

Building an East German Nation: The Construction of a Socialist *Heimat*, 1945–1961

Jan Palmowski

FOLLOWING the GDR's surprising collapse in 1989, historians have produced a range of studies that have added new contours to its state and society and contributed to a much fuller understanding of the reasons for East Germany's implosion.¹ As scholars became more aware of the "limits of dictatorship" in the GDR,² however, the longevity of a state that lasted for almost as long as the second German Empire became all the more perplexing. In response to this problem, a number of historians reflected on approaches practiced by historical anthropologists and sociologists,³ to explore the distinctive nature of GDR life in its everyday manifestations.⁴ Inspired by the pioneering work of Alf Lüdtke and Lutz Niethammer, they began to investigate the history of everyday life at the workplace, within and across generational and gender divides, and in areas such as consumption and leisure.⁵ Such histories

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1. Albert O. Hirschman, "Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic: An Essay in Conceptual History," *World Politics* 45 (1993): 173–202. The list of relevant works is extensive. For an excellent, detailed survey on the collapse of the GDR, see Hans-Heinrich Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer: Die Unbeabsichtigte Selbstauflösung des SED-Staates* (Opladen, 1999).

2. Richard Bessel and Ralf Jessen, eds., *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen, 1996). For a discussion of the limits of totalitarianism in analysing the GDR, see also Mary Fulbrook, "Jenseits der Totalitarismustheorie? Vorläufige Bemerkungen aus sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive," in *The GDR and its History, Rückblick und Revision: Die DDR im Spiegel der Enquete-Kommissionen*, ed. Peter Barker (Amsterdam, 2000), 35–54.

3. See, for instance, the important work of Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended* (Berkeley, 1997), here esp. 9–15; Andreas Glaeser, *Divided in Unity: Identity, Germany, and the German Police* (Chicago, 1999).

4. The history of everyday life was, of course, not an invention of West German historians. See Georg Iggers, ed., *Marxist Historiography in Transformation: New Orientations in Recent East German History* (New York, 1991).

5. Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato and Dorothee Wierling, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz in der DDR* (Berlin, 1991); Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker,

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have uncovered some of the complex interactions among individual actors and their economic, social, and political environment in everyday life. Summarized by the concept of *Eigen-Sinn*, they laid bare the “individual meanings” that actors attached to their behavior in private, social, and official contexts.⁶

Given the current emphasis on considering the East German past in all the rich dimensions of everyday life, it is striking that scholars have largely ignored the impact of local cultures and regional identifications on politics and social practice in the GDR. This is particularly puzzling because for more than a decade, historians have emphasized the pivotal importance of regional identities in modern German history, from the German Empire to the German Federal Republic. In her pioneering work, Celia Applegate explored the concept of *Heimat*, a term that denotes a homeland, a rootedness in the locality and its physical environment, and a particular familiarity with, and protection by, the local community.⁷ Through the emotive force of *Heimat*, the locality became crucial to the ways in which individuals and communities encountered the economic, social, and cultural ruptures of German history, from the economic boom of the 1890s, through to the perceived threats of globalization and environmental disaster in the 1990s.⁸ Applegate’s work sparked an intense debate about the uses of *Heimat* in the mediation between local and national (as well as state) identities in German history.⁹ That *Heimat* was important in the way the nation was perceived appears beyond doubt. Alon Confino has even gone so far as to suggest a concept of “Heimatism” in modern German history, as a tool for investigating the ways in which “local, regional, national, and global powers interact.”¹⁰

For West Germany, scholars have argued that identifications provided by the

eds., *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: Die DDR und ihre Texte, Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Berlin, 1997); Konrad-H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, 1999); Catherine Pence, “‘You as a Woman will Understand’: Consumption, Gender and the Relationship Between State and Citizenry in the GDR’s Crisis of 17 June 1953,” *German History* 19 (2000): 218–52; Renate Hürtgen and Thomas Reichel, *Der Schein der Stabilität: DDR-Betriebsalltag in der Ära Honecker* (Berlin, 2001); Dorothee Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Null* (Berlin, 2002).

6. Alf Lüdtke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, 1995); Thomas Lindenberger, *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Cologne, 1999), here 23–26.

7. Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990).

8. Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman, *Heimat, A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890–1990* (Oxford, 2000); Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (London, 2002).

9. See the Introduction and Part One of James Retallack, *Saxony in German History: Culture, Society and Politics, 1880–1933* (Ann Arbor, 2000); Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Jennifer Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture and Liberal Politics in Fin-de-Siècle Hamburg* (Ithaca, 2003).

10. Alon Confino, “On Localness and Nationhood,” *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* 23 (2001): 7–28, here 15, 26.

local and regional Heimat became particularly important in shaping collective identifications and providing acceptance of the new state.¹¹ Moreover, a consideration of the images associated with Heimat has allowed historians to challenge the prevailing view that the National Socialist past was a taboo subject in the early FRG. Heimat enabled the articulation of public and private memories by providing a context for themes of community, sacrifice, and redemption, beyond the brutal political machinations of the central state.¹² Finally, Alon Confino has underlined the importance of Heimat loyalties in postwar politics and culture, because for the large number of expellees from the east, Heimat denoted a sense of irretrievable loss.¹³ Regional and local identifications thus provided important contexts for the stabilization of the Federal Republic.

Up until now, the GDR has remained at the margins of such considerations about the significance of Heimat. Individual scholars such as Timothy Garton Ash have hinted at the substantial strength of local patriotism and a popular rootedness in Heimat, but such occasional observations have not yet been followed by sustained research.¹⁴ Although the appropriation of Heimat by the GDR state has been noted by historians interested in the development of GDR historiography,¹⁵ the processes through which this occurred, and the significance this acquired in ideology and practice has gone largely unnoticed. More recently, a research center at the University of Leipzig has investigated processes of regional identity-formation in Saxony and their relationship to specific Saxon social, economic, and cultural structures across the transformations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁶ A similar approach has informed some pioneering scholarship of local identities in the GDR. The forthcoming work of both Thomas Schaarschmidt and Willi Oberkrome considers how successive totalitarian regimes impacted upon the articulation of

11. Habbo Knoch, ed., *Das Erbe der Provinz: Heimatkultur und Geschichtspolitik nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2001); Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1998), chap. 5.

12. Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Alon Confino, "'This lovely country you will never forget': Kriegserinnerungen und Heimatkonzepte in der westdeutschen Nachkriegszeit," in *Erbe*, ed. Knoch, 235–51. Koshar, *Transient Pasts*, 236–37.

13. Confino, "This Lovely Country," 246–48.

14. Timothy Garton Ash, *Und willst du nicht mein Bruder sein . . . Die DDR heute* (Hamburg, 1981), 43.

15. Karlheinz Blaschke, "Die marxistische Regionalgeschichte: Ideologischer Zwang und Wirklichkeitsferne," in *Die DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft als Forschungsproblem*, ed. Georg G. Iggers, Konrad Jarausch et al. (Munich, 1998), 341–68, here 354–55.

16. The results of this project are being published in the *Leipziger Studien zur Erforschung von regionenbezogenen Identifikationsprozessen*. See also Ulrich Hess, "Sachsen im 20. Jahrhundert: Wiederentdeckung einer Region oder Neukonstruktion einer regionalen Identität?," in *Nach dem Erdbeth: (Re-)Konstruktion ostdeutscher Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch and Matthias Middell (Leipzig, 1994), 288–303. Interestingly, Hess explores the nature of Saxony as a region by considering its traditions before 1933 and their "revival" during the late 1980s, thereby leaving out its regional development during most of the GDR's history.

Heimat in Saxony and Thuringia respectively.¹⁷ Where regional identifications in the GDR have been considered, therefore, this has occurred primarily in the context of historians' attempts to uncover the impact of two successive dictatorships on eastern Germany.

Since work on regional identities in the GDR has barely begun to take off, there is a continued scholarly consensus that regional identities, such as they existed in 1945, paled into insignificance over the forty years of the GDR's existence.¹⁸ It is still widely assumed that Heimat and regional identifications had been overcome by democratic centralism, which constituted one of the founding principles of the state. Accordingly, from the GDR's inception, the relentless political and organizational centralization, coupled with the administrative destruction of the individual states (*Länder*) in 1952, removed the "last vestiges of federalism and state traditions."¹⁹ Even if some local identities persisted, these continued either because this was opportune for the state (notably to attract Western, hard-currency paying tourists), or because they had been relegated to a private, nonpolitical realm.²⁰ From such a perspective, the official sanction of regional history and a corresponding revival of regionalism in the GDR from the early 1980s,²¹ and the re-creation of the five East German states in 1990, had similar origins: the revival of long-dormant regionalisms from the top down for political purposes.²²

This article challenges the ostensible destruction, during the 1950s, of regional identities in the GDR. In the formative years of the GDR's creation, even while at a central level the state asserted its political and economic control, identifications with regional and local cultures thrived, as they were expressed through folk music, amateur theater, folklore groups, traditional crafts, hobby enthusiasts, local festivals in towns and villages, and Heimat museums. By 1960, the expression of local identities in the GDR had become a central component of popular culture and state politics, and this essay will examine some of

17. Thomas Schaarschmidt, *Regionalkultur und Diktatur: Sächsische Heimatbewegung und Heimat-Propaganda im Dritten Reich und in der SBZ/DDR* (Cologne, forthcoming); Willi Oberkrome, *Teure Heimat: Nationale Konzeption und regionale Praxis von Naturschutz, Landesgestaltung und landschaftlicher Kulturpolitik am Beispiel Westfalen-Lippes und Thüringens 1900/10–1960/70* (forthcoming); Willi Oberkrome, "Durchherrschte" Heimat? Zentralismus und Regionalismus im organisierten Heimatschutz der früheren DDR: "Das Beispiel Thüringens," in *Erbe*, ed. Knoch, 252–74.

18. Local and regional identities do not feature in any way in what is still the definitive survey of the GDR in the English language. Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949–1989* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1995).

19. Christoph Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung: Deutsche Geschichte 1945–1955* (5th ed., Bonn, 1991), 266–67; Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR* (2nd ed., Munich, 1999), 155.

20. Mary Fulbrook, "Democratic Centralism and Regionalism in the GDR," in *German Federalism: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Maiken Umbach (Basingstoke, 2002), 146–71.

21. Katrin Keller, "Landesgeschichte zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik: August der Starke als sächsisches "Nationalsymbol," in *Nach dem Erdbeben*, ed. Jarausch and Middell, 195–218, here 215.

22. Fulbrook, "Democratic Centralism," 168–69.

the tensions that developed between these two arenas. The institution of democratic centralism notwithstanding, Heimat and an appeal to regional traditions provided an otherwise artificial state with potential sources of legitimacy through the local histories and regional concerns it could attempt to claim as its own.

This essay discusses the ways in which Heimat became central to public constructions of a GDR identity, despite initial concerns about an ideological incompatibility of Heimat within Marxist-Leninist socialism. Having explored the importance that Heimat came to acquire in socialist ideology and popular practice, the essay will discuss the relationship between the two by exploring the state's attempts to realize its vision of Heimat, and the individual meanings to which they gave rise.

The Problems of Heimat

The first decade after the end of World War II was marked by sustained challenges to regional identities in the GDR. Although the five federal states created in 1945 were recognized by the 1949 constitution, they were relegated to acting as executive organs of the central state, with few remaining legislative powers.²³ Ideologically, they had become redundant in a state that defined itself exclusively in terms of class, which in turn was solely determined through the means of production. Organizationally, the state was reconstructed along the lines of democratic centralism, which ensured the concentration of power in Berlin. The state and its administration, as well as all parties and mass organizations in the individual states acquired rigid hierarchies, with strict discipline being demanded from the top down. This was complemented by the administrative reform of 1952, when fourteen districts replaced the five federal states (which were finally abolished in 1958). These districts, which were subdivided into 217 new counties (*Kreise*), were created according to military, economic, and logistical criteria first and foremost, hence their borders often cut across regional boundaries. Democratic centralism in "Germany's first workers' and peasants' state" had removed most of the political and administrative anchors of traditional regional loyalties.

The destruction of traditional regional structures was accompanied by deep suspicions against the concept of Heimat itself. In the first years after the war, Heimat was often linked to the "blood and soil" ideals of the Third Reich, a highly problematic association in a state created as the antithesis of fascism.²⁴ In

23. Siegfried Wietstruk, "Von den Ländern zu den Bezirken: Die DDR 1949 bis 1952," in *Staat und Recht* 38, no. 9 (1989): 753–60.

24. Insa Eschenbach, "Zur Umcodierung der eigenen Vergangenheit: Antifaschismuskonstruktionen in Rehabilitationsgesuchen ehemaliger Mitglieder der NSDAP, Berlin 1945/46," in *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster*, ed. Lüdtkke and Becker, 79–90. Simone Barck, „Widerstands-

Saxony, for instance, Nazi ideology had associated the Saxon with hard work and a will of steel, honed by regular interactions with non-German peoples across its southern borders. For this reason, Nazi propagandists within Saxony ascribed to Saxons also ideal racial qualities.²⁵ Both the racial connotations of Heimat in the Third Reich, and the legitimacy that it had lent to the aggressive claims of Germans outside the Reich's eastern borders, caused great concern to the new political and cultural leaders in the Soviet Zone and its successor, the GDR.²⁶

The fascist connotations of Heimat acquired their particular poignancy through evident personal and organizational continuities between fascist and Communist Germany. In 1949, a number of folklore groups resisted what they considered to be political control, and demanded instead to be able to revive what they claimed to be the unpolitical organizational structures that had served them well under the Nazis.²⁷ The Cultural League, which frequently developed into the sole organizer of local cultural activities in outlying areas that were beyond the reach of the Free German Youth and the Free German Trade Union, had other reasons to be alarmed. In 1946, a report warned that in the town of Annaberg in the Saxon Erzgebirge, a region marked by particularly pronounced local traditions, only 19 out of 150 members of the Cultural League had not been members of the Nazi Party. In nearby Oberwiesenthal, it estimated that of the 250 members, at least 80 percent were former members of the Nazi Party.²⁸

Concerns about the continuation of fascist conceptions of Heimat continued beyond the late 1940s. When the Cultural League discussed, in 1958, the incidence of local folklore and Heimat festivals, it noted with alarm that many celebrations, especially many harvest festivals in which local priests continued to play an important role, showed no traces of the recent political transformations. One speaker, who had recently gone to Questenburg in the Harz to witness its annual Pentecostal festival, noted that its pageant was virtually identical to the one recorded on film in 1936.²⁹ Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, one of

Geschichten und Helden-Berichte. Momentaufnahme antifaschistischer Diskurse in den fünfziger Jahren," in *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs: Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (Cologne, 2000), 119–73.

25. Thomas Schaarschmidt, "Regionalbewusstsein und Regionalkultur in Demokratie und Diktatur 1918–61: Sächsische Heimatbewegung und Heimat-Propaganda in der Weimarer Republik, im Dritten Reich und in der SBZ/DDR," *Westfälische Forschungen*, 52 (2002): 203–28, here 222.

26. Erik Hühns, "Zu einigen Problemen der Heimatgeschichte in Unterricht und Forschung," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 3 (1955): 907–22, here 908–9.

27. Karl Kneschke, "Volksbildende Vereine und Gruppen," *Die Aussprache* 4, no. 6/7 (1949): 10–11.

28. Berichterstattung der Landesleitung des Kulturbundes Sachsen 1946–1951. Bericht Völzke, 4 November 1946. SAPMO-BArch DY 27 226 [unpaginated].

29. *Volks- und Heimatfeste gestern heute morgen: Referat und Diskussionsbeiträge einer Beratung, die der*

the most recurrent complaints against continuing expressions of local identity was that of *Heimattümelei*, an individualist, romantic clinging to the past.³⁰

The expression of local and regional identities in associations and the staging of festivals did not just raise important ideological concerns, it also gave rise to a number of practical problems. One of the new state's foremost concerns was the integration of some four million expellees who by 1947 had migrated from the occupied German territories to the Soviet Zone. To induce this relatively mobile proportion of a total population of 17.5 million to stay, the state tried hard to integrate these migrants not just economically, but also culturally. This could be made more difficult by the cultivation of regional peculiarities, which could easily be exclusive and exacerbate tensions between traditional and newly arrived residents. This problem was particularly acute in Mecklenburg. No other state in all of Germany had as many migrants from the east, and equally no other region in eastern Germany had such a distinctive local dialect.³¹ In consequence, there was considerable unease at the continued use of Low German in popular culture, which was sustained by recurrent complaints that Low German was incomprehensible to newly arrived citizens, and hence extremely divisive.³²

Given the particularly harsh conditions of economic reconstruction in eastern Germany, leading activists in the Cultural League were also concerned about the wasteful aspects inherent in the consumption of *Heimat*. As the state secretary for the Cultural League in Saxony noted in 1950, there was scarcely enough forest left in Saxony to keep the people warm during the winter. The use of wood to supply theaters and orchestras therefore was justifiable only *after* this had been earned by greater efforts to produce high-quality export goods.³³ Even more forbidding were many reactions to the annual flower festival that the two thousand inhabitants of the village of Schönbach (Upper Lusitania) organized from 1955. The festival proved an instant success, so that by 1958 it drew crowds of 130,000 visitors. And yet, far from being delighted by the festival's popularity, many Cultural League activists were appalled by the event's ideological diffuseness. They were unable to see how the new socialist order could be expressed appropriately through perishable items such as flowers.³⁴

Deutsche Kulturbund — Zentrale Kommission Natur- und Heimatfreunde — am 25. und 26. Oktober 1958 in Magdeburg veranstaltete (Berlin, 1958), 16, 33.

30. For a further instance, see the note by Hermann Lachs offering himself as the new head of the Circle of Low German Theaters in order to move against the circle's "rückschrittlichen Spiesser und unpolitischen Blut- und Heubodenromantiker." Letter Hermann Lachs to Regierungsrat Stiemke, 10 April 1948. Landeshauptarchiv (LHA) Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2865.

31. This comment disregards the Sorbs, whose language and customs were of Slavic rather than German origin, and whose situation within the GDR was unique.

32. Letter by Willy Grimm an den Ring Niederdeutscher Bühnen, Bad Doberan, 11 April 1948. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2865.

33. *Volks- und Heimatfeste gestern heute morgen*, 4.

34. *Ibid.*, 23, 28–29, 42–53.

Activism on behalf of the *Heimat* was often considered wasteful, if not counterproductive. A case in point was the annual *Dreckschweinfeste*, the Dirty-Pig-Festivals celebrated in the southern Harz mountains. These began with heavy drinking, continued with mudbaths and mudfights, and ended with a swim in the village stream.³⁵ A more general example concerned the issue of food. No *Heimat* festival could be complete without adequate provisions of sausages. This, however, led to frequent complaints that organizers were subject to the demands of the supplier, the state-owned *Handelsorganisationen*.³⁶ At Haldensleben, near Magdeburg, one *Heimatfest* was celebrated by calling the population to eat as much smoked meat as possible.³⁷ Celebrations of *Heimat* often appeared to be less about any distinctive local traditions, and primarily about the excessive consumption of food and — even worse for those who believed in a new humanist society heralded by socialism — drink.

For a variety of reasons, then, the persistence and development of local identities through *Heimat* were extremely problematic in the ideological and economic climate of Germany's first "workers and peasants' state."³⁸ Some commentators wondered if the time had come to break with the local traditions of the past completely. In Chemnitz (Saxony), one Mr. Vogel argued that the naturalistic and simplistic forms of what passed for traditional crafts from one of Germany's most traditional regions, the Saxon Erzgebirge, no longer had anything to do with genuine folk art. The death of original folklore could also be shown in the destruction of folklorist poetry.³⁹ Other commentators agreed. They argued that genuine local popular culture had been destroyed through capitalism, which was why all the remaining artifacts of local culture amounted to little more than kitsch. Genuine local traditions had died, and could only be invented afresh, under the new conditions of socialism.⁴⁰

The Resurgence of *Heimat* at the Grassroots

Just as representatives at the ministry of culture and the Cultural League agonized about the problems inherent in the notions of *Heimat*, active engagement

35. *Ibid.*, 21, 33.

36. This problem was particularly acute in the countryside, where many "houses of culture" also housed the local bar. Protokoll über die am 16.1.1963 durchgeführte Arbeitsbesprechung mit den Kulturhausleitern des Bezirkes. LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirkes 15108. See also *Völk- und Heimatfeste gestern heute morgen*, 35.

37. *Völk- und Heimatfeste gestern heute morgen*, 10.

38. Further evidence for the skepticism of officials in Saxony is in Schaarschmidt, "Regionalbewusstsein," 223–24.

39. "Volkskunst im Erzgebirge?" Bericht des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, Wirkungsgruppe Chemnitz, April 1948. Berichterstattung der Landesleitung des Kulturbundes Sachsen 1946–1951. SAPMO-BArch DY 27 226, f. 00391 (old pagination). (Mr Vogel's first name is not apparent from the files.)

40. Heinz Stern-Astor, "Auf dem Wege zu einer neuen Volkskunst," *Die Aussprache* 4, no. 6/7 (1949): 9–10.

with the local environment proliferated at the grass roots. Ironically, Mr. Vogel's hosts, the local branch of the Cultural League, financed their activities with crucial income from regular sell-out performances of the Chemnitz Folksong Choir.⁴¹ The popularity of Heimat was also apparent in the countryside. In the Saxon county of Zittau, talks on themes like "Heimat, our joy and fortune" persistently attracted village audiences of between two and three hundred listeners. Other events such as the "Upper Lusitanian Heimat evening" in the village of Olbersdorf drew close to five hundred people despite the January cold, with folk plays such as the one performed in the village of Grossschönau, held in the same month, attracting an audience of 350.⁴²

Saxony was not the only state in which the popularity of Heimat quickly established itself. In 1947, the district committee (Kreisvorstand) of the Free German Youth in Parchim, Mecklenburg, noted that there had been, in the last two years, a blossoming of local theater groups and choirs, whose offerings delighted the local population through their *volkstümlich* (popular folklore) character.⁴³ The state tried to quench the general thirst for culture in other ways, through organizing lecture tours, variety shows, and serious drama. However, such events often suffered from small audiences, variable quality, and high staging costs. Both supply and demand, therefore, determined that in Mecklenburg, two entertainment genres predominated: popular classical music (especially operettas), as well as folklore theater performed by local stage companies.⁴⁴

Crucial to the expression of local culture from the grassroots was the use of local dialect.⁴⁵ In Mecklenburg, despite the high proportion of immigrant expellees, the supporters of Low German made no effort to hide their demands. As they put it at the opening of the 1947 Low German stage festival in Bad Doberan, Low German was the primeval expression (*unwüchsiger Ausdruck*) of the area and its landscape. It was the tie uniting all people along the coast, and

41. SAPMO-BArch DY 27 226, f. 00390 [old pagination].

42. Kreis Zittau, Monate Januar-März 1947. Berichterstattung der Landesleitung des Kulturbundes Sachsen 1946-1951. SAPMO-BArch DY 27 226. In this instance, the talk on "Heimat, unser Glück" was performed in four villages between late January and March 1947, and on each occasion attracted between 200 and 300 listeners. The report excused the poor attendance figures for other events, which ranged between 20 and 50, with the frosty conditions prevailing in the unheated rooms, but this clearly did not affect the popularity of Heimat events.

43. Freie Deutsche Jugend, Kreisvorstand Parchim. Monatsbericht des Kulturreferenten für den Monat Mai (30 May 1947). LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2296.

44. The (untranslatable) German term for this type of play is "Schwank," a farce set in a highly localized context. For the popularity of these genres, see the audience figures in Monatsberichte der Mecklenburgischen Kreise über Volks- und Laienkunst. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2996.

45. On the relations between Low German and folklore, see Siegfried Neumann, "Das Niederdeutsche im Rahmen der volkskundlichen Forschung und Dokumentation des Wossidlo-Archivs in Rostock," in *Heimatsprache zwischen Ausgrenzung und ideologischer Einbindung: Niederdeutsch in der DDR*, ed. Renate Herrmann-Winter (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), 125-46.

one of the essential components of the local feeling of Heimat. For the supporters of Low German, the harmony between humans and landscape formed the strong roots of the Mecklenburgers' strength. And this harmony formed the basis for the sentiment of Heimat. Language and popular song, they argued, nurtured the people's soul.⁴⁶

Heimat culture comprised different kinds of activities that were, in their nature and in their potential impact, quite distinct. The first concerned pastimes that were aimed at public representation. Obviously, amateur theater groups, agit-prop groups and choirs ranked among these. These groups were predicated on public performance, and the social milieus they depicted, the language they spoke, or the time period they addressed, all had direct political relevance. This gave such groups a large role in expressing and defining the culture of their particular locality, both within the locality, and against those from outside (when on tour).

A second type of Heimat engagement consisted of more private hobby pastimes that had a potentially significant public dimension, such as stamp collecting, or coin collecting. Although principally private, these activities thrived on semipublic collectors' fairs at which collections could be improved and completed. Collections were often displayed at school fetes, village festivals, in local *Heimatmuseums*, or in the new towns, and this gave these groups an important political role. For instance, stamps were to be exhibited as documents of artistic refinement, historical evolution, the political and socialist nature of the state, the cultural achievements of the people, and world peace.⁴⁷ Stamp collecting was popular, and disproportionately so among the young, hence it became an important way to engage them in their Heimat and its visual representation relative to other countries.

The final type of activity concerned private activities that were carried out individually or in small groups, and whose passions would only be shared among like-minded circles. Such hobbies included archaeology, ornithology, and aquarism. Enthusiasts could and did reach the public by contributing to local Heimat exhibitions, but the goal was rather that of advancing knowledge

46. The full quotation is "Über den Wert und die Bedeutung des Plattdeutschen als den erwüchsigen Ausdruck unseres niederdeutschen Sprachraumes gibt es keine Meinungsverschiedenheiten mehr. Die Heimatsprache als Ausdruck der Landschaft ist allen Mecklenburgern vertrautes und wohl gehegtes Gut. Trotz der örtlichen Verschiedenartigkeit verbindet die plattdeutsche Sprache alle Menschen der Wasserkante miteinander. Sie ist eine der wesentlichen Bestandteile unseres starken Heimatgefühls. In der Harmonie von Mensch und Landschaft liegen ja die starken Wurzeln unserer Kraft. Aus dieser Harmonie ist die Empfindung der Heimat gebildet. Die sich in Sprache und Volkslied offenbarenden Schwingungen der Volksseele zu pflegen, war und ist auch Sinn und Ziel der niederdeutschen Bühnen." Eröffnungsansprache zum niederdeutschen Bühnentag am 31. August 1947 in Bad Doberan. LHA Schwerin, H. Abt. Allg. Volkskultur 2866.

47. Karl-Heinz Schulmeister, ed., *Die Leitsätze der Sektion Philatelie* (Berlin, 1959).

and entering into a dialogue with professional scientists. These hobbies were important for private enjoyment and to map the new state through its archaeology, its birds, or its domestic and imported plants. However, with some significant exceptions their direct contribution to defining the region and representing changed political conditions was slight.

Interestingly, the state did choose to distinguish between different types of Heimat enthusiasm, but it did not do so along functional lines. The first of two categories that the state invented comprised groups engaged with “popular folk culture” (*Volkskunstgruppen*). These were defined as groups concerned with any traditional skill, ranging from woodcutting associations to folklore dance groups and amateur theater companies. By 1949, the state of Mecklenburg alone counted 1,567 such groups with a total of 52,000 members. Of these, 23,430 members in 710 groups engaged in amateur theater (ranging from amateur drama to propaganda plays), while almost 13,000 people sang in a total of 391 choirs.⁴⁸

A second category of hobby groups was officially categorized by their involvement in “popular folk education” (*Volksbildungsgruppen*). These groups included local history associations, enthusiasts of local Heimat museums, stamp collectors, birdwatchers, and so on. In early 1948, the nature enthusiasts of Saxony alone had formed sixty local groups, with a total of 4,606 members.⁴⁹ In fact, the state authorities had difficulties in keeping up with the spread of local hobby groups. In January 1948, an internal document in the Mecklenburg ministry of education urged that these groups be organized through a Movement for People’s Culture, Leisure, and Recreation. Such an organization would introduce an element of control without which, it feared, many hobby groups could become ideologically subversive, form illicit contacts with the West, and diverge from groups in other states within the Soviet Zone.⁵⁰ Even before the foundation of the GDR in 1949, then, expressions of local identity, whether through enthusiasm for local history, bird watching, song, or local dialect, could not be ignored or wished away.

In response, on 12 January 1949, the Soviet Zone’s administration of the interior issued an ordinance that transferred all local groups of “popular folk culture” and “popular folk education,” that were still independent to the existing

48. Jahresbericht 1949. Arbeits- und Jahresberichte der Abt. Allg. Volkskultur. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung, 2667. Statistische Übersicht der Laienkunstgruppen Mecklenburg. LHA Schwerin, Deutsche Volksbühne Landesleitung Mecklenburg 9. The popularity of amateur theater was a specificity of Mecklenburg, as other types of popular “folk” entertainment prevailed further south.

49. Protokoll der Referentenbesprechung am 5.2.1948 in Berlin. Naturkundliche Gruppen in den Städten und Kreisen 1948. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2992.

50. Arbeitsgemeinschaft “Freizeit und Erholung.” Vorschlag für die Organisation einer Bewegung für Volkskunst, Freizeit und Erholung. Januar 1948. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2994.

mass organizations.⁵¹ Pastimes such as chess or choral singing were assigned to the Free German Youth and the Free German Trade Union. Amateur theater companies that were not linked to the workplace were allocated to the short-lived League of German Folk Theaters (Bund deutscher Volksbühnen). Finally, a wide range of groups whose pastimes were defined by collecting, involvement with nature, local history and archaeology, and popular art forms such as photography were allocated to the Cultural League. In practice, many of the assignments were arbitrary. For instance, rambler's associations were allocated to the DTSB, the German Gymnasts and Sports League, while groups dedicating themselves to signposting footpaths became part of the Cultural League. In other words, central to the ordinance of 1949 was the state's desire for control, rather than a desire to further the most effective and united articulation of the *Heimat* and folklore enthusiasts' concerns.

Only a minority of groups concerned with their *Heimat* were allocated to the Cultural League, while a number of *Heimat* groups had already been part of the Cultural League before.⁵² Still, because of the league's small overall membership, the 1949 ordinance had a disproportionate impact on this particular mass organization. Over the years, its membership was boosted by around 20 percent, and these *Heimat* enthusiasts were of a very different ilk compared to the intellectuals and professionals who had joined the Cultural League in its early days to promote the intellectual renewal of Germany. The tensions this created led to the formation in 1950 of the Friends of Nature and *Heimat*. This became an umbrella organization of all *Heimat* enthusiasts, which subsequently enjoyed considerable autonomy against the league's other sub-divisions.⁵³ Subsequently, the Friends of Nature and *Heimat* and its leaders became formidable advocates for any concern related to the *Heimat*, and for the popular culture in town and countryside that this engendered.

51. Deutsche Verwaltung des Innern, *Verordnung zur Überführung von Volkskunstgruppen und volksbildenden Vereinen in die bestehenden demokratischen Massenorganisationen*, 12 January 1949.

52. On 1 December 1949, the amateur groups of folk culture in Mecklenburg had divided themselves as follows. 173 were organized in the League of German People's Theaters, 918 in the Free German Youth, 204 in the Free German Trade League, and 121 in the Cultural League, 91 in the German Women's Service (DFD), and 60 in the Society of German-Soviet Friendship. Jahresbericht 1949 der Abteilung Volkskultur. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung (1946–52) 2667, f. 39. LHA Schwerin, Deutsche Volksbühne Landesleitung Mecklenburg 9. For a different interpretation of the 1949 ordinance, see Magdalena Haider, *Politik — Kultur — Kulturbund: Zur Gründungs- und Frühgeschichte des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands 1945–1954* (Cologne, 1993), 103 ff.

53. Schaarschmidt's excellent discussion for Saxony can be generalized for the entire GDR. Schaarschmidt, "Vom völkischen Mythos," 252–56.

Inventing Ideology: The “Socialist Heimat”

Perhaps the most important task facing the Friends was a clearer definition of *Heimat* under the conditions of socialism.⁵⁴ Perhaps the most immediate, and least controversial legitimation of *Heimat* was that it led to a truer appreciation of the immediate surroundings. This in turn led to a new sense of responsibility for the greater good, and thus a genuine, democratic patriotism.⁵⁵ As the start of the “Fourteen Points” program adopted by the Friends of Nature and *Heimat* put it, “true love of our *Heimat* and of our people strengthens democratic patriotism.”⁵⁶

“Democratic patriotism” was linked to the readiness to defend one’s *Heimat* if need be. To the Cultural League’s first president (and author of the national anthem), Johannes R. Becher, “whoever feels truly the beauty of his *Heimat* within, cannot but undertake everything within his powers to protect it from ruin and destruction.”⁵⁷ The organizer of an expedition of the Communist children’s organization, the Young Pioneers, put it more bluntly than this. He considered it necessary to bring today’s young closer to the *Heimat* for them to understand that it had to be defended against the warmongers from the West.⁵⁸

These early conceptions of *Heimat* did much to legitimize its importance in the GDR, but there was nothing about them that was distinctively socialist. A systematic debate about the relation of *Heimat* to socialism was slow to take off, however, for political reasons. Until the mid-1950s, there was a pointed ambiguity to the concept of *Heimat* in the GDR, which made it an important rhetorical device. Public rhetoric usually distinguished between the eastern and western parts of one German *Heimat*, and it is striking that the Central Folklore Institute in Leipzig was created in 1952 not simply to promote *Heimat* in the GDR, but to underline the progressive traditions in all of Germany.⁵⁹

54. Note the early protestations in the Cultural League’s journal *Die Aussprache*, that the Friends of Nature and *Heimat* were not romantic day-dreamers wandering through the streets with singing! *Die Aussprache* 5, no. 6 (1950): 10.

55. Professor Schellenberger, “*Heimat und Vaterland*,” *Die Aussprache* 7, no. 7 (1952): 12–13. Paul Kaiser, “Eine Diskussionsrede,” *Die Aussprache* 7, no. 12 (1952): 10–11.

56. “Leitsätze der Natur- und Heimatfreunde im Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands. Beschlossen von der Ersten Zentralen Delegiertenkonferenz am 3. und 4. Juli 1954 in Weimar,” in *Die Aussprache* 9, no. 8 (1954): 115.

57. “Wer die Schönheit seiner / *Heimat* wahrhaft zuinnerst / fühlt, der kann nicht anders, / als das, was in seinen / Kräften steht, zu unternehmen, / diese schöne *Heimat* / vor Verderb und Vernichtung / zu bewahren.” Johannes R. Becher, *Schöne deutsche Heimat* (Berlin, 1952), 5.

58. Herbert Bauer, “Die Thüringer-Wald-Expedition der Jungen Pioniere,” *Die Aussprache* 8, no. 10 (1953): 155–58, here 156.

59. Zentralhaus für Laienkunst. Aufgaben. SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06 no. 158, f. 27. See also Herausgabe der Zeitschrift des Zentralhauses für Laienkunst, f. 65, in which the point is made specifically that the institute’s duties included folklore “in the Western part of our *Heimat*.” See also the report by Heinz Besch, Berlin, 29 July 1952. SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06 no. 156, ff. 276 ff., here ff. 291–94. In this report on the folklore festival, Besch referred to the patriotism that love for the *Heimat* induced in an all-German context.

From 1955, when the two Germanies formally received their respective sovereignty, public references to the western part of the Heimat declined dramatically. The GDR began to define its perception of Heimat much more unambiguously, as did the introduction of Heimat as a separate school subject in the same year. In her study on the pedagogical implications of Heimat in socialism, Sigrid Schwarz argued that feelings of Heimat were innate, whereas the manifestations of these feelings were determined by the class relations that existed within the Heimat. The task of socialism was perpetually to educate its citizens and turn their inward feelings of Heimat toward a true, socialist Heimat. Only then could Heimat become a sphere of peace and class equality, and overcome chauvinism and exploitation.⁶⁰ As Schwarz later made explicit, her concept of the socialist Heimat was unrelated to individual sentiment, which in itself was a remnant of bourgeois attitudes toward Heimat.⁶¹ At the same time, it is striking that Schwarz's ideas on Heimat were largely based on the pastoral peasant idyll in German and Russian literature, with only indirect reference to the ideals of Marx and Engels.

Erik Hühns, the deputy director of the Märkisches [Heimat-] Museum in Berlin, disagreed. As the Cultural League's leading protagonist in the debate about a socialist Heimat, he pointed out that, according to Marxist-Leninist historical materialism, the means of production were the central factor that determined every social development in history.⁶² If in West Germany and elsewhere, Heimat defended the bourgeois exploitation of the working class, it followed that the socialist Heimat was characterized by the end of class inequalities. Under socialism, Heimat was no longer owned by the capitalist bourgeoisie, but by the workers and peasants, who had the full power to transform it according to their wishes and needs.⁶³ As a result, Heimat was more emotionally charged in the GDR, where the love for it could be expressed in its active transformation, than in the FRG, where the working classes could only encounter it passively.⁶⁴ Willibald Gutsche could not agree more. If so many young people left the GDR every year, this was because they could not identify with traditional concepts of Heimat. If only a modern, socialist conception of Heimat were developed that could convince the young of the emotional and practical superiority of socialism, Gutsche felt certain that the young would find sufficient reasons to love their country and stay.⁶⁵ According to Hühns and Gutsche,

60. Sigrid Schwarz, "Die Liebe zur Heimat, ein wesentliches Ziel unserer patriotischen Erziehung" (Ph.D. diss., Humboldt University, Berlin, 1956), 2 vols., here 2:419–48.

61. *Um unsere sozialistische Heimat: Referat und Diskussionsbeiträge einer Tagung am 20. Juni 1958 in Berlin* (Berlin 1958), 59–65.

62. Hubert Mohr and Erik Hühns, eds., *Einführung in die Heimatgeschichte* (Berlin, 1959), 18.

63. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

64. "Gedanken zum Begriff 'sozialistische Heimat,'" pt. 14. *Um unsere sozialistische Heimat*, 9–11.

65. *Ibid.*, 65–68.

therefore, the socialist *Heimat* was a given, and was ideologically defined by its ownership and by its forward-looking nature. *Heimat* in the GDR was inherently about change, and not, as allegedly in the FRG, about clinging to the past.

Heimat in the GDR contrasted with that in the Weimar Republic and the Federal Republic, where the false romanticism inherent in the term apparently defended exploitative property relations and noble privileges against the forces of progress.⁶⁶ In this, capitalist utilization of the term, *Heimat* prevented the workers and peasants from realizing their class unity, and was thus inimical to the ideals of the GDR.⁶⁷ As a result, whereas it was possible for West German workers to have a sense of *Heimat*, their lack of ownership would prevent them from having any more than a muted feeling for the opportunities and goodness enjoyed by workers in the socialist *Heimat*.

The emerging view about the nature of the socialist *Heimat* had some controversial implications. If *Heimat* was defined principally by class, it then raised questions about its geographical size. Hühns distinguished between *Heimat* in a narrow sense, and *Heimat* in a wider sense. The former was defined by a person's immediate surroundings, while the wider *Heimat* was determined by familiar customs, language, and social conditions. In other words, the wider *Heimat* was synonymous with the fatherland, which comprised the state of the GDR itself.⁶⁸ In turn, the fatherland was distinct from the nation because the former was always synonymous with the state. Under the peculiar conditions of contemporary Germany, however, the nation was as yet incomplete. The western part of Germany could only become a nation to the working class once it was no longer exploited, and capitalism had been overcome. Until that time, the German nation remained confined to the GDR. Just like *Heimat*, therefore, the nation could only be realized under conditions of socialism and equality.⁶⁹

Heimat was distinguished by class, not by geography. The distinction between narrow and wider *Heimat* was not one of principle, but of practice. Indeed, as more and more individuals became aware of the class definition of *Heimat*, Hühns observed a dynamic whereby the confines of the *Heimat* in the narrow sense became extended. Over time, the narrow *Heimat* would merge with the wider *Heimat*. This occurred as a growing number of people came to recognize that they had one *Heimat*, the GDR, which was also their fatherland. To

66. *Von der Liebe zur deutschen Heimat: Bericht von der Konferenz der Natur- und Heimatfreunde im Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands am 21./22. März 1950 in Bautzen (Königstein, 1950)*, 5–6; Erik Hühns, "Der Inhalt der heimatgeschichtlichen Forschung," in *Einführung in die Heimatgeschichte*, ed., Mohr and Hühns, 7.

67. For a good summary of the ideological concerns about the capitalist use of "*Heimat*," see Günter Lange, *Heimat — Realität und Aufgabe: Zur Marxistischen Auffassung des Heimatbegriffs* (Berlin, 1973).

68. Erik Hühns, "Nation — Vaterland — Heimat," *Aus der Arbeit der Natur- und Heimatfreunde 8* (1959): 169–79.

69. Erik Hühns, "Das Volk gestaltet seine Heimat," in *ibid.*, 4 (1960): 67–69.

Hühns, then, in the GDR, Heimat, fatherland, and nation were in a process of merging into one and the same.⁷⁰

This approach had important implications for the difficult relationship between Heimat and place of birth. Since, according to Hühns, the individual's consciousness of Heimat was now dynamic and determined by class, it followed that Heimat became unrelated to birth. Heimat was no longer defined by one's birthplace and one's childhood experiences, but by the area in which the worker lived and with which he engaged. This provided a further major distinction between the GDR and its capitalist neighbor. Under socialism, the German expellees had been able to find their true Heimat in the GDR. In the FRG, by contrast, the expellees were still hankering after their birthplaces in Eastern Prussia, Silesia, and Bohemia, because they had been given a new fatherland, but no new Heimat.

Within a few years, the Friends of Nature and Heimat had become central to the ideological construction of the socialist Heimat. In 1954 the Office of Literature and Publications decreed that any books or pamphlets on Heimat such as calendars, memorial volumes, and local histories, which were published independently of the other mass organizations, required prior approval by the Friends.⁷¹ At the same time, Hühns's concept of Heimat did not go unchallenged. In a speech delivered to the German Historians' Society, Max Steinmetz did accept the importance of Heimat and local history as an object for historical research. However, he built on Friedrich Donath's earlier criticism of Hühns by rejecting the difference between narrow and wider definitions of Heimat as diffuse and impractical.⁷² Heimat was simply defined by one's immediate, constantly evolving surroundings, and by the freedom now enjoyed by the working class. Heimat stood in a close relationship to the fatherland, the socialist state, since the love of Heimat provided for the love of the fatherland. However, both were differentiated by size: Heimat was more limited in its geographic extent than the fatherland, and this was a fundamental, unbridgeable difference. Steinmetz also disagreed with the unimportance Hühns attached to birth: it is true, he argued, that many people had found their true Heimat in regions of the GDR in which they had not been born. For the majority of the population, however, birth was still the major factor in their feelings of Heimat.⁷³ Steinmetz

70. Hühns, "Nation — Vaterland — Heimat," 178–79.

71. "Die Deutsche Demokratische Republik ist die Heimat alles Grossen, Schönen und Wahren: Kulturpolitische Konferenz der Natur- und Heimatfreunde 1960," *Aus dem Leben der Natur- und Heimatfreunde* 11/12 (1960): 274–309, here 292.

72. Friedrich Donath, "Bürgerliche oder sozialistische Heimat?," in *Sächsische Heimatblätter* 6 (1960): 258–60.

73. Max Steinmetz, "Die Aufgaben der Regionalgeschichtsforschung in der DDR bei der Ausarbeitung eines nationalen Geschichtsbildes," in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 9 (1961): 1735–73, esp. 1754–58.

and Friedrich Donath did find themselves in agreement with Hühns in their postulation that, for as long as Germany was divided into capitalism and socialism, only the GDR could be the true German nation. However, for Donath and Steinmetz the identity between the GDR and the German nation was all the more reason not to confuse it with the Heimat, since for them equating Heimat and nation rendered the concept of Heimat pointless and absurd.⁷⁴

In response to these criticisms, Hühns accepted that there were conceptual differences between Heimat, fatherland, and nation, but he continued to insist on the dynamic through which under the conditions of socialism, the individual's perception of Heimat became broader until it encompassed the entire GDR.⁷⁵ Although it is true that his distinction between a narrow and a broader Heimat was cumbersome and inoperable as an analytic tool, this dynamic approach contained greater ideological consistency. If Heimat was distinguished principally by the ownership of the means of production, and if Heimat was about its own transformation by its new owners, then it was only logical that, ultimately, Heimat extended to the entire GDR.⁷⁶

By the early 1960s, then, some disagreement about the definition of Heimat remained. However, a remarkable shift had taken place since the late 1940s, when Heimat had been extremely suspect on ideological grounds. Given that the concept of Heimat has eluded any clear definition in other periods in German history, the central tenets of Heimat in the GDR were remarkably clear. The socialist Heimat was determined through its ownership by the working class that in turn transformed it according to its wishes. In this way, Heimat shaped the nation and made the dialectical historical processes to which both were subject apparent.⁷⁷ Heimat was no longer determined principally by birthplace, but could be appropriated by every worker who contributed to the transformation of Heimat. In principle, then, every region in the socialist fatherland could become the workers' Heimat. It was here that they learned to appreciate, love, and defend not just his immediate environment, but the entire fatherland, the GDR.

74. Friedrich Donath, "Bermerkungen zur Diskussion um die Begriffe Heimat — Vaterland — Nation," *Aus der Arbeit der Natur- und Heimatfreunde* 9 (1959): 226–28. It follows that Donath, on whose ideas Blaschke has based his brief outline on the socialist redefinition of Heimat, was an important, but not fully representative, participant, in the Heimat debate. Blaschke, "Regionalgeschichte," 354.

75. Erik Hühns, "Noch einmal. Nation — Vaterland — Heimat: Antwort an Dr Donath, Leipzig," *Aus der Arbeit der Natur- und Heimatfreunde* 9 (1959): 228–29; Erik Hühns, "Zum Stand der Diskussion um den sozialistischen Heimatbegriff, in *ibid.*, 10 (1960): 229–33.

76. For an agreement with Hühns, see also Heinrich Gemkow, "Über Wert und Missbrauch der Heimatliebe: Gedanken zu Inhalt und Funktion des Heimatbegriffs," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* 3 (1962): 657–70, here esp. 668–69.

77. Heinrich Gemkow, "Unsere nationale Grundkonzeption und die Aufgaben der Heimat-historiker," in *Sächsische Heimatblätter* 6 (1950): 431–38.

Appropriating Heimat

At the same time as the ideology of the socialist Heimat was developed and clarified through the 1950s, the state came to recognize the political and cultural potential of the idea of Heimat. Uta Poiger and others have demonstrated the concern caused, in both East and West Germany, by the perceived threats of the penetration of American forms of popular culture in music and film beginning in the late 1940s.⁷⁸ In the FRG, perhaps the most successful genre that offered resistance to Americanized culture was the *Heimatfilm*, which “offered consolation, compassion, and the prospect of reconciliation and inclusion.”⁷⁹ In the GDR, with its self-conscious rejection of the fascist past, such a popularization of Heimat was out of the question. Still, Heimat took center stage in the state’s response to Americanization, as the state focused on what it considered “genuine” forms of folklore and Heimat activities.

In 1952, the GDR organized a German Folklore Festival (Fest der deutschen Volkskunst) in East Berlin. The festival provided an opportunity in part to “present” the GDR through folklore. The German Heimat was presented overwhelmingly through East German regions, as audiences were introduced to renditions of the “grassdance” from the Harz, the Mecklenburgian “four-circle dance with kiss,” and the “church fair dance” from Thuringia.⁸⁰ Such contributions underlined the GDR’s claim to authenticity, as it could present itself as the true guardian of German values and traditions, over and above its appropriations of German “humanism.” The Brandenburg newspaper *Märkische Volksstimme* expressed this sentiment in its review of the Potsdam pedagogical university ensemble. The ensemble’s performance not only demonstrated how folk dances could excite the young generation, it also presented a vibrant contrast to the “moldering planks of American cultural barbarism” evident in neighboring West Berlin.⁸¹ The newspaper’s report was far from untypical, as the overcoming of what it termed American nonculture became a central theme in the newspaper reports of the event.⁸²

The German folklore exhibition of 1952, opened in East Berlin to accompany the festival, was similarly aimed at presenting genuine German folk traditions as an “unmistakable rebuttal of kitsch and the American pseudo-souvenir

78. Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, 2000), chap. 1; see also Alf Lütke et al., eds., *Amerikanisierung: Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1996), esp. 13–14.

79. Fehrenbach, *Cinema*, 163.

80. Meldungen ADN Kurierdienst, 5 and 6 July 1952). SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06, no. 157, here fos. 63–64, 88.

81. “Heute lacht Brandenburg.” *Märkische Volksstimme*, no. 166 (18 July 1952). SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06, no. 157, fo. 164.

82. “Fröhlicher Tanz und Gesang begleiten unseren Aufbau.” *Freiheit* (Halle), no. 58 (25 July 1952). SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06, f. 157., “Festspiele der Volkskunst — Sache aller Werktätigen.” *Volksstimme* (Berlin), no. 153 (4 July 1952). SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06, f. 147.

industry alien to the German people, which has taken on worrying forms in West Germany.”⁸³ In the GDR, Heimat could overcome the corruption through American music and American consumer culture evident in the FRG. In response to Walter Ulbricht’s promptings on the occasion of the Third Party Congress of the SED in June 1950, the Central Committee passed a resolution against formalism and the advent of American barbarism, which was to be overcome by promoting Germany’s classical cultural heritage as well as folklore, in particular the folk song and folk music.⁸⁴

Heimat became a central tool through which the state hoped to overcome U.S.-induced cultural excesses that it perceived especially, but by no means exclusively, in GDR youth culture. Through the 1950s, folklore and an occupation with Heimat were propagated as a “sensible” use of spare time whose benefits contrasted sharply with other, more irrational pastimes, notably drinking and dancing. At the first Soviet-Zone wide conference of the Free German Youth in Berlin, its leaders lamented the youth’s fixation on dancing and its disinterest in politics, which could best be remedied through cultivating the German folk song.⁸⁵ Heimat activists on the ground concurred. In Mecklenburg, the Low German stages justified their use of plays that referred to local dialect and customs with their ability to lure the youth into the audience and thus circumscribe their “excessive dance abuse.”⁸⁶ Similarly, the ornithologists of Grabow (Mecklenburg) appealed to their fellow friends of nature to “leave the muffled bars and dance clubs” and be strengthened by the beauty of their Heimat to help them face the “greyness of the everyday.”⁸⁷

In the course of the 1950s, it became clear that dancing could not just be suppressed or ignored. Even then, Heimat retained an important function, as it could provide a less subversive context. For instance, in early 1963 the cultural house of Parchim organized a dance evening with a film about a village community that took up local culture and turned its back on the pub. The dances that followed were interrupted by artistic breaks, performed by three musicians from the National People’s Army playing songs on the accordion and mandolin, and a local amateur group presenting short sketches in Low German. Even during the staging of dances, therefore, Heimat was used to rescue the youth from

83. SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06, no. 154 (6 July 1952).

84. Entwurf. Arbeitsaufgaben, Strukturplan und Stellenplan für das künftige Zentralhaus für Laienkunst [1951]. SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV 2/9.06 no 158, ff. 2–9.

85. Günter Schwede, “Die Kulturarbeit der FDJ und ihre Rolle bei der ideologischen Erziehung der Jugend in der Zeit der antifaschistisch-demokratischen Umwälzung von 1945/46 bis 1949” (Ph.D. diss., Wilhelm-Pieck-University, Rostock, 1979), part I, 41.

86. In the original, they referred to the “übermäßige Tanzsucht der Jugend.” Bericht, Ring Niederdeutscher Bühnen, Bad Doberan 16 February 1948. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2865 [unpaginated].

87. Biologisch-Ornithologische Wanderung der naturkundlichen Gruppe der Ortsgruppe des Kulturbundes 13 April 1947. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2992 [unpaginated].

excess in movement or alcohol.⁸⁸ Folklore and the concern for Heimat had become central to the state's promotion of cultural pastimes that it considered authentic and sensible.

Heimat not only provided a frontline against unwanted forms of popular culture. By its very nature intrinsic to the regions of the GDR, it could be utilized to induce pride in the GDR's achievements vis-à-vis the FRG. In the 1950s, enthusiasts' magazines and journals from the GDR could enlighten West German readers, while the stamps, coins, and tin statues collected by fans in the GDR were not intrinsically of a worse quality than those collected in the FRG. Local and GDR-wide exhibitions were organized not just to serve as foci for the regional reorientation of individual enthusiasts. Collectors' or Heimat fairs such as the philatelist "Debria" in Leipzig (first held in 1950), "the tin statues" fair in Weimar (1955), or the conference of Heimat museum activists were clearly conceived also as showcases of the GDR vis-à-vis West Germany.⁸⁹ In 1953, the aquarists of Erfurt completed the construction of the GDR's first new aquarium, created in their own spare time as part of the National Reconstruction Effort (NAW). This initiative was hailed as exemplary within the context of the GDR, and it was crowned by the acknowledgement of West German visitors present at the opening that such an undertaking on a voluntary basis could never happen in the FRG.⁹⁰ Museums, folklore groups, collectors and enthusiasts' journals all accounted for the superiority of the "Heimat GDR," beyond the reach of issues like consumption or political repression.⁹¹

Despite early concerns about the potential exclusiveness of local identities, the state began to see, in Heimat, an important tool for integrating a diverse population and inducing a mobile workforce to stay.⁹² Heimat enthusiasts in the Cultural League emphasized that Heimat folklore, far from excluding the newly arrived German expellees from the East, integrated them by giving them new roots. In Schwerin, the "working group on the care of Heimat" observed that, of the 133 members it counted after three months, as many as forty were new residents.⁹³ The Low German stages similarly argued that the use of their lan-

88. "'Die Zeit verging viel zu schnell': Kulturelle Veranstaltungen einmal anders — Warum noch immer Betriebsfeste alten Stils?" (January 1963). LHA Schwerin Rat des Bezirkes Schwerin, 15108 [unpaginated].

89. Protokoll der Sitzung des Präsidialrates des Kulturbunds zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, 4. November 1955. SAPMO-BArch DY27/919, ff. 261–65. "Debria Leipzig 1950," in *Die Aussprache*, 5, no. 6 (1950): 11; nos. 7/8, 23–24.

90. H. Küntzel, "Das Erfurter Aquarium," in *Aquarien und Terrarien* (Jahrbuch 1954): 16–20, here 20.

91. Protokoll der Sitzung des Präsidialrates des Kulturbunds zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, 4. November 1955. SAPMO-BArch DY27/919, ff. 261–65.

92. Letter to Egon Rentzsch, Dresden, 3 May 1952. SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06, no. 154, fo. 145.

93. Meetings of 15 October 1947 and 31 October 1947. Manfred Kriek and Helga Leopoldi, *Chronik des Kulturbundes in der Stadt Schwerin. Teil 2 1945–47* (Schwerin 1985), 54, 57. Meeting of

guage and traditions was essential to the integration of the new settlers and to giving them a new Heimat in Mecklenburg.⁹⁴ In fact, Heimat could even be used to overcome the past. If the Cultural League often worried about the number of former Nazis among the Friends of Nature and Heimat, it was under no illusion that their integration was part of the friends' *raison d'être*. As Karl Kneschke noted, the Friends and Heimat could reach those parts of society that the state could not reach.⁹⁵

From establishing the superiority of the socialist Heimat against the cultural excesses of the FRG it was but a small step to seeking its protection lest it be corrupted and denigrated. Heimat became a prominent theme in the justification of the inner-German border and its military guards, notwithstanding the fact that the border cut right through the Heimat landscapes of central Germany, including the mountains of the Harz, Rhön, and Vogtland. From the mid-1950s, local and national newspapers abounded with "adventure reports" (*Erlebnisberichte*), essayistic reports written by journalists who spent a day with the border guards. In these accounts, rich use was made of classic Heimat tropes.⁹⁶

The romantic heroism of these guardians of Heimat was suggested by reports that stressed the toughness of the individual border guard. Often, he was portrayed as someone who had learned to adapt to, and in this way overcome, the physical challenges of his environment. This was portrayed through images of soldiers blending in with the surrounding landscapes, and of navy crews mastering the torrential storms of the Baltic Sea.⁹⁷ Perhaps the most striking romantic allusion to the border was made just after the construction of the Berlin Wall. Describing the border guards in the Rhön, the article depicted the photographic image of a soldier nestling on top of a tree, holding a field telephone to one ear. His posture was turned diagonally inward, with the far distance behind him. In other words, the young man was not looking longingly away into the infinite space, but his reassuring pose turned to the reader. This visual inversion of a Caspar David Friedrich painting was made explicit in the text, which referred directly to the enchantment of the landscape that Friedrich had painted and which this guard was now called to protect.⁹⁸

6 February 1948. Manfred Kriek and Helga Leopoldi, *Chronik des Kulturbundes in der Stadt Schwerin. Teil 2 1948–52* (Schwerin 1985), 3–4.

94. Aus der Eröffnungsansprache zum niederdeutschen Bühnentag am 31.8.47 in Bad Doberan. Niederdeutsche Bühne in Bad Doberan 1947–48. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2866 [unpaginated].

95. Karl Kneschke in Protokoll der Sitzung des Präsidialrates des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, 4 November 1955. SAPMO-BArch DY 27 919 f. 299.

96. The exploration of different, "classic" Heimat tropes is the central topic of Boa and Palfreyman, *Heimat: A German Dream*.

97. "Streifendienst bei minus 40 Grad," *Tribüne*, 1 December 1956; "Sturmfahrt im Einsatzhafen," *Junge Welt*, 14 March 1956.

98. "An der roten Linie des Friedens," *Neues Deutschland*, 12 September 1961.

Oftentimes, the toughness of the conditions at the border was contrasted with the peaceful, idyllic image of the nearby village, so that the latter's survival was conditional upon the former.⁹⁹ And, indeed, many reports portrayed graphically how the intimately familiar and tranquil Heimat community was protected against dark, criminal, and scheming intruders.¹⁰⁰ Some articles focused particularly on the human sacrifice that many border guards had rendered to the protection of the Heimat, and in whose honor current guards were patrolling.¹⁰¹

The border guards were not just protecting the Heimat community, they were part of it. The reports emphasized this through reference to the communal TV, which in the late 1950s was still a rare commodity. Television connected the soldiers to other sites of the national Heimat, while the sets in turn symbolized the material rewards with which the Heimat thanked its heroes. This was complemented by portrayals of the soldiers' integration into the local village. Reports showed how the guards helped the nearby village through constructive work at harvest time, while the village in turn integrated the soldiers in their own Heimat pursuits, through hobby groups such as photography, chess, and singing.¹⁰² Such stories of "homecoming" into the village were cemented by accounts of romantic encounters with a local woman, or simply the soldiers' masculine attractiveness to the girls in the surrounding villages.¹⁰³ Finally, the community between the National People's Army and Heimat was emphasized by the army's folk ensemble, the Erich-Weinert-Ensemble, whose popular performances were designed to represent the army's devotion to the Heimat.

Heimat became not just an important theme of propaganda, as in the case of the armed forces. During the 1950s, the community defined by the socialist Heimat, its culture, and its borders, became an integral part of a socialist education. From 1955, through *Heimatkunde*, Heimat became a distinct subject for every schoolchild in its third and fourth year of school. An explicit justification for the introduction of *Heimatkunde* was to instill in every child a readiness to defend the GDR.¹⁰⁴ More immediately, *Heimatkunde* imparted knowledge about the local, regional, and national environment. More important than

99. "Unsere Grenzpolizei wacht," *ibid.*, 10 February 1952.

100. "Alarm im Kommando B," *B.Z. am Abend*, 22 March 1956 (part one); 23 March 1956 (part two); 24 March 1956 (part three).

101. "Junge Friedensposten am alten Grenzstein," *Das Volk*, 23 September 1961.

102. "Wo eine Wanderfahne weht: Aus dem Leben einer Dienststelle der Deutschen Grenzpolizei," *Neues Deutschland*, 11 April 1956.

103. "Bei unseren Grenzern," *Freier Bauer* 4 (26 January 1958).

104. "Aus dem Beschluss des Politbüros des ZK der SED zur Erhöhung des wissenschaftlichen Niveaus des Unterrichts an den allgemeinbildenden Schulen vom 29. Juli 1952," *Heimat im Geschichtsunterricht: Materialien zur Verwirklichung des heimatlichen Prinzips im Geschichtsunterricht* (Berlin, 1957), 135–36. and "Aus der Anweisung zur Einführung des Faches Heimatkunde in der deutschen demokratischen Schule vom 30. Juni 1955," *Heimat im Geschichtsunterricht*, 136–37.

factual knowledge about the narrow and the wider Heimat, however, was the creation of an emotional bond between children and the Heimat, a Heimat feeling determined by loyalty and affinity. This could best be realized through school trips to monuments and local factories, visitations to the local *Heimatmuseum*, and by discussing local myths and sagas.¹⁰⁵

Education for the socialist Heimat did not stop at school. In an ordinance of 1957, the state detailed a program for the summer vacations to provide recreation and socialist education for all children up to the age of fourteen.¹⁰⁶ It did not mention the ideal of a socialist Heimat specifically, but on the ground many counties (*Kreise*) chose to focus on this. The Kreis Ludwigslust vacation guide of 1958, for instance, stated as its primary goal the children's education to the love of the Heimat. It underlined this by organizing trips to the local *Heimatmuseum*, talks by nature enthusiasts from the Cultural League, and walks through the countryside.¹⁰⁷

Heimat also featured in the preparatory lessons for the *Jugendweihe*, the GDR's secular version of the Protestant confirmation. Youngsters preparing for the *Jugendweihe* were encouraged to appreciate their local environment and their state through it. Instructors were advised that good ways of realizing this aim included visits to a local factory, or the local *Heimatmuseum*. The "Heimat GDR" could also be appreciated through a trip to other parts of the GDR, such as Berlin or the Wartburg in Eisenach. From the mid-1950s, it became impossible for a youth not to encounter the socialist Heimat through education inside and outside school.

Such education could only work, of course, if youth leaders, teachers, and all those guiding the young were themselves versed in the socialist Heimat. As shown above, *Heimatmuseums* acquired an important role not just for the general public, but also for school groups, youth groups, and vacation entertainment. Unsurprisingly, the state and district authorities spent much energy in ensuring that the museums arranged their displays and organized their exhibitions in what they considered to be appropriate ways. In this endeavor, they were far from successful, given the constant shortage of manpower and know-how in the responsible cultural administrations.¹⁰⁸ All the more important, therefore, was the help of Heimat activists organized in the Cultural League, who had much better access to experienced personnel as well as exhibits.¹⁰⁹ The

105. Werner Bastine, "Zur Beziehung zwischen Heimatkunde und Geschichtsunterricht," in *Die Heimat im Geschichtsunterricht: Materialien zur Verwirklichung des heimatkundlichen Prinzips im Geschichtsunterricht*, ed. Herbert Mühlstädt (Berlin, 1957) 24–30.

106. Anordnung über die Gestaltung froher Ferientage für alle Kinder in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Gesetzblatt der DDR, Teil I, Berlin den 11. März 1957, no. 21. LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirkes 4626.

107. Ludwigslust, den 10. Juni 1958. LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirkes 4626.

108. Oberkrome, "'Durchherrschte' Heimat?" 265–56.

109. Note the prominent position of Hans-Heinrich Leopoldi, the chief archivist of the

Friends of Nature and Heimat, in turn, were guided through regular meetings, conferences, and through enthusiasts' magazines or yearbooks financed by the Cultural League.

The socialist Heimat was to be realized not simply through direct education and propaganda. By 1959, Walter Ulbricht defined the central cultural aim for the next seven years as the formation of the "socialist person" in town and countryside. To realize this goal, the seven-year plan stressed that a diverse cultural life should educate socialist individuals to realize the economic and political goals of socialism. To achieve this, the state would encourage a diverse cultural life in town and countryside including summer festivals, joyful popular fairs (*fröhliche Volksfeste*), folklore competitions, village festivals, and so on.¹¹⁰

The creation of a socialist Heimat, therefore, was inevitably linked to its realization and reflection in new types of Heimat festivals that were truly socialist. Perhaps the purest representation of the socialist Heimat occurred at public holidays, notably 1 May and 7 October (the republic's "birthday"). Throughout the country, on these days the wider Heimat, the GDR, was celebrated in the mornings through political demonstrations, while in the afternoon the population was rewarded by celebrations of the narrow Heimat, through folklore, local foods, and beer.

In addition to public holidays, the state encouraged the development of festivals that reflected the diverse nature of the localities in which they were held, and this took different forms. First, the state attempted to transform existing Heimat festivals that it considered to be genuine expressions of folklore into socialist Heimat festivals. In practice, the socialist elements were most apparent in ideological contributions to program notes, or the inclusion of representations of state and mass organizations in pageants. The Naumburg Cherry Blossom Festival or the Eisenach Spring Festival maintained their local flavor, and continued to function as important touchstones of local identifications.

A second category concerned individual festivals that celebrated the anniversaries of the foundations of villages and cities. Especially in cities, officials took a much larger part in the planning, and organizers of the 750-year anniversary of Dresden, for instance, were keen to sponsor celebrations of its industry and its contribution to the new five-year plan. Yet, what made anniversary celebrations popular were those elements that defined the locality, which in Dresden included bridge-jumping and mass swimming in the Elbe.¹¹¹ Third, the state

Schwerin State archive and head of the local Cultural League, in the organization of Mecklenburg's local museums. LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirks 4681.

110. Entwurf. Programmklärung über die Entwicklung einer sozialistischen Nationalkultur. Herausgegeben vom Ministerium für Kultur 1959. LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirkes 4576, here esp. ff. 28–31.

111. Thesen zur 750-Jahrfeier. Rahmenplan für die 750-Jahrfeier der Stadt Dresden. SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06, no. 51, ff. 34–40.

encouraged the development of new forms of town and village festivals. This was not always successful, as the ill-fated attempt to popularize the “festival of the collectivized village” demonstrated. A more successful attempt involved a sustained campaign to promote annual village festivals (*Dorffestspiele*) and street festivals in the cities. These had not become a popular feature of life by 1960, but during the 1960s and 1970s such festivals did become a characteristic of everyday life. Choirs, folklore groups, and nature enthusiasts were an essential part of village festivals, but a concern to express the particularity of the immediate environment defined many urban festivals, too.

A fourth category concerned invented, district-wide festivals that involved heavy public sponsorship, such as the annual press festival, and the annual youth sports festival (*Bezirksspartakiade*). These were not Heimat festivals as such, but they included a rich program of folklore in which district choirs and other folk-lore groups as well as Cultural League activists could present their Heimat. Finally, there were Heimat festivals with GDR-wide significance, such as the German folklore festivals, and the “national” folkdance festivals at Rudolstadt. Of much greater significance was the Baltic Week, which until 1964 received the kind of attention in the national media otherwise reserved for the Leipzig trade fair. For the GDR, this became a showcase in which it could present itself to the world through the Rostock district, and an important part of this self-image was the quality and diversity of the performing folklore groups from Mecklenburg.

With reference to socialist festivals, it has been argued that socialism affected the visible surfaces of Heimat, but left its deeper dimensions unaffected.¹¹² It is doubtful, however, whether the socialist impact on Heimat can be adequately evaluated in such terms. The socialist environment impacted on a festival much more than through the addition to a pageant of a few themed carriages and banners in honor of socialism. It affected deeper aspects of the Heimat that were only partly visible to the public, including the availability of decoration material, the types of carriages used, the types, price, and quality of the food available at the festival, and so on.

The question is less how deeply the state penetrated into expressions of Heimat identifications, it is, rather, whether the state's attempts to link Heimat and socialism in practice actually changed the meanings of Heimat for those involved as performers or as spectators. Just because the GDR declared folklore and other Heimat activities to be an expression of the socialist Heimat, this is not necessarily what the folklore groups and the Friends of Nature and Heimat at the grassroots meant to express. Changing the ideology of Heimat and the forms in which it could be expressed was one thing. Changing its meaning for the population at large, at the level of the everyday, was quite another.

112. Oberkrome, “‘Durchherrschte’ Heimat?,” 270–74.

Heimat and *Eigen-Sinn*

The final issue that needs to be discussed is the *Eigen-Sinn* that folklore and other Heimat activities expressed. *Eigen-Sinn* explores the individual meanings through which power (*Herrschaft*) is perceived and expressed through social practice, at the level of the everyday.¹¹³ Crucial for the definition of *Eigen-Sinn* is the individuality of the interpretation: *Eigen-Sinn* is used by the individual to develop meanings that create space for oneself (or one's group) and a sense of distance against others.¹¹⁴ It thus can shed more light on the diverse and often incongruent ways in which power related to social practice, to the lives lived by the "many" (*die Vielen*).¹¹⁵

As mentioned above, in Mecklenburg, the popularity of folk plays that depicted everyday situations performed in local dialect in distinctive, localized settings was, alongside operetta, second to none. The cultural ministry in Schwerin was eager to promote the creation of new, socialist Heimat plays that could respond to this demand. However, the need to combine such material with recognizable traits specific to individual regional mentalities posed a significant intellectual challenge, and limited the potential pool of authors. During the 1950s, the relatively limited regional outlets for budding Heimat poets or playwrights also depressed the profitability of producing Heimat culture, and this limited supply still further. Moreover, especially in the early years, many plays that strove to depict the transformations of the real-existing Heimat were out of date as soon as they were produced. In particular, those plays that dealt with the lives of newly independent farmers in the late 1940s were overtaken by the collectivization drives starting in 1952.

Of the Heimat plays that were newly written, most were rejected because of their poor quality. In one such play, farmer Karst was depicted on his sofa as his neighbour, Lining, walked in to announce that he had just vowed to double his milk production. Karst refused to do the same, and not even his wife could convince him to change his mind. In the end, Karst was convinced because his neighbor appealed to his sense of pride. Here was a play that dealt with a central issue in socialist agriculture, the voluntary vow to increase production. Yet, the censors rejected the play, because they doubted that pride was a sufficient motive for bringing about as much as a doubling of production.¹¹⁶ If the cen-

113. Thomas Lindenberger, "Everyday History: New Approaches to the History of the Post-War Germanies," in *The Divided Past: Rewriting Post-War German History*, ed. Christoph Klessmann (Oxford, 2001), 43–68, here 51–52. Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn*, 13–44.

114. Alf Lüdtke, "Lohn, Pausen, Neckereien: *Eigensinn* und Politik bei Fabrikarbeitern in Deutschland um 1900," in Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus. Ergebnisse* (Hamburg, 1993), 85–119.

115. Alf Lüdtke, ed., *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt am Main), 14; Alf Lüdtke, "Alltagsgeschichte — ein Bericht von Unterwegs," in *Historische Anthropologie* 11 (2003): 278–95.

116. "Buer Karst un de Sülvstverpflichtung" (1952). LHA Schwerin, Deutsche Volksbühne Landesleitung Mecklenburg 1.

sors demanded realistic socialist plots, the same was true for the dialogue. Lining's jovial teasing ("When I consider the little sins you as a farmer have committed against the people") or the intimate promptings of his wife ("What matters is our share in the supply") were rejected, because the evaluators did not believe that Mecklenburg farmers talked like this, even in socialism.¹¹⁷

Finding plays that were both popular and had the right ideological message proved extremely difficult.¹¹⁸ One of the approved plays was "When the Bridegroom Comes." The play features a procurator who meets his bride's working-class family for the first time. As he deals with (and betrays) his prejudices, mishaps occur, and the attack by the family goat is the last straw. He flees from the family, but in the end he returns to marry his true love. The censors approved of this play not so much as a love story, but as a social-critical play: they noted that it dealt with the overcoming of social prejudice, and the appreciation of the simple and upright person. Crucially, the censors applauded the play's humor. They described it as a hearty play, an adjective also used to describe the characteristics of the Mecklenburger.¹¹⁹

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the censors at the Mecklenburg ministry of education bent over backward to put a socialist gloss over good, popular plays. The themes of love crossing class boundaries, or the confrontation between the haughty outsider and the simple but cunning villagers, were neither new, nor were they necessarily socialist. However, the censors were only too aware that if the plays approved were too out of sync with the audience's perception of *Heimat*, theater companies would decline the material for their repertoire, and the audience could vote with its feet and stay away from the performances. For this reason, more pointedly ideological plays and sketches were reserved to agit-prop groups, which performed when the audience could not just walk away: at annual general meetings in collectivized farms or companies, or during election gatherings. Outside this particular context, both supply and demand forced the state to put ideology on the backburner.

The difficulty of creating new socialist folklore was not restricted to the theater; it also extended to choral works, dances, and instrumental music. With folklore groups, however, performers did not face an all-or-nothing choice — the question was not just whether or not to perform songs or dances from the

117. "Buer Karst"; see also Georg Wilhelm Koplin. "Kein Schwein bei der Silberhochzeit." (1952). LHA Schwerin, Deutsche Volksbühne Landesleitung Mecklenburg 1.

118. See also the critical stance against new plays taken by the directors of the Low German stages in Rundschriften an die angeschlossenen Bühnen und an die betreuten Spielscharen. July 1948. LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung, 2865 [unpaginated].

119. Evaluation on "When the Bridegroom comes" by Lange (Gutachten . . . betr. Lange, Wenn de Brögam kummt). LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 2866 [unpag.]. For a play that was similarly approved on account of its "hearty" (*derb*) character, see evaluations on "Monday Morning" (*Maandagmorgen*).

new socialist Heimat, but also how many such songs would be performed in which order and on what occasions.

Perhaps the best example of the socialist Heimat performed could be experienced in the vacation homes and resorts organized by the state. From Thuringia to Mecklenburg, the state was keen to organize a cultural program for its holiday makers, to help them realize the benefits of socialism in which every worker could afford an uplifting vacation. This also contributed to the ideal of the socialist Heimat, as visitors could be introduced to, and thus became part of, new Heimat traditions. Finally, an important aim of such cultural evenings was to overcome the influences of cosmopolitanism, kitsch, and foreign music such as samba and “hotmusic.”¹²⁰ In the seaside resort of Kühlungsborn, over the month of July 1951, eight of the twenty-two cultural evenings were related to Heimat, which included two talks given by members of the Cultural League (e.g., about Mecklenburg), with the other six being devoted to folklore. Mostly, such folklore evenings did include samples from the socialist Heimat. The Dresden Heimat Quintet, for instance, began its program with five ideological songs on Germany and the Soviet Union. This was followed by eight songs about the German Heimat, four of which were newly composed by Hans Eisler and J. R. Becher, the authors of the national anthem. Only then did the quintet perform twelve pieces from its Saxon Heimat.¹²¹ Overall, there was little consistency in the ideological content of Heimat evenings, and on occasions it was missing altogether. At Kühlungsborn, one evening saw the “Sounds of Upper Bavaria,” including “yodel, laughing, shoe-clapping and hearty (*zünftige*) music.” This evening may have been successful in the aim of overcoming American nonculture through Heimat — but socialist it was certainly not.

The popularity of Bavarian folklore is evident from folklore groups across Mecklenburg. The folklore group from the “Machine Lending Station” at Altentreptow included in its repertoire songs like “Dirndl you said” (*Dirndl hast gesagt*) next to more ideological songs such as “We are the frontline” (*Wir sind die erste Reihe*). In fact, a comparison of the repertoires of Mecklenburg folklore groups in 1952 reveals a striking diversity. Some folklore groups eschewed any ideology, as the folklore group of the “Machine Lending Station” at Trollenhagen, and this did produce conflict with the local authorities.¹²² Most folklore groups, however, avoided direct confrontation and added a few Russian

120. Richtlinien für die Kulturarbeit in den FDGB-Ferienheimen (Berlin, 25 April 19[51]). Bericht über den Ablauf der Badesaison und der Bäderbetreuung 1951 (Bergen, 25 September 1951). LHA Schwerin Ministerium für Volksbildung (1946–1952) 3024 [unpaginated].

121. Programme, Heimatquintett Dresden. LHA Schwerin Ministerium für Volksbildung (1946–1952) 3024 [unpaginated].

122. Aufführungspläne und -Programme von Volkskunstgruppen 1952. LHA Schwerin Ministerium für Volksbildung (1946–1952) 2988 [unpaginated]. On Trollenhagen, see also Brief,

or socialist songs or dances in their repertoire of mostly traditional folklore. Nevertheless, the song most groups included in their repertoire, the “Mecklenburger Song,” did not bear witness to the USSR, nor had the most popular song performed by Mecklenburg choirs, “Ännchen von Tharau,” anything to do with the socialist Heimat.¹²³

Eigen-Sinn of folklore groups showed itself clearly in their individual programs, but it could be expressed in myriad other ways that were even more difficult for the state to influence. In 1956, the GDR ministry of the interior conducted an investigation into folklore groups, and many of its findings testified to the diverse ways in which *Eigen-Sinn* could be expressed. The organizers noted many choirs, for instance in Seyda (Cottbus district) and in Misslareuten (Karl-Marx-Stadt), which regularly performed at events organized by the church, but which refused to perform in official state celebrations. The refusal to engage in politics could be encouraged by traditional church loyalties, but this needed not be the case. A male choir in Haldensleben (Magdeburg) refused to sing political songs even at public holidays, simply because, as the conductor put it, a “choir had nothing to do with politics.” In Zitz (Potsdam), the male choir discovered a passion for old folklore, in which it subsequently specialized. Not coincidentally, this also provided it with an important rationale for not feeling bound to any requirement to perform new, socialist songs.

Even if choirs did perform on public holidays, this did not mean that those involved accepted the politicized meanings of Heimat. The male choir from Dornburg (Magdeburg) caused much consternation in the Ministry of the Interior as it sang, at the official anniversary celebrations of the land reform, the folk song “Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust” (wandering is the miller’s joy). The male choir of Wusterwitz (Potsdam) did not have any socialist songs in its repertoire, but it did perform the national anthem in honor of the 1 May celebrations in 1955. Here, the *Eigen-Sinn* lay in the performance itself, when the choir mysteriously lost its voice. The choir of Mühlberg (Cottbus) agreed to perform at an official function of the National Front, but observers were struck that the members left immediately after their performance, without taking note of any other aspect of the festivities.

Clearly, local relations were a crucial determinant of the meanings attached to the engagement with Heimat. In Dambeck (Magdeburg), the conductor of the local choir declined an invitation to perform at the annual general meeting of the consumers’ association (*Konsumgenossenschaft*), because he himself owned the rival grocery and textile shop. Conversely, a number of choirs observed by

Rat des Kreises Neubrandenburg, an die Landesregierung Mecklenburg (23 June 1950). LHA Schwerin Ministerium für Volksbildung (1946–1952) 3023 [unpaginated].

123. Aufführungspläne und -Programme von Volkskunstgruppen 1952. LHA Schwerin Ministerium für Volksbildung (1946–1952) 2988 [unpaginated].

the Ministry of the Interior clearly took village relations to a different extreme. The report registered its disapproval at excessive socializing that could characterize rehearsals, which was often encouraged by heavy drinking.¹²⁴

Eigen-Sinn manifested itself in individual attitudes toward the kinds of songs performed, where they were performed, what happened before and after they were performed, and the enthusiasm with which they were performed. Crucially, it also lay in the interpretation of each part of the performance. When observers from the Mecklenburg Ministry of Education in Schwerin visited the folklore group of Rosenhagen near Anklam, they noted that traditional folk-songs were performed with more conviction than new songs.¹²⁵ The state frequently noted the quality of folklore performances and their interpretation with great alarm. A report for the Ministry of Education in Berlin lamented the sentimental nature of many performances of folklore, which did not reflect the new socialist realities. It cited as an example the widely performed Heimat song "Im schönen Wiesengrunde." In its last stanza, the author sings of his hope to die in his Heimat valley and be buried there. This, the report noted, was an expression of the love of Heimat, nothing more, nothing less. However, this stanza was generally performed with "such sentimentality, and in any case in piano-pianissimo, that it becomes simply unbearable." The song was thus transformed from a manifestation of the love of Heimat "into a symphony of death, at which these choirs seem close to dying themselves." Loving one's Heimat had thus been moved beyond "reality to the ivory tower of kitsch."¹²⁶

Manifestations of *Eigen-Sinn* in folklore performances gave expression to personal rivalries, desires for companionship, the personality of the director, the dynamics within the performing group, and the group's role within the locality. Similar types of *Eigen-Sinn* could also be present at other Heimat activities. The collections chosen for an exhibition, or the order in which they were displayed, could just as well be an expression of local relations or the personalities of individuals. Many displays of *Eigen-Sinn*, such as the refusal to sing at public holidays, were political. Other manifestations may or may not have been political. The Dornburg choir's rendition of "Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust" may have been performed because it was the best song in its repertoire, not because the choir intended to sabotage the political meaning of the festivities. And, if a choir's folksong performance dripped with kitsch, this may have been less a consciously chosen expression of local or national identification, than a reflection of the singers' (in-)abilities.

124. Hausmitteilung von Abteilung Kunst, Literatur und Kultur, 5 June 1956. SAPMO-BArch DY 30/IV 2/2.026 no. 51, ff. 1–6.

125. Besuch der Laiengruppe Deutsche Volksbühne Rosenhagen, Kreis Anklam (7 April 1952). LHA Schwerin, Ministerium für Volksbildung 1.

126. Einschätzung des Entwicklungsstandes einiger Hauptfachgebiete des künstlerischen Volksschaffens in der DDR (c.1952/53). SAPMO-BArch DY 30 IV 2/9.06, no. 154, ff. 45–46.

However, even by the early 1950s, choirs must have been aware that they were expected at least to add new, realist songs to their repertoire. Ignoring such expectations, or compensating them through particularly emotive performances of traditional folklore, moved such expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* into the political sphere. The range and the types of *Eigen-Sinn* that could be expressed through the *Heimat* were difficult for the state to access, if they were not completely out of reach. However, in the collective ideal of the socialist *Heimat*, such spheres could not exist. The ideal that the socialist *Heimat* (re-)present a collective of new human beings meant that in such a *Heimat*, there could, by definition, be no *Eigen-Sinn*.

The fact that the individual meanings attached to *Heimat* were incongruent with its socialist ideal became a great concern to the state, but it contested expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* relatively rarely, only after certain boundaries had been transgressed. One of the most recurrent examples of this concerned the annual celebrations of carnival. The state allowed these, but tried hard to make sure that they became an expression of genuine local traditions, instead of carbon copies of rhenish (i.e., West German) traditions with their incessant speechmaking. Most importantly, the humor expressed should not poke fun at the state and its institutions, but expose laggards and traditionalists in society.¹²⁷ When transgressions occurred, the state was quick to act. In the Mecklenburg village of Dabel, the 1961 pageant had the village mayor, himself a fervent supporter of the event, on a cart locked inside an iron cage. At this expression of local fun, the state authorities suffered an acute sense of humor failure. The mayor was deposed, and future carnival celebrations were banned.¹²⁸

Open contestations of *Eigen-Sinn* were the exception, because once the state had endorsed the principle of *Heimat*, it relied upon the performance and activities of *Heimat* enthusiasts. These were largely voluntary and could not be forced. In the Thuringian town of Suhl, a prominent tradition consisted of the *Pfingsthütte*. At Pentecost, local children and youth would build huts in public squares, which then served as stages for public performances of local choirs, entertainers, and singers. When, in the 1950s, the Free German Youth tried to muscle in and take over the festival the tradition found its abrupt end, as the townsfolk simply refused to take part.¹²⁹

During the 1950s, the state discovered that the socialist *Heimat* could not be realized overnight. At best, individual meanings attached to the *Heimat* could be transformed indirectly, and over time. A report from Mecklenburg written

127. Bericht über die Vorbereitung zum Schweriner Fasching (8 January 1955). LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirks 4595 b [unpaginated].

128. Fritz Ahrens et al., ed., *725 Jahre Dabel. Eine Chronik: Beiträge zur Dabeler Chronik 1262–1987* (Schwerin, 1987), 35. Interview Wolfgang Gövels, Helga Böhnke, Karlheinz Schwabe, and Rosemarie Bartelt (Dabel, 7 July 2003).

129. Interview with Waltraut Schulz (Suhl, 19 June 2003).

in 1953 noted the conditions under which socialist harvest festivals could prosper: they should include traditional pageants (in traditional costumes if possible), sketches in Low German, and the performance of traditional German folklore.¹³⁰ The state could invent new forums for the representations of the socialist Heimat, but ironically these worked only if they were expressed through traditional folklore. This, in turn, made it very difficult for the state to affect the meanings traditionally attached to village folklore. By appropriating traditional folklore and other traditional pastimes for the socialist Heimat, the state was confronted with the private expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* that undermined this very ideal.

By the 1960s, the state had managed to transform the forums in which Heimat could be expressed, but it was under no illusions about the difficulties it had yet to overcome in transforming its contents, let alone its meanings. In 1958, a report on the national agricultural exhibition, at which the best folklore groups of every district were to demonstrate their skills, despaired that almost a decade after the GDR's creation, there was a palpable lack of good new material available, and not nearly enough was being written.¹³¹ In 1962, a report for the Sternberg council noted that the number of folklore groups had stagnated, while the number of choirs and bands had declined markedly. District inspectors noted repeatedly that village life was still lagging behind the ideal of the socialist Heimat. Those who directed cultural life in the villages had so far failed to realize the transition from the "I" to the "We."¹³²

Conclusion

By the early 1960s, the introduction of democratic centralism in the GDR had not destroyed regional identities, nor had it relegated them to a private, unpolitical, and inconsequential sphere. If the SED's early cultural leaders had been tempted to overcome regional particularisms completely and to recognize distinctiveness solely along class lines, it soon became clear that such aims were impossible to achieve. Local patriotisms and the popularity of local cultural pursuits were too strong to be ignored. By opting instead to try and control such passions, the state recognized the legitimacy of their existence. Neither the ideology of class, nor the politics of centralization, were able to prevent the resurgent expressions of local tradition in the GDR.

130. Bericht über die Unterstützung der werktätigen Landbevölkerung bei der Ausgestaltung ihrer Erntefeste (investigation of 22 August–30 September 1953). LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirkes 4595 b.

131. Einschätzung der kulturellen Veranstaltungen während der 6. Landwirtschaftlichen Ausstellung der DDR . . . in Markkleeberg (Berlin, 5 September 1958). SAPMO-BArch DY30 IV 2/9.06 no. 154, f. 357.

132. Kreisprogramm für die allseitige Entwicklung der kulturellen Massenarbeit für das 2. Halbjahr 1962 [Kreis Sternberg]. LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirkes 4599. Bericht über den Einsatz der Brigade in Hagenow . . . (Schwerin, 26 February 1961). LHA Schwerin, Rat des Bezirkes 4601.

As the principal expression of the local traditions and culture that evoked a person's sense of belonging, Heimat became integral to East Germany's official ideological and cultural self-definition. In this important respect, East Germany did not disavow its German historical traditions. It may be true that the East German historical profession only embraced the progressive aspects of its German heritage with the reevaluation of its Prussian roots in the early 1980s.¹³³ Yet, regional history and culture became pivotal to the state's legitimacy from the origins of the GDR, long before the Prussian renaissance of the early 1980s.

This article's discussion of some of the difficulties encountered by the state in realizing its ideals for popular culture is evidence for the need, in considering the exercise of power in the GDR, to distinguish between different arenas of everyday life. Cultural activities and self-perceptions were much harder to impose than acts of political compliance or individual submission to economic policies. The state could not impose the cultural commitment it so desired: it could force neither choral singing, nor stamp collecting, nor an interest in ornithology. Nor could it coerce the population into wanting to listen to socialist Heimat broadcasts in endless radio shows. The state could only generate popular cultural activity and in this way hope to realize its cultural aspirations if it responded at least to some degree to the already existent cultural desires of the population.

Heimat in the GDR was determined by a concern with folk traditions, as well as with local festivals in town and countryside. It was also related to hobbies occupied with nature, as well as the collection or production of artifacts that helped define the GDR through the distinctiveness of its regions. Through stamp collecting, local theater, folk music, urban festivals, school teaching, and recurrent propaganda about the "national" community and its borders, the socialist Heimat became an important and persistent determinant of popular culture in the GDR. This pervasiveness of Heimat led to a central dichotomy, which had established itself within the GDR's founding period, and which persisted throughout the state's existence: between the expression of local and regional identifications, which this popular culture encouraged on the one hand, and the search by a centralized, hierarchical state for an emotionally-appealing "national" identity on the other.

Ideologically, the socialist Heimat became an integral part of the socialist utopia. In practice, the state developed the socialist Heimat into a countermodel against the West. The emblem of the first German folklore festival depicted a

133. Edgar Wolfrum, "Die Preussen-Renaissance: Geschichtspolitik im deutsch-deutschen Konflikt," in *Verwaltete Vergangenheit: Geschichtskultur und Herrschaftslegitimation in der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (Leipzig, 1997), 145–66; H. Alexander Kraus, *Die Rolle Preussens in der DDR-Historiographie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993); Jan Herman Brinks, *Die DDR/Geschichtswissenschaft auf dem Weg zur deutschen Einheit: Luther, Friedrich II und Bismarck als Paradigmen politischen Wandels* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992).

dancing couple in stylized Heimat costumes in front of a building surrounded by scaffolding, whose decoration suggested that it was at the halfway point to completion (*Richtfest*). In contrast to the FRG, in the GDR Heimat did not historicize the past, it transformed it. Heimat did not hold out the promise of the green pastures of consumer society, but presented itself as pure and unadulterated (by apparent American barbarism), shared equally by all. Heimat did serve as an important sphere of national reconciliation but this could only come about through a complete break with the Nazi past. Finally, unlike in the FRG, the GDR Heimat precluded any return of expellees to their former homelands, but offered them complete integration instead.

However, it would be misleading to suggest that the socialist Heimat existed purely, or even primarily, in response to the Federal Republic. More important was that the socialist Heimat provided the GDR with a claim to legitimacy that was no longer solely confined to ideology and postwar geopolitics. The landscapes of the Thuringian Forest, the chemical works of Bitterfeld, and the marches (*Bodden*) of Mecklenburg, were unique to the GDR, as were the Saxon woodcutters and the Pommeranian fishingcarpet weavers. Through Heimat, Communist ideologues, the SED, and cultural leaders could — and did — assert a distinctive and emotive national identity.

The success of the socialist Heimat was predicated on its acceptance and expression by Heimat and folklore enthusiasts at the grassroots. Clearly, in the GDR, Heimat folklore and hobby groups did promote many of the aims of the socialist Heimat, such as the sensible use of spare time, social integration, and identification with one's surroundings. However, the socialist Heimat also gave rise to diverse expressions of *Eigen-Sinn*, which were incongruent with the collective ideal of Heimat. Such acts came to indicate distance from the socialist ideal, and so ironically, by tying Heimat so closely to its socialist utopia, the state increased rather than reduced the scope of expressing distance between itself and the Heimat loyalties it so desired.

The goal of the seven-year plan of 1959, to transform cultural life in town and countryside and create the socialist person, was as much a statement of intent as an admission of failure. Through the seven-year plan, Heimat remained a key state concern during the 1960s. In the 1970s, Erich Honecker's aim to realize all "socialist" desires of the population made the socialist Heimat yet more important for the state's attempts to fulfill the cultural desires and ambitions of its population. The 1950s therefore not only saw the state's acceptance of the popular identifications with Heimat but also its appropriations of them. The tensions between the state's ideological and practical attempts to realize the socialist Heimat, and the divergent meanings attached to folklore and other Heimat-related pastimes in social practice, continued to define a central, and hitherto largely neglected part of everyday life in the GDR throughout its existence.

The findings on Heimat and local popular culture presented in this article do not invalidate other historiographical approaches that emphasize the importance of repression in the way in which the state sought to establish power and control over society, economics, and politics. However, a consideration of the interplay between state and citizens at the level of popular culture does enrich and complicate our understanding of everyday life in the GDR. By linking aspects of its own legitimacy to the reinvention of popular traditions, festivals, and hobbies, the state exposed itself greatly at a cultural level to the cultural desires of its population. The individual meanings attached to the consumption and production of Heimat forced the state into responding to the cultural desires of the population as it tried to affect and appropriate them. An examination of the socialist Heimat reveals a state which, at the level of popular culture, was much more ambitious in its attempt to control the population, and much more restrained in its ability to succeed, than has hitherto been realized.

KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON