

## Introduction

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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.<sup>1</sup>

—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.<sup>2</sup> Ernst von Salomon's 1951 *Der Fragebogen* (The Questionnaire) sold a quarter of a million copies in its first year alone.<sup>3</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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*.

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“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” (*Gewissenserforschung*).<sup>4</sup>

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).<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> Commenting on the general reception of *Der Fragebogen*, one British reviewer wrote:

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> Novelist Wolfgang Borchert complained that it rendered individual freedom meaningless, while election posters called for an "End to the Fragebogen Regime!"<sup>9</sup> In fact, a similar disdain was held by members of the Allied military governments, who considered the questionnaire too detailed and complicated.<sup>10</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>11</sup>

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

<sup>11</sup> 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).

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legal system, and perhaps as an analogy to the already familiar act of demilitarization.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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).<sup>14</sup> 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

<sup>14</sup> 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.



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

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

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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.”<sup>17</sup> 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.

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

<sup>17</sup> 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).

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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.”<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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

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

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