Twenty years after the collapse of the German Democratic Republic, historians still struggle to explain how an apparently stable state imploded with such vehemence. This is the first book to show how ‘national’ identity was invented in the GDR and how citizens engaged with it. Jan Palmowski argues that it was hard for individuals to identify with the GDR amid the threat of Stasi informants and with the accelerating urban and environmental decay of the 1970s and 1980s. Since socialism contradicted its own ideals of community, identity and environmental care, citizens developed rival meanings of nationhood and identity. They learned to mask their growing distance from socialism beneath regular public assertions of socialist belonging. This stabilized the party’s rule until 1989. However, when the revolution came, the alternative identifications citizens had developed for decades allowed them to abandon their ‘nation’, the GDR, with remarkable ease.

JAN PALMOWSKI is Professor of Modern and Contemporary History and Head of the School of Arts and Humanities at King’s College London. His previous publications include Urban Liberalism in Imperial Germany: Frankfurt am Main, 1866–1914 (1999) and Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany (as co-editor, with Geoff Eley, 2008).
The aim of this series in early modern and modern European history is to publish outstanding works of research, addressed to important themes across a wide geographical range, from southern and central Europe to Scandinavia and Russia, from the time of the Renaissance to the Second World War. As it develops the series will comprise focused works of wide contextual range and intellectual ambition.

For a full list of titles published in the series, please see the end of the book.
INVENTING
A SOCIALIST NATION

JAN PALMOWSKI
King’s College London
To Alf Lüdtke, Sue Matthew and Heather Williams
Contents

List of illustrations
List of maps
Acknowledgements
List of abbreviations

1 Introduction 1

PART 1 SOCIALISM, HEIMAT AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY 21

2 Cultural renewal and national division, 1945–c. 1958 23
3 Traces of stones 65

PART 2 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TRANSCRIPTS 109

4 Heimat and identity in the Honecker era 111
5 Citizenship and participation in the local community – ‘Join in!’ 149
6 Environmental destruction 186

PART 3 POWER, PRACTICES AND MEANINGS 223

7 Social drama and the euphemization of power 226
8 Cultural practices, Eigen-Sinn and hidden meanings 259

Conclusion: From citizens to revolutionaries 295

Bibliography 314
Index 338
Illustrations

1. CDU election poster, Thuringia, 1947. © Deutsches Historisches Museum page 48
2. SED election poster, Thuringia, 1947. © Deutsches Historisches Museum 49
3. ‘The Beautiful German Heimat’, Sömmerda county (Thuringia), 1956. Reprinted with kind permission of the Kulturbund e.V. 55
4. Ummerstadt, Thuringia, 1959. Reprinted with kind permission of the Kulturbund e.V. 56
5. ‘Wer die Heimat liebt…’ (Whoever loves the heimat…), 1957. © Deutsches Historisches Museum 57
6. ‘Auf Friedenswacht’ (On guard for peace), Tribüne, 24 December 1955 61
10. The Thuringian Forest, 1966. Reprinted with kind permission of the Kulturbund e.V. 101
12. ‘Historical gap construction’ in Merseburg, 1983. © Berliner Verlag 198
13. Holungen slag heap, c. 1968. Photo by Josef Kistner, reprinted with his kind permission 227
14. Holungen slag heap, c. 1978. Photo by Josef Kistner, reprinted with his kind permission 228
15. Wooden cross on the Sonnenstein. Picture taken by the author, 2003 230
List of illustrations

16. House of Theo Iseke and the Holungen slag heap. Picture taken by the author in 2005 246
17. The proposed extension of the slag heap northwards and its consequences. Holungen, c. 1980. Map reproduced with the kind permission of Josef Kistner 247
18. Devotional monument by Iseke’s house. Picture taken by the author in 2005 250
21. ‘Snacks ut de Plappermoel’ (Stories from the chatting windmill), Dabel, 1983. © Burda Verlag, reproduced with their kind permission 274
22. ‘Snacks ut de Plappermoel’: The Miller’s Lads, Dabel, 1983. © Burda Verlag, reproduced with their kind permission 275
23. Slogan painted on a propaganda billboard in Dabel, 28–29 November 1957. Ministerium für Staatssicherheit Hauptabteilung (MfS HA) xix No. 4768, p. 58 283
25. GDR ten-pfennig stamp displaying Dabel’s windmill, 1981 291
Maps

1. The GDR and its districts, 1952–90
It is ten years since I began thinking about this book, and in the process I have incurred many debts. I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the award of a major research grant in 2001–4, to the Berlin Senate for the award of a Research Fellowship in 2002–3, and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for the award of a Fellowship in 2004–5. I also wish to record my thanks to my own institution, King’s College London: it has been a stimulating, demanding and fulfilling place to work in, and I am immensely grateful to my colleagues for allowing me the time to finish this book.

I will never forget the generosity with which colleagues have supported me over the years. At a very early stage in this project, Dieter Langewiesche provided invaluable advice which included introducing me to the work of Alf Lüdtke. Richard Bessel was similarly crucial to laying the foundations for this study, not least by tirelessly providing references and offering advice at a time when I was a completely unknown quantity amongst GDR scholars. Whatever he may think of this book, the help he gave me at that stage is emblematic of his encouragement to other scholars more generally. I am also grateful to Alon Confino, Celia Applegate, Nick Stargardt, Chris Clark, Geoff Eley and Thomas Lindenberger. This book attests to how deeply I admire their scholarship (even where I disagree with it), and for this reason their words of encouragement at critical junctures were more significant than they can know.

A number of conferences and seminars have provided critical feedback for important arguments presented here. I would like to thank participants and commentators of the University of London German History Seminar, the German Historical Institute, the German Studies Association in Houston and Pittsburgh, and the University of Oxford German History Seminar for their valuable comments. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to speak at Paul Nolte’s seminar at the Free University in Berlin – this was not the strongest paper I ever gave, but for that very reason
the experience was invaluable. Of all the seminars and workshops I participated in, the importance of Alf Lüdtke’s colloquium, which I had the privilege to attend regularly between 2002 and 2007, stands out. The personal support and academic comments enriched my work immeasurably. Even though it is against the spirit of the seminar to mention individuals, I would like to record my debt to Christina Hartig, whose comment on my final presentation to the seminar caused me to rewrite important parts of the book.

Over the past ten years I have been sustained by the support of many friends, colleagues and relatives. My life, and my work for this book, have been enriched immeasurably by my extended family even if they still do not understand what I actually ‘do’ for a living; my sense of my sister’s joy in motherhood; and my parents’ extraordinary courage, determination and love as they battle against my father’s Parkinson’s disease. Among my friends, I would like to thank Barbara and Chris O’Reilly, Tore and Norunn Rem, Franz Mayer and Hanne Neuhauser for their support despite my constant lack of time, and I am forever indebted to Michael Suarez SJ and Robin Griffith-Jones not only for their friendship, but also for their spiritual support. Finally, Katherine and Leo Martin have been extraordinarily generous in offering me their time, their counsel, and their home when I needed it. This book could not have been written without them.

Amongst my friends and colleagues, I am particularly indebted to S. Jonathan Wiesen, who heroically battled through an earlier version of the manuscript, and to Helmut Walser Smith for almost making it through the manuscript. Their advice was critical for its quality and its timing, and I truly appreciate the huge amount of time and energy they devoted to me. I am equally grateful to David Crew, who read through two chapters even though he had met me only a few times. Like Helmut and Jonathan, he had his own deadlines to keep, and his unflinching willingness to help has been truly humbling. I would like also to thank Deborah Neill, for reading parts of the book and providing me with characteristically sound and expert advice, and also for her wonderful friendship and counsel, especially during a very difficult year in Berlin. I have benefited immeasurably from the help of Anne Reissig, who transcribed most of my interviews, proved to be a valuable sounding board for ideas, and introduced me to the Vogtei region. Last but not least, I am grateful to Anna Patton, who did a wonderful job at turning my Germanic sentences into something slightly more intelligible; and I thank David Monger for his insightful work in helping me to prepare the final manuscript for publication.
Throughout this project on everyday history, I have become ever more aware of the historian’s dependence on her or his environment. The choice of topics I studied, the files I chose to read, the persons I decided to interview and ultimately the arguments I came up with were not simply the result of rational thought, but also of emotions, personal circumstances and the kindness of others. Three individuals influenced this book in particular ways. Sue Matthew provided a home for me whenever I needed it, and being able to stay in Oxford particularly over one summer provided me with a wonderful opportunity to develop this book conceptually. Since meeting him for the first time in 2002, I have benefited enormously from the example of Alf Lüdtke, who had weathered extraordinary personal and academic attacks to realize his vision of rigorous scholarship and astonishing support for others. This book would have been completely different without his questions, comments and inspiration. Finally, the life of this book coincides almost perfectly with my relationship with Heather Williams, who has been with me in good times and in bad. While our lives changed with and in part through the work undertaken for this book, our time together also deeply affected what I explored, and how I explored it. It is to these three individuals that I dedicate this book.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIM</td>
<td>archivierter IM-Vorgang (archived file of an unofficial informant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOP</td>
<td>archivierter operativer Vorgang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOPK</td>
<td>archivierte operative Personenkontrolle (an investigation into the life of an individual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARD</td>
<td>Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Community of the Public Broadcasting Services in West Germany - First TV Channel of the FRG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BArch-SAPMO</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv – Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDV</td>
<td>Bund Deutscher Volksbühnen (League of German Folk Theatres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BStU</td>
<td>Die Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staats sicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR (Federal Commission for the Records of the state security services of the former German Democratic Republic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BV</td>
<td>Bezirksverwaltung (district administration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFA</td>
<td>Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft (German Film Corporation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFF</td>
<td>Deutscher Fernsehfunk (German Television Broadcasting House, renamed GDR TV in 1972)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>Deutsche Mark (West German currency unit, 1948–2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRA</td>
<td>Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv Babelsberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>Freie Presse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR TV</td>
<td>Fernsehen der DDR (cf. DFF)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of abbreviations

GHI  geheimer Hauptinformator (secret/unofficial informer)
GHZ  Gothaer Heimatzeitung
GNU  Gesellschaft für Natur- und Heimatfreunde (Society for the Friends of Nature and the Environment)
HA  Hauptabteilung
HSStD  Heimatstube Dabel
IG  Interessengemeinschaft
IM  Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (Unofficial or covert informer for the state security services, the Stasi)
JbVkKg  Jahrbuch für Volkskunde und Kulturgeschichte
‘Join in!’ ‘Mach mit! – schöner unsere Städte und Gemeinden’ (Join in! – more beautiful our towns and communities)
KA  Kreisarchiv (County Archive)
KD  Kreisdienststelle (County Office)
LHA  Landesarchiv (State Central Archives)
M  Mark (East German currency unit from 1968)
MDN  (Deutsche) Mark der Deutschen Notenbank (East German currency unit, 1948–67)
Mark  Mark Brandenburg: the historical centre of Brandenburg, derived from the Margravate of Brandenburg. In the GDR, its territory extended from east of Magdeburg to the Polish border, including the northern half of Potsdam and Frankfurt districts
NAW  Nationales Aufbauwerk (National Reconstruction Effort)
NBI  Neue Berliner Illustrierte
NDR  Norddeutscher Rundfunk (North German Broadcasting Station)
NF  Nationale Front (National Front, the umbrella organization for all mass organizations)
NL  Nachlaß (private papers)
RdG  Rat der Gemeinde (Village Council)
RdK  Rat des Kreises (County Council)
StA  Stadtarchiv
Stasi  Staats sicherheit (State Security Services)
SVZ  Schweriner Volkszeitung
ThHStAWe  Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar
ThStA  Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Altenburg
ZDF  Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (Second German Television Station)