Text,” *German Life and Letters* 71, no. 2 (April 2018): 149.

⁵ Just Scheu, “Der Fragebogen,” in *Kleinkunststücke*, vol. IV, *Wir sind so frei: Kabarett in Restdeutschland 1945–1970*, ed. Volker Kühn (Weinheim: Quadriga, 1993), 61–62. Anna M. Parkinson interprets the cultural and emotional implications of von Salomon’s book in *An Emotional State: The Politics of Emotion in Postwar West German Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), here 67–111.

⁶ W. H. Rey, review of *Der Fragebogen*, by Ernst von Salomon, *Books Abroad* 27, no. 1 (1953): 48. See also Teresa Seruya, “Gedanken und Fragen beim Übersetzen von Ernst von Salomons ‘Der Fragebogen,’” in *Konflikt-Grenze-Dialog: Kulturkontrastive und Interdisziplinäre Textzugänge*, eds. Jürgen Lehmann et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 227–37, here 229. Not all reviews were positive. Some media outlets criticized *Der Fragebogen* for being an overtly antidemocratic publication, calling it an “embarrassing stink bomb” written by an “immature youth” and “incompetent advocate for fascism.” For negative press, see Schildt, *Medien-Intellektuelle in der Bundesrepublik*,

When I visited Germany in 1951 Ernst von Salomon's 'Der Fragebogen' blossomed in all book-store windows and agitated all reviewing columns. On a second visit in 1953 many other works had strutted into and vanished from the literary Lebensraum [living space], but the cover of 'Der Fragebogen' still shone from the display racks, the public still bought it by the thousands, and the reviewers, hostile or friendly, had made it into a critical standard of reference.⁷

Made notorious by von Salomon's novel, but also because of its centrality in the denazification experience, the Fragebogen has become eternalized. Since the 1950s, the survey is remembered by Germans and non-Germans alike as the physical embodiment of a failed purge. To many, it represents everything wrong with the political screening program: the redundant legislation, tireless bureaucracy, and indiscriminate punishments.

During the Allied occupation, which existed in various forms between 1945 and 1955, Germans colloquially referred to the Fragebogen as the "tapeworm" (*Bandwurm*), due to its long length and their general repulsion to it.⁸ Novelist Wolfgang Borchert complained that it rendered individual freedom meaningless, while election posters called for an "End to the Fragebogen Regime!"⁹ In fact, a similar disdain was held by members of the Allied military governments, who considered the questionnaire too detailed and complicated.¹⁰ To the Germans, the form was uncompromising and ignorant to the nuances of living under dictatorship, and to the Americans, British, French, and Soviets it was too ambitious a program and economically burdensome.

Despite its popular portrayal as being central to the miscarriage of denazification, the Fragebogen has never been seriously studied. The origins and impact of this survey, one of the largest in history, are virtually unknown. Apart from a superficial examination of the general

here 372–75, and Angela Borgstedt, "Der Fragebogen. Zur Wahrnehmung eines Symbols politischer Säuberung nach 1945," *Der Bürger im Staat* 56 (2006): 166–71, here 166–67. Written correspondence between von Salomon and his editor, Ernst Rowohlt, reveals much on the book's initial reception. These letters are included in the von Salomon Nachlass at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach.

⁷ Frederic Morton, "One Prussian's Story," review of *Fragebogen (The Questionnaire)*, by Ernst von Salomon, *The Saturday Review*, January 1, 1955, p. 54.

⁸ Bianka J. Adams, *From Crusade to Hazard: The Denazification of Bremen Germany* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 66.

⁹ Sollors, "Everybody Gets Fragebogens Sooner or Later," 147–48; Poster, "Im Namen der Wahrheit der Freiheit und der Rechts," 1950, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (hereafter, AdsD), B6/FLBL003050.

¹⁰ Letter, CC for Germany (British Element) to SHAEF, G-5, December 22, 1944, US National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter, NARA), RG 331, SHAEF, G-5, Secretariat, Box 32, Doc. 21/1108.

purpose and scope of the program, historians have made little attempt to understand this principal weapon of the ideological war against fascism or the consequences that it held for Germans.

This book is the first in-depth study of the Fragebogen. In many ways, the story of this survey instrument, and the screening system it embodied, is a history of everyday denazification; that is, the campaign at its most rudimentary level and the routine experiences of common people – civilians, soldiers, and administrators. Of course, individual denazification experiences have been investigated before, but these studies rarely examine all four occupation zones, nor do they account for the perspective of both the occupiers and the occupied. They certainly do not engage with the political questionnaire in a meaningful way. There were many denazification experiences – interrogation, internment, tribunal hearings, institutional dismantling – all of which are addressed in this book, but it was the Fragebogen that governed nearly all activities, affected by far the most citizens, and accounted for as much as 90 percent of denazification budgets.

A more nuanced assessment of denazification is needed, not least because of the campaign's ambivalent results and its misunderstood scope and impact. In this study, emphasis is placed on the individual, be they an Allied wartime researcher, occupation soldier, or German citizen. These postwar actors were not passive bystanders to a large statistic-driven screening campaign; they did not know about the coming Cold War. Based largely on recently declassified materials, this book draws the curtain to reveal what denazification looked like on the ground and in practice, and how the highly criticized vetting program impacted the lives and livelihood of individual Germans and their families as they recovered from dictatorship and war. It revisits the ideological purge and seeks clarity about its origins, implementation, reception, effectiveness, and legacy. Therefore, what follows is a more comprehensive history of denazification than has previously been written.

I do not claim to account for every activity but instead to communicate a denazification story that is more inclusive and commonplace. This book is a study of both soldiers and civilians, tracing mostly American, British, and German experiences, but also those of the Soviets and French. Some readers may be surprised at, and even uncomfortable with, the ease with which I move between occupation zones. This approach is deliberate, for although there were important differences in the undertakings of the four military governments, especially between the Soviets and their Western counterparts, the mechanics of the purge, and the German experience of denazification, were remarkably similar across zones. By recognizing the questionnaire as an international project and

rare common denominator of the Allied denazification campaigns, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that applies a holistic approach to studying the immediate postwar years.¹¹

Ultimately, I conclude that the Fragebogen was an inadequate mechanism for the complex task of judging Germans. The form possessed inherent flaws in its structure and content, and it was too contradictory an investigatory device. The project was overly ambitious and cumbersome, and the Allies underestimated the resources it required. However, despite such shortcomings, the questionnaire achieved much of what it intended and offers meaningful lessons, or at least serious considerations, for future political screening and reorientation campaigns. It permanently disrupted the careers and hence influence of many former Nazis and introduced the notion of individual accountability. The program brought denazification into the homes of millions of German citizens, far from the courts at Nuremberg, and made average people account for the personal decisions they made during the Third Reich. It also encouraged respondents to build and rehearse non-Nazi narratives.

This is the conflicting legacy of the Fragebogen, the bureaucratic catastrophe that helped discredit Nazism. The ideological transformation was messy and perhaps superficial, but the inclusivity and grassroots nature of the political screening system ensured that a permanent non-Nazi imprint was left on German society. As such, this study is revisionist, at least in part, as I argue against the existing scholarship that has largely emphasized that the Fragebogen program not only failed in its own right but destabilized the entire denazification campaign. As you will learn, the questionnaire was by far the most pervasive and powerful tool of the political purge.

Denazification and the Fragebogen

The term “de-nazification” was first used by military planners in the Pentagon in 1943 to refer to proposed postwar reforms of the German

¹¹ There are only a handful of published studies that examine denazification activities in all four zones. Among them are Andrew H. Beattie, *Allied Internment Camps in Occupied Germany: Extrajudicial Detention in the Name of Denazification, 1945–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Perry Biddiscombe, *The Denazification of Germany: A History, 1945–1950* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing, 2007); Constantine Fitzgibbon, *Denazification* (London: Joseph, 1969); and Justus Fürstenau, *Entnazifizierung: Ein Kapitel deutscher Nachkriegspolitik* (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1969).

legal system, and perhaps as an analogy to the already familiar act of demilitarization.¹² By the spring of 1944, the implication of the word had been expanded by policymakers and adopted by the other Allied nations to refer to any concerted effort to rid German and Austrian society, culture, politics, economy, and judiciary of National Socialism and militarism. This included liquidating the Nazi Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP) and its affiliated and subsidiary organizations, repealing legislation, destroying symbols and monuments, and arresting Nazi leaders and influential supporters. However, the much larger and more substantial action was the investigation of regular Germans, mainly civil servants and professionals, and removing or barring those identified as Nazis or Nazi sympathizers from positions of responsibility and influence. The purge of public offices and private businesses dominated all serious discussion of denazification.¹³ To most wartime planners, the campaign was not meant to be a forum for moral discussion or a teaching institution of the nation, or even an investigation of legal guilt. It was, instead, about political responsibility and the physical exclusion of individuals who had been in close proximity to the Nazi regime from the building of a new democratic Germany.

Recognizing they were venturing well outside their wheelhouse, all four major Allied-nation armies recruited experts from civilian life to formulate strategies to eradicate Nazism. These specialists introduced social scientific approaches into the denazification curriculum, including innovative theoretical, statistical, and applied research methods, as well as modern perceptions of political, ideological, and sociological transformation. Inspired by procedures used to identify Fascists in occupied Italy (1943–45) and the progressive ideas of a handful of American-based scholars, many of them German-Jewish intellectuals, a simple yet unorthodox strategy was chosen. Denazification would be achieved primarily by screening Germans for employment using standardized questionnaires. Every adult who wished to work, or continue to, in a public or semi-public position of responsibility or in a leading private enterprise would be required to complete a survey. They would not be arrested or

¹² Political scientist Elmer Plischke, who headed the denazification desk for the US Office of the Political Advisor to General Eisenhower, claimed to have coined the word in April 1944, but there are several instances of it being used earlier. Elmer Plischke, "Denazification in Germany: A Policy Analysis," in *Americans as Proconsuls: United States Military Government in Germany and Japan, 1944–52*, ed. Robert Wolfe (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 207; Biddiscombe, *Denazification of Germany*, 9.

¹³ Elmer Plischke, "Denazifying the Reich," *The Review of Politics* 9, no. 2 (April 1947): 156; Directive, "Annex XXXIII (Denazification)," April 24, 1945, NARA, RG 331, SHAEF, SS, SD, Box 77, pp. 4–5.

made to face a military tribunal, but rather asked to fill out some paperwork, notifying the military government if they had ever been a member of a Nazi organization.

American and British civilians, working together under the Western command's Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), wrote the first denazification questionnaire in the spring of 1944, referring to the form by the German name: "Fragebogen" (or the plural Fragebögen).¹⁴ It did not take long for the French and Russians to adopt similar surveys and for analogous forms to be drafted for distribution in occupied Austria (1945–55) and Japan (1945–52). This seemed to be the only way to gather political intelligence on such large populations. Enrolling the defeated enemy in its own vetting process was an unconventional strategy, but so too was the task of transforming their worldview. Never before had a military victor attempted to screen the personal beliefs of civilians to ensure a lasting peace.

Despite popular representations, judicial actions taken against war criminals, including the Nuremberg Trials, as well as the reeducation of citizens, were not part of formal denazification proceedings; these activities had separate protocols. Instead, the purging of Nazism from public life was realized almost exclusively by the investigation of regular Germans, most of them middle-class educated men – teachers, doctors, civil servants, and managers. While the Nazi leadership faced the International Military Tribunal, the general population was subjected to a political examination directed by the Fragebogen.

The original form contained seventy-eight questions, most of which related to professional biography and positions held in the institutional structure of the National Socialist regime. In the longest section, the applicant was instructed to provide details on membership in the NSDAP, SS, SA, and twenty-nine other organizations. They were also required to include information on their education, military service, and financial history. Over the course of the occupation, all four Allied armies drafted their own version of the questionnaire, each slightly different from the one prior. One of the most widely circulated forms was the American Fragebogen, printed in May 1945, which contained 131 questions

¹⁴ Staff Study, "Measures for Identifying and Determining Disposition of Nazi Public Officials in Germany," May 28, 1944, NARA, RG 331, SHAEF, GS, G-5, IB, HS, Box 104, p. 7, Doc. 9959/181. SHAEF had sixteen Allied nation members: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, (Free) France, Greece, India, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Yugoslavia, United Kingdom, and United States.

printed on six pages; this was the form that Ernst von Salomon (supposedly) completed, along with millions of other Germans.¹⁵

A caveat was printed at the top of all versions of the Fragebogen, warning respondents that if they did not answer every question or if they submitted false information, they would be subject to judgment by a military tribunal. To ensure veracity, completed forms were cross-checked against seized and salvaged Nazi Party and government records, collected locally and in zonal and national document repositories. After being inspected for any responses that necessitated mandatory removal or arrest, the remaining forms were divided into predetermined categories of Nazi affiliation. This, in turn, could result in the immediate termination of the respondent's job or a prohibition from entering influential employment.

However, the Fragebogen was not a typical questionnaire composed of just checkboxes and columnar lists. The survey allowed for the inclusion of supplementary materials, such as a *Lebenslauf* (resumé), within which applicants could add comments to their answers and provide any other information that, they believed, would improve their chances of being cleared for employment. These allowances seemingly granted the former Nazi a fair trial, which some wartime planners and politicians were opposed to. Nevertheless, these additional records run into the millions of pages submitted by citizens trying to keep their jobs by convincing the occupiers that they were innocent of the excesses of the Nazi regime.

The first Fragebögen were distributed in early 1945 by the civil affairs officers who followed American, British, and French armies into German territory. Soon after, the Red Army began using the form. Referred by some Allied administrators as the "political litmus test," the questionnaire quickly came to govern most denazification efforts, dwarfing all other activities in scale, scope, and expense. Nearly every facet of the larger campaign, and many other undertakings such as food ration allocation and management of refugees, relied on these or similar forms. The Fragebogen system changed regularly over the course of the occupation and there existed significant differences between and even within each zone. The character of the program was affected by local circumstances

¹⁵ A complete list of the questions in the US Fragebogen can be found in the book's Appendix. As suggested by Werner Sollors, von Salomon may have never completed the long-form questionnaire that his book was structured around. In a 1948 letter, von Salomon explained that the idea for the book came from his editor, Ernst Rowohlt, who had informed him that the British authorities required all authors to complete a political questionnaire. See Sollors, "Everybody Gets Fragebogens Sooner or Later," 151–52, and Schildt, *Medien-Intellektuelle in der Bundesrepublik*, 366.

and the discretion of individual officers just as much as international affairs, including the developing events of the Cold War. The most significant change, however, came in 1946, when the Allied Control Council announced the transfer of denazification responsibilities to German authorities. Gradually, all four occupiers approved the establishment of a network of German-staffed denazification commissions (or tribunals) within their respective zones and the introduction of a standardized system for categorizing Nazi affiliation.

All German ministries adopted the Fragebogen of their respective military government overseers and the information the surveys provided continued to form the basis for investigative screening. In the spring of 1946, the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) oversaw the drafting of a shorter questionnaire, which acted as a political census; its completion was required by all citizens over the age of eighteen. At times, distributed alongside the Fragebogen, this *Meldebogen* (registration form) was completed by more than thirteen million people.¹⁶

Due to a growing discontent with denazification by Germans, the impracticality of processing millions of questionnaires, and rising tensions between the Soviet Union and the West, political screening was gradually phased out, the Fragebögen along with it. Beginning in late 1946, the purge devolved into a watered-down and routine system of civilian-staffed commissions that coincided with the issuing of exoneration certificates, the enactment of far-reaching political amnesties, and a popular public sentiment of “forgive and forget.”¹⁷ By 1948, questionnaires were still being used in all four zones but to a much lesser degree. The early impetus of denazification had given way to a program of amnesty and reintegration. In early 1948, the Soviets declared that their war against fascism had been won. Soon after, in the West, Konrad Adenauer’s Christian Democratic Party (*Christlich-Demokratische Union*, CDU) formally denounced all remaining denazification activities. The American, British, and French armies acknowledged their campaign’s failures. After the founding of East and West Germany in 1949, the questionnaires gradually disappeared from circulation and stacks of completed forms were moved from offices to archives.

¹⁶ Jeffery Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 204.

¹⁷ Lutz Niethammer, *Entnazifizierung in Bayern: Säuberung und Rehabilitierung unter Amerikanischer Besatzung* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1972), 613; Ernst Klee, *Persilscheine und falsche Pässe: wie die Kirchen den Nazis Halfen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991).

The US Military Governor of Germany, Lucius D. Clay, wondered if “perhaps never before in world history has such a mass undertaking to purge society been undertaken.”¹⁸ More than twenty million German civilians and returning soldiers completed at least one of the forms, making it, likely, the largest survey in history to that point.¹⁹ It is difficult to comprehend the magnitude of resources required to manage such a project. The fact that the Allies allowed extensive written supplements, which had to be translated, authenticated, and evaluated, makes the challenges presented by the program almost unfathomable.

Although the lifespan of the Fragebogen was limited, it had a substantial and lasting impact on the millions of Germans who completed it, nearly a third of the population. The questionnaire affected income, professional status, and community reputation. It directly influenced, and in many cases determined, physical lifestyle and mental well-being in the postwar years and it generated heightened feelings of anxiety and distrust. “Failing” the Fragebogen usually resulted in the loss of employment and career. Most importantly, the surveys shaped how the Nazi regime was remembered because, for many, it was the first time they had to seriously address their recent past under the Third Reich. This peculiar instrument provided Germans an opportunity, and an imperative, to recreate themselves in the aftermath of the war and to rewrite their personal histories, which would then be “approved” by the occupiers, in essence granting exoneration. The Fragebogen was therefore not only a fundamental instrument of the Allied occupation but a mindful record of the German past and a site of memory distortion and recreation.

Interpreting Denazification

For decades, denazification has been characterized as a wholesale failure. In rare unanimity, scholars across disciplines and generations mostly agree that the Allies’ ideological war against fascism was ill-conceived and that it failed to achieve its basic objectives.

Loud criticism began immediately upon arrival of the occupiers, in the early months of 1945. Soldiers, politicians, legalists, humanitarians, and journalists accused denazification of being ineffective, illegal, and immoral. As censorship loosened, German critics, including new and revived political parties, as well as the Protestant and Catholic churches, joined in the chorus. Adenauer’s coalition government rejected denazification outright, passing amnesty laws in 1949 and 1954 that reintegrated

¹⁸ Lucius D. Clay, *Decision in Germany* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1950), 259.

¹⁹ A calculation of questionnaires processed in the four zones can be found in Chapter 3.

hundreds of thousands of former Nazis into the workforce. At the same time, the German Democratic Republic (*Deutsche Demokratische Republik*, GDR) carried out an effective propaganda campaign against the West, claiming that the “fascist successor state” had failed to denazify, having reemployed hundreds of former high-ranking Nazis in prominent political and commercial positions. Combined with a memory of defeat and hard-fought postwar survival, it is not surprising that the verdict against denazification became cemented in the minds of early scholars.

Negative assessment was based on a variety of factors and critics are right to recognize fundamental deficiencies in the denazification project. Still, such overwhelming consensus is peculiar considering the absence of clearly defined aims against which to judge success and failure. How does one evaluate the eradication of Nazism and militarism from society? What timeline should be used for the measurement of success? Does Germany’s current role as a world leader in democracy feature in this assessment? The concept of denazification has always been vague, and its lofty objectives, complex activities, and uncertain legacies make any evaluation difficult, especially when resorting only to short-term quantitative data related to job dismissals and amnesties. It is equally curious that the crowded field of scholarship has ignored perhaps the most crucial piece of evidence, the Fragebogen. The political screening instrument consumed much of the resources dedicated to ideological disarmament and it defined the denazification experience for most Germans. The enormous success of Ernst von Salomon’s book elevated the questionnaire to an arena of popular conversation, but this also had the effect of permanently condemning the screening program and discouraging scholarly investigation. The Fragebogen has almost always been presented as a statistical annotation, relegated to footnotes and appendices, and referenced only in passing and with superficial analysis to illustrate the overly ambitious, bureaucratic, and flawed character of denazification. After seventy years, the full story of the Fragebogen and its legacies is beginning to be told. A small number of studies have recently emerged that examine different components of the questionnaire program, as well as its public and private reception.²⁰

²⁰ Among them is Hanne Leßau’s published dissertation, which is an investigation of how denazification documents, including the Fragebogen, allowed Germans an opportunity to confront and negotiate their own Nazi pasts. Leßau examines a sample of eight hundred case files from North Rhine-Westphalia in the British occupation zone. Hanne Leßau, *Entnazifizierungsgeschichten. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der eigenen NS-Vergangenheit in der frühen Nachkriegszeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020). My own interpretation of these mental processes can be found in Chapter 5. The remaining

Researchers struggled for decades to gain access to political screening records. In fact, before 1975, no archive in any country had declassified its denazification holdings. It was not until 2015 that most Fragebögen were available in German, American, British, and French collections. The majority of Soviet records are still unavailable, however; reportedly hundreds of thousands of questionnaires remain under lock and key at the State Archive in Moscow.²¹ The slow release of records is unsurprising. Case files contain personal information, much of it incriminating, and they are protected by information privacy laws.²² It does not help that the questionnaires that are available to researchers are scattered across dozens of archives in no fewer than five countries. Due to these obstacles, the course of scholarship has progressed unevenly. The Fragebogen program, and therefore individual experiences of denazification, has been largely ignored, while studies continue to be siloed into individual zones and nation groups. The focus remains overwhelmingly on the western zones and the perspective of the Allied occupiers, and historians continue to conduct mostly policy-based critiques, using a top-down analytical approach and, until recently, adhering to the well-worn thesis that denazification was a monumental failure.

The first period of what can be considered independent scholarship occurred between the 1950s and 1970s and was dominated by American historians and political scientists who surveyed denazification activities in the US zone. This exploratory stage of research drew mainly from the firsthand experiences of the authors and the limited archival records available, mostly government research reports. No serious debate on any topic emerged, only a joint venture to discover the reasons *why* denazification failed. Former chief of the US denazification program in Bavaria, William Griffith, claimed in his unpublished but influential

studies are, Sollors, “Everybody Gets Fragebogen Sooner or Later,” 139–53; Mikkel Dack, “Retreating into Trauma: The Fragebogen, Denazification, and Victimhood in Postwar Germany,” in *Traumatic Memories of the Second World War and After*, eds. Peter Leese and Jason Crouthamel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 143–70; Mikkel Dack, “Tailoring Truth: Political Amnesia, Memory Construction, and Whitewashing the Nazi Past from Below,” *German Politics and Society* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 15–36; Mikkel Dack, “A Comparative Study of French Denazification: Instruments and Procedures in Allied Occupied Germany,” in *La France et la dénazification de l’Allemagne après 1945*, eds. Sébastien Chauffour et al. (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2019), 109–27; and Borgstedt, “Der Fragebogen. Zur Wahrnehmung eines Symbols politischer Säuberung nach 1945,” 166–71.

²¹ The denazification records of the East German KPD and SED were released in 1990, along with some relevant SMA collections, but most files housed in Russian archives remain inaccessible to researchers.

²² Unless stated otherwise, all German civilians referenced in this book have been assigned a pseudonym. Their true initials are included in the relevant citation.

1950 dissertation that the Americans abandoned denazification too early and that they should have put more trust in German antifascists.²³ Similarly, John D. Montgomery accused American urgency to contain communism of undermining the war against Nazism.²⁴

In the 1970s, the study of denazification changed considerably, as a new school of revisionist historians challenged traditional arguments and theoretical constructs about the postwar era. Sustained by the release of tens of thousands of *Spruchkammer* (special denazification tribunal) files in West German state archives, this resource-rich period was populated by a younger generation of researchers who were not as concerned with high-policy studies as they were with *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of the everyday). The new wave of scholarship was championed by social historian Lutz Niethammer with his landmark book, *Entnazifizierung in Bayern* (1972).²⁵ Consulting archival materials on both sides of the Atlantic, Niethammer concluded that denazification had indeed been a failure, but that the war on fascism could have very well succeeded if the Americans had not allowed fundamental political reform and economic goals to overshadow the need for social and ideological change. The argument that he forwarded did little to upset traditional interpretations, but his research did admit the German-administered screening commissions to historical review. No longer was the story of denazification being told only by Americans and investigation confined to the actions of the occupiers.

Niethammer's seminal work initiated the publication of a series of microstudies in which mostly German historians examined denazification measures in individual *Länder* (states) and *Kreise* (districts).²⁶ But these *Alltagsgeschichten* of the 1970s and 1980s were not concerned with grassroots denazification experiences. Like earlier works, they evaluated the screening campaign from the perspective of authoritative institutions. Instead of military governments, they investigated the activities of German-run screening commissions, pooling data on rulings and amnesties in hopes of answering the same question of why denazification failed. Niethammer and his followers continued to measure "success"

²³ William Griffith, "The Denazification Program in the United States Zone in Germany" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1950).

²⁴ John D. Montgomery, *Forced to Be Free: The Artificial Revolution in Germany and Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 1–9.

²⁵ Niethammer, *Entnazifizierung in Bayern*.

²⁶ Among them are Irmgard Lange, *Entnazifizierung in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Richtlinien, Anweisungen, Organisation* (Siegburg: Respublica Verlag, 1976); Boyd L. Dastrup, *Crusade in Nuremberg: Military Occupation 1945–1949* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985); and Elmar Ettle, *Die Entnazifizierung in Eichstätt: Probleme der politischen Säuberung nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1985).

according to the number of former Nazis permanently removed from positions of influence. The Fragebogen featured prominently in these histories, but only as statistical evidence of the overly ambitious bureaucratic screening program.

The concurrent release of many British and French occupation records, in 1975 and 1986, respectively, saw researchers scrambling to catch up with the existing scholarship on the US zone. The origins, scope, and scale of the “other” Western campaigns were studied at length, mainly for the purpose of comparison. With the American model firmly typecast as the epitome of administrative failure – and the “American Fragebogen” as its showpiece – the unique and perhaps more positive characteristics of the British and French programs were highlighted. British historians emphasized the features of a more moderate screening campaign, and scholars of the French occupation unanimously concluded that denazification in the smallest zone was more personalized, consistent, and forward thinking.²⁷ These authors did not go as far as to celebrate the British and French campaigns, but only to attest that they had not been as redundant as the American project. Furthermore, they continued to operate in the same historical timeframe, evaluate denazification based on employment data, and mostly ignore the experiences of individual Germans.

Unsurprisingly, the most significant shift in scholarship occurred in the 1990s and early 2000s, following the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The gradual release of occupation-era documents in the former GDR and in Russia resulted in a landslide of literature on varying aspects of the Soviet occupation, including violence, censorship, education, and political reform. Post-reunification debate on Soviet denazification intersected with a reevaluation of East German politics and culture, including “de-Stasification” and a wider comparison of Germany’s two

²⁷ Notable studies include Barbara Marshall, “German Attitudes to British Military Government, 1945–1947,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 4 (October 1980): 655–84; Jill Jones, “Eradicating Nazism from the British Zone of Germany: Early Policy and Practice,” *German History* 8, no. 2 (June 1990): 145–62; Klaus-Dietmar Henke, *Politische Säuberung unter französischer Besatzung: Die Entnazifizierung in Württemberg-Hohenzollern* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1981); Rainer Möhler, *Entnazifizierung in Rheinland-Pfalz und im Saarland unter französischer Besatzung von 1945 bis 1952* (Mainz: V. Hase & Koehler, 1992); Reinhard Grohnert, *Die Entnazifizierung in Baden 1945–1949* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991). Prior to the 1980s, most discussion of denazification in the British zone was absorbed by studies on the larger occupation, such as Michael Balfour and John Mair, *Four Power Control in Germany and Austria, 1945–1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956). At this time, the only serious study of the French occupation was Roy Willis, *The French in Germany, 1945–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

dictatorships.²⁸ These studies either drew critical attention to the inconsistencies in the application of denazification policy within the Soviet zone or emphasized the differences between the Russian and Western campaigns.²⁹ Such a comparison is made, for example, in Timothy Vogt's indispensable work, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany* (2001), which is the first monograph to explore the Soviet Fragebogen program in any detail. Vogt argues that much like in the West, denazification in the Soviet zone was a failure, but that this was never admitted publicly.³⁰

In more recent years, the study of the *Nachkriegszeit* has splintered into different avenues of historical inquiry, accounting for multiple perspectives and methodologies. Research on soldier–civilian encounters, individual and collective memories, trauma, victimhood, gender, and justice has produced a more sophisticated interpretation of the postwar.³¹ These works move beyond the short-sighted and single-framed evaluation of the military occupation, to consider the impact of war and dictatorship on German society, including the emotional state of the citizen and the political and cultural effects of foreign subjugation.

Unfortunately, these rich and mostly German-oriented studies have only engaged tangentially with the topic of denazification. What this cultural history has done, however, is chip away at the foundation of traditional interpretation and encourage a new cohort of scholars who are more reflective in their analysis of denazification and willing to challenge long-held historiographical assumptions. Equipped with better access to relevant archival records, researchers no longer shy away from conducting multi-zone studies and even highlighting similarities between

²⁸ On de-Stasification, see John O. Koehler, “East Germany: The Stasi and de-Stasification,” in *Dismantling Tyranny: Transitioning between Totalitarian Regimes*, eds. Ilan Berman and J. Michael Waller (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 43–74; and Christiane Wilke, “The Shield, the Sword, and the Party: Vetting the East German Public Sector,” in *Justice As Prevention: Vetting Public Employees in Transitional Societies*, eds. Alexander Mayer-Rieckh and Pablo de Greiff (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2007).

²⁹ Such as Damian van Melis, *Entnazifizierung in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern: Herrschaft und Verwaltung 1945–1948* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999).

³⁰ Timothy Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany: Brandenburg, 1945–1948* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 232–34.

³¹ Some notable works include Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: Beck, 1996); Herf, *Divided Memory*; Atina Grossman, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

Western and Soviet approaches to screening and internment.³² More noteworthy is an inclination to acknowledge the positive legacies of denazification. Revisionist scholars tend to adopt a longer timeframe to measure effectiveness and point to the democratic success story of the Federal Republic.³³ However, this emerging scholarship has not yet fully embraced a bottom-up history of denazification. Conducting multi-zone comparative studies and reevaluating ideological effectiveness are essential tasks, but so too is an examination of everyday shared experiences. Furthermore, few studies have successfully combined the history of Allied denazification efforts with the subsequent experiences of the German population.

Methodology, Sources, and Scope

This book is a history of mass political screening in occupied Germany – what I refer to as *everyday denazification*. The research reminds us that the occupying authorities were involved in the day-to-day lives of the people they governed and that they influenced how Germans rebuilt their lives after the war. It deconstructs what is currently a compartmentalized history of the military occupation to garner an appreciation that soldiers and civilians populated the same physical space and interacted closely with each other, especially during the denazification process.

From the Allied perspective, an investigation of the Fragebogen program allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the ideological war against fascism. The number of people arrested, discharged, and rehired are weak quantitative proxy measures of program success, as they fail to reflect how Germans actually felt about Nazism. By studying the mechanics of the machine and its operation in the field a more precise interpretation of the American, British, French, and Soviet campaigns is achieved. An inclusive study of the first nonviolent de-radicalization project in modern times also speaks to contemporary issues, as seen in the pervasive public concern for the rising wave of political extremism and right-wing populist movements.

³² Biddiscombe, *Denazification of Germany*; Beattie, *Allied Internment Camps in Occupied Germany*.

³³ Among them are Konrad Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011); Uta Gerhardt and Gösta Gantner, “Ritualprozeß Entnazifizierung: eine These zur gesellschaftlichen Transformation der Nachkriegszeit,” *Forum Ritualdynamik* 7 (July 2004): 1–80; and Harald Jähner, *Aftermath: Life in the Fallout of the Third Reich, 1945–1955*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Knopf, 2022).

From the German perspective, the book explores how average citizens living under military occupation experienced denazification and how it affected their lives – family welfare, employment, financial status, community reputation, mental health, etc. It individualizes political screening, shifting the analytical gaze away from high-level administrators to the common German citizen and their immediate community. At its core, the Allied crusade to eradicate Nazism was about changing the views and beliefs of Germans; this study refines the investigation of whether this in fact happened. Moreover, it extends the already rich literature on postwar German cultural history by asking overdue questions about how denazification impacted community relations and memory.

In this book, “denazification” is interpreted as both the sociological imperative to eradicate National Socialism from public life and permanently discredit the ideology in the minds of German citizens, as well as the actual approved multifaceted administrative program designed to achieve such goals. This is aligned with the often-proposed dual definition, which accounts for both “expansive” and “narrow” interpretations.³⁴ The former includes any actions taken to discourage Nazism and serve transitional justice, such as mass dismissals, criminal prosecutions, internment, and reeducation initiatives. The “narrow” definition, which was subscribed to by the occupying armies, is confined mainly to vetting (or purging) processes and the removal of personnel.³⁵ In defining success and failure, I do not take the “narrow” view or adopt an uncompromising system of measurement; destroying National Socialism did not hinge on a long-standing exclusion of every Nazi from postwar public service. Instead, effective denazification meant a prevailing community rejection of the regime and its ideology, rendering them culturally taboo and thereby ensuring that Nazism would not reemerge in any meaningful form. Unlike scholars who evaluate denazification based on pooled statistics, I measure the campaign’s success by interpreting the firsthand accounts of people who in fact underwent political screening. That being said, it is not the main intention of this book to evaluate the

³⁴ See Beattie, *Allied Internment Camps in Occupied Germany*, 10; Rebecca Boehling, “Transitional Justice? Denazification in the US Zone of Occupied Germany,” in *Transforming Occupation in the Western Zones of Germany: Politics, Everyday Life and Social Interactions, 1945–55*, eds. Camilo Erlichman and Christopher Knowles (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 65.

³⁵ In the relevant literature, “purging” is generally used to refer to the targeting of individuals for their affiliation in a certain group, while “vetting” is a systematic evaluation of personnel based on specific criteria. In this study, the terms are used interchangeably.

effectiveness of denazification. While a critique is unavoidable, especially when introducing a crucial piece of evidence to the investigation, it is my opinion that the habitual fixation of producing a definitive verdict has distracted from the interpretation of many significant experiences and influences.

To account for more perspectives, a multitude of sources have been reviewed for this study. They include government and military files, soldier and civilian diaries, commission documents, church and party records, and newspapers drawn from German, American, British, and French archives and libraries. A small number of interviews were conducted with Germans who experienced the denazification process firsthand. Unsurprisingly, the predominant source is the questionnaire itself. Thousands of Fragebögen, completed by citizens of varying backgrounds, living in different occupation zones, between 1945 and 1951, were examined. They contain more than a million short answers, but I was more interested in the descriptive and oftentimes evocative responses found in the appended documents – personal biographies, sworn statements, and letters. For the purpose of this study, “Fragebogen” refers not only to the standardized form, but the sheets of written commentary attached to them, submitted by respondents during their screening. The study of a mass-distributed questionnaire, one that produces an exhausting amount of quantifiable data, makes the traditional stochastic method of analysis appealing. However, to generate a history of everyday denazification, this study avoids a statistical approach.

American and British zone activities are featured more prominently in the book, which is intentional. The questionnaire program originated as an Anglo-American project. The French and Soviet programs were distinct, as were those instituted under the various *Land* governments, but the questionnaires used by every authority were based on the American and British model. Furthermore, the American zone witnessed by far the widest distribution of Fragebögen. Of the more than 20 million questionnaires submitted for review, 16 million were processed by OMGUS or by German offices operating under American supervision.³⁶ Moreover, the US National Archives and Records Administration maintains the largest accessible collection of records related to the Fragebogen program. Therefore, while activities in all four zones are examined, the Soviet zone perspective, and to a lesser degree the French viewpoint, are more circumstantial.

³⁶ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 56.

Outline of the Book

The book's temporal frame extends from the Allied invasion of Europe, in July 1943, to the formation of the two German states, in late 1949. Some consideration is given to residual denazification activities in the early 1950s, under the watchful eye of the Allied high commissioners. The work adopts a mix of chronological and thematic organization. Overlaps in timeline reflect the difficulty of neatly periodizing late 1940s Germany and the uneven transition from war to peace to stable government. The book is divided into five chapters and accommodates three undefined sections, each with its own vantage point and timeframe.

The first section traces the ideological and practical origins of the inter-Allied denazification campaign and the unorthodox questionnaire program that it proposed. Chapter 1 surveys the wartime planning landscape in 1943 and 1944 and introduces the individuals and institutions that created the *Fragebogen*. Hundreds of civilian experts, including college professors, police officers, lawyers, and Jewish refugees, were employed to build denazification policy and to overhaul military civil affairs programs. In Chapter 2, the *Fragebogen* is introduced – it sits the reader down at the drafting table and explains what the civilian specialists envisioned for Germany after the collapse of the Nazi dictatorship. The structure and content of the original survey is scrutinized, and conclusions made as to why so much confidence was placed in such an experimental project. Although the French and Soviet questionnaires are not the principal focus of this book, they are an essential part of the denazification story. Neither of these lesser-known political screening programs has been subject to thorough scholarly review; both are examined here in detail.

Chapters 3 and 4 act as the centerpiece of the book and together comprise a study of everyday denazification. Here, the lived experiences of both the civilian occupied and the military occupiers are explored, describing to the reader what political screening looked like on the ground and in action. Chapter 3 lifts the incomplete and unevaluated *Fragebogen* off the desks of planners in England and delivers it to American, British, French, and Soviet soldiers operating in Germany. It analyzes the implementation and gradual institutionalization of the *Fragebogenaktion* (questionnaire campaign) beginning in 1945; how the form was distributed, collected, and evaluated, and what role it played in the larger military occupation. In Chapter 4, the second vantage point of the book is introduced, that of the German citizen. It describes what denazification was like for most men and women; how they reacted to the Allies' war on Nazism and how it impacted their daily lives. This chapter

concludes with a detailed case study of denazification experiences in Hersfeld (Hesse), a moderately sized district (*Kreis*) in the US occupation zone.

In the final section of the book, the reader is introduced to a conversation about the psychological and social consequences of denazification, particularly community relations, emotional well-being, memory and identity, and the national process of coming to terms with the Nazi past. Despite being heralded at the time as a campaign to change the hearts and minds of Germans, no comprehensive investigation of the ideological effects of denazification has been conducted. Chapter 5 includes a more nuanced interpretation of denazification, beginning with an investigation into how the Fragebogen encouraged the already widespread practice of political denunciation, likely delaying the healing of the dysfunctional society left after the war. It then turns its focus on how Germans remembered and recorded memories of the Nazi regime. Consideration here is given to narrative psychology and the power that written language has on memory. The Fragebogen is presented as an autobiographical ego-document with performative features. Emphasis is placed on the German appropriation of denazification and the transformative role that the questionnaire played in the emotional lives of a morally culpable people.

A comprehensive assessment of the Fragebogen is presented in the book's conclusion, including speculation about the enduring effects of denazification on the two German successor states. The unexpected achievements of the zonal screening programs are measured against their many weaknesses and negative results. Consideration is also given to more recent political screening projects in different parts of the world, and the historical lessons ascribed to denazification.