LIVING THROUGH THE WENDE

INTRODUCTION

MIRJAM BRUSIUS

It has long been commonly held that state socialism and private life at home were at odds in East Germany. For GDR citizens and the regime, however, housing and the home had an important political valence that was ambiguous from the very outset, as this Special Issue on experiences of the Wende\(^1\) and the following transformations will show building on the work of earlier historians. Housing created an opportunity for people to retreat from the state, to a place where citizens could literally ‘allow themselves room’ for private activities. The term *Nischengesellschaft* (niche society), coined in 1983, implied that in the GDR, the home was a space where citizens could escape from the regime to carve out their own slice of happiness.\(^2\) After the fall of the Berlin Wall, this idea was often used to explain the political functionality of the East German state. Paul Betts, for example, suggests

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