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On Edge: Building the Border in East and West Germany

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How did the inter-German border, created in 1945, become one of the most formidable boundaries in the world by 1952? The early boundary was not fenced, but just years in the wake of National Socialism's "Thousand Year Reich" Germans on both sides broadly accepted and enforced it against other Germans. These early divisions made possible the GDR's physical closure and fortification of the border after 1952. The hastily drawn demarcation line between Allied zones of occupation had rather quickly expanded into a legal, economic, political, and social boundary—in which both East and West developed a stake.

In contrast to its monolithic image as an Iron Curtain, the border was a collective construction, arising from the volatility of the immediate postwar period and the legacy of the Third Reich. In both East and West, it came to be seen as a wild frontier, breeding violence, smuggling, refugees, and political instability that necessitated continual security escalations. National Socialist practices shaped Cold War concerns; authoritarian and denunciatory policing reinforced military measures, while border anxieties evolved from social vagrancy to political subterfuge. As each side progressively patrolled and purged its borderlands of influence from the other, partition became self-reinforcing, buttressed by the very problems it created. Eastern enforcement was always much harsher, but initiatives in the West were particularly startling given traditional views of its opposition. What began as an arbitrary and unwanted division was soon adapted and instrumentalized by frontier officials and residents alike.

Borderlands are pivotal in the construction of societies, fostering differences from frictions, rather than the isolation of separated communities. New policies and identities are not simply crafted centrally and disseminated outward, but take

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shape in significant ways along the periphery itself.[1] This was especially pronounced in the Cold War Germanies, as both states positioned their borderlands as economic and ideological showpieces, discrete from the opposing regime as well as from their own hinterlands. Though a vital problematic in the postwar decades, the Iron Curtain beyond Berlin remains largely remote and unknown, appearing as a static artifact of the GDR. Recent publications are beginning to penetrate this daunting edifice. Compilations and reminiscences have fleshed out everyday life on the frontier, while some scholars, notably Daphne Berdahl in her acclaimed ethnography of an eastern German village after 1990, have explored the workings of the borderland in richer detail.[2] Indeed, the Iron Curtain was built of more than just mortar and barbed wire, and continued excavation can help uncover the jumbled components of its construction.

This investigation of the border's early history suggests it was a collaborative creation. Mutual insecurity drove governments on both sides toward reciprocal escalations, while citizens assimilated severance into their daily lives, internalizing an external division. Now, however, these broad foundations are scarcely remembered. This story of two divided sister cities on the Bavarian-Thuringian border helps illustrate how swiftly the Cold War formed from its front line, hardening, within a few years, the literal and imagined boundaries of East and West.

Openings

The adjacent cities in Upper Franconia, Sonneberg and Neustadt bei Coburg, were an unlikely site of divergence. With roughly 50,000 people, this was the largest community divided outside of Berlin. The towns were separate entities, yet everyday connections through family, work, churches, and schools in this homogenous region were probably stronger than those between the average East and West Berliner.

Prior to 1945, Neustadt and Sonneberg were remarkably similar and intertwined, linked for 800 years in an isolated valley. Their town halls less than three miles apart, provincial Neustadters and Sonnebergers intermarried, spoke the same dialect, had similar socioeconomic structures, and shared political and cultural traditions. The cities became a center of toy and doll production; before World War One, the region claimed one-fifth of global sales. The vast

[1]Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 270–271.

[2]Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). A popular work on the Probstzella region, near this article's area of study: Roman Grafe, *Die Grenze durch Deutschland. Eine Chronik von 1945 bis 1990* (Berlin: Siedler, 2002). A dissertation on the Rhön region is underway by Sagi Schaeffer at Columbia University, "The Boundaries of Rural Identification: The German-German Border and the Transformations of Provincial Society, 1939–61." An Internet bibliography of recent works: www.grenzerinnerungen.de/literatur.htm.

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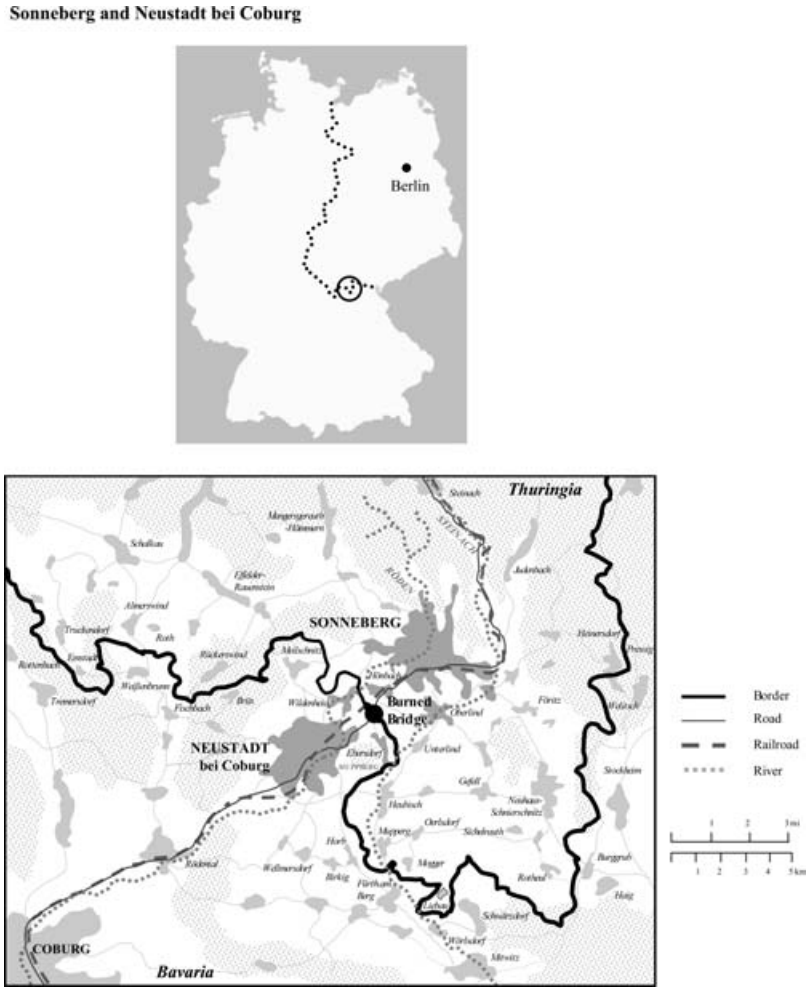


Fig. 1.

majority of people were poor cottage industry workers, with child labor rates around forty percent and wages among the lowest in Germany.[3] During the tough interwar years, National Socialism came early to the region and found

[3]Ernst Fugmann, *Der Sonneberger Wirtschaftsraum* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1939), 410. This overview draws from numerous local histories. Most comprehensive: Helmut Scheuerich, *Geschichte der Stadt Neustadt bei Coburg im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Neustadt bei Coburg: Stadt Neustadt bei Coburg, 1989), and *650 Jahre Stadt Sonneberg, 1349–1999* (Sonneberg: Verlag Frankenschwelle KG, 1999).

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more than fifty percent electoral support. Their Buchenwald satellite camps were opened within a week of each other.[4]

Naturally, tensions and differences emerged between the cities over the years, especially as Sonneberg grew larger and economically dominant in the nineteenth century—boasting a U.S. consulate and seven American toy export firms, including a gargantuan Woolworth's distribution center.[5] The imposition of different boundaries in the valley also bred frictions. Indeed, postwar realignment was presaged in milder forms throughout the towns' eventful millennial relationship, particularly dynastic division in 1735 and the Bavarian-Thuringian state border in 1920–23.[6] Yet on the whole, locals saw themselves as one region and the pre-1945 border remained inconsequential in everyday life. Absent any natural barrier such as a hilltop or river, few people even knew where it lay. Once different occupation armies entered the cities—with Neustadt in the American Zone and Sonneberg in the Soviet Zone—their smaller rifts were dwarfed by the Iron Curtain.

The border bisected the region at "Burned Bridge," the main road that spanned the marshland between the towns. In medieval times it had been built from charred wood to withstand rot. Originally a landmark of connection, Burned Bridge, or *Gebrannte Brücke*, became a symbol of postwar severance. A checkpoint in the initial postwar years, it saw a succession of extraordinary yet half-forgotten openings that, perhaps more than anything, best illustrate the puzzling early Cold War dynamic in the borderland.

In 1949, the Soviet Zone's Socialist Unity Party (SED) in Sonneberg sponsored a soccer game on the border as a propagandistic demonstration—and organized it "quickly" in order to "surprise" western forces just ahead of the first

[4]Both cities had voted more than fifty percent Social Democratic (SPD) since the turn of the century. Neustadt claimed the highest percentage of NSDAP "golden badge" carriers in Germany (sixty-eight ranked among the first 100,000 Nazi Party members). The satellite camps were far from the Holocaust "paradise" that many today wish to remember; of the 450–500 Jewish men at the Sonneberg camp, around twenty died every month, and fewer than half survived the six-week evacuation march in April–May 1945. "United States v. Heinrich Buuck," April 19, 1951. U.S. National Archives (NACP) RG 338, USAREUR-War Crimes 266. (Friedrich Rauer, "'Nach Auschwitz war hier das Paradies.'" *Neue Presse* (*NP*), May 11, 2005).

[5]Gerhard Stier, "Ein Konsulat der USA in der Spielzeugstadt," *Südthüringer Heimatblätter* 1, no. 5 (96): 20. The U.S. consulate in Sonneberg (1851–1916) was the third in central Germany, opening before those in much larger cities such as Chemnitz, Magdeburg, Erfurt, and Weimar. The cities' populations are difficult to compare given the different rates at which they incorporated surrounding municipalities. Roughly, in 1946 Sonneberg counted 21,500 residents to Neustadt's 16,650.

[6]In 1920 Neustadters voted overwhelmingly (ninety-one percent; eighty-eight percent in the Duchy of Coburg overall) in a referendum to join the state of Bavaria instead of Thuringia, enticed by promises of stability and prosperity. Resultant tensions in Neustadt and Sonneberg over the new state border led to ever stronger police controls and even an exchange of gunfire in 1923—creating an oppositional dynamic that would be reprised after 1945 with far more lasting consequences.

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Fig. 2. The July 31, 1949 soccer game on the border. The Sonneberg team's banner reads, "we want the unification of Germany!" while Neustadt's, in the foreground, agrees – "and we do, too."

federal elections.[7] The boundary was the midfield line, so that easterners and westerners could watch the match from their own sides without interzonal passes; the athletes, of course, needed permits to run up and down the field legally. After Sonneberg had won the match 2:0, the Soviet commander announced the border would be open for the day. While thousands of easterners streamed across to Neustadt, only 400 to 500 westerners ventured into the Soviet Zone.[8] One native Sonneberger, who had fled to Neustadt in 1946, said that although she had enjoyed seeing her family she, like many, was "happy when the Sonnebergers went back home again."[9]

The soccer game kicked off three additional mass crossings in the autumn of 1949 that numbered around 20,000 people each. The SED had orchestrated

[7]The newly elected Third People's Congress actually "embarrassed" Sonneberg's city council by announcing the demonstration just days in advance, to the councilors' "astonishment" and "strong irritation." Sonneberg city council—157, July 25, 1949. Stadtarchiv Sonneberg (SA-S) C2-9. Sonneberg County Leadership (SED-KL) Minutes, July 19, 1949. Thüringisches Staatsarchiv Meiningen (StA-M) SED-KL-S 287.

[8]Riedl, August 5, 1949. NACP RG260, OMGUS-CAD-PS 335-2.

[9]Interview with Inge Mulzer; Neustadt, December 13, 2002. All names given are pseudonyms except those of government officials.

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Fig. 3. A Crowd of easterners breaking across the demarcation line (marked by the trench) with parcels ready for trade in Neustadt.

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Fig. 4. *Berliner Illustrierte*, September 3, 1949. The spectacle of armed American Constabulary troops holding back easterners with peace placards on the demarcation line made for good propaganda in the Soviet Zone.

smaller border openings elsewhere, but they approached nowhere near the magnitude of breaches at Sonneberg and Neustadt, which took on a life of their own due to the cities' unique proximity. As alarmed American and Bavarian sentries tried to arrest as many of the crossing easterners as they could, the Soviet Zone widely publicized the image of armed Americans confronting crowds of peaceful Germans.[10] For its part, the *New York Times* was amazed that western forces were

[10]For example,"Großkundgebung vor amerikanischen Maschinengewehren," *Neues Deutschland*, September 2, 1949; "Zwei Welten begegnen sich," *Berliner Illustrierte*, September 3, 1949. During the September 1 opening, for example, western forces in Neustadt apprehended and returned 2,365 easterners to the Soviet Zone. Kleindienst, September 3, 1949. NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg 1205–3. Mass crossings occurred on July 31, 1949; September 1 (Peace Day); October 1–2 (World Peace Day), and the anniversary of the October Revolution (November 9). Although the Soviet Zone had intensified cross-border propaganda after the Berlin Blockade and founding of the Federal Republic, and had initiated the border crossings, eastern officials grew alarmed as the breaches spiraled out of control—and rapidly shifted course after the October 1–2 openings and renounced them. Still, a crowd of thousands compelled a fourth crossing on November 9 against the GDR's prohibition. Border forces on both sides jointly prevented a fifth breach on December 21 (Stalin's seventieth birthday). In May and June 1951, strengthened security successfully contained four smaller crossings; the GDR's People's Police used force and wounded several people, while Bavarian Border Police, wary of "trouble" from "unlawfully crossing" easterners, at one point

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Fig. 5. Crowds of Sonnebergers in Neustadt during the border openings.

"unable to halt the mobs of Germans forcing their way through barriers and police road blocks," and the brazenness of these "shabby people" once across, resembling a "swarm of locusts" that "frantically" sold all they had for western goods or hard currency.[11] Western Neustadters, aghast at their neighbors' "unimaginable appetite for shopping," demanded state recompense and warned of the "danger of

built a makeshift "confining barrier" thirty meters inside the border. Riedl, May 15, 1951. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München (BayHStA) PrBGP 119.

[11]"Swarm Into U.S. Zone" and "East Germans Throng U.S. Zone Stores as Russians Lift Bars for a Few Hours," *The New York Times*, September 2 and November 10, 1949.

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sabotage."[12] Politicians and businessmen begged the U.S. Military Government to protect the town from the easterners' recurring "invasions" and "excesses."[13] Western authorities duly responded to this local pressure and strengthened border controls. In fact, these increasingly unruly openings had ramifications well beyond the immediate region, leading to border tightening on both sides.[14]

Today, Neustadters and Sonnebergers romanticize the four border openings as joint, spontaneous protests against a closing Iron Curtain. Local histories and the regional border museum commemorate a spirit of mutual fraternity. And in a recent survey for this project, eighty-one percent of respondents born before 1945 remembered the crossings as "initiated by both communities," as opposed to just nine percent who accurately stated they were "organized by the SED."[15] Even with this gloss, the 1949 openings resonated much less than other events that better fit the standard narrative of eastern brutality and local resistance. Whereas the minute details of border shootings and escapes are passed down from generation to generation, only thirteen percent of the 141 survey respondents born after 1945 had heard of the mass crossings, compared to sixty-one percent who knew of East Germany's forced evacuations of 600 residents in 1952 and 1961.[16] This selective amnesia is curious because the border openings were major events at the time. Eastern crowds had gained autonomous, subversive momentum—with the world press watching—and posed one of the most significant challenges to the Iron Curtain until 1989.

Yet the events were extremely one-sided and short-lived. Indeed, more striking than four mass crossings in four months is how swiftly border compliance returned to normal. After all, the "green border," or *grüne Grenze*, was still unfenced. But Germany was already divided, and the 1949 border breaches

[12]Neustadt Food Office, November 9, 1949. Stadtarchiv Neustadt (SA-N) 6564. Union of Bavarian Toy and Christmas Ornament Manufacturers, September 7, 1949. SA-N 4404.

[13]Paul Weppler, September 9 and November 14, 1949. SA-N 2050. Although Neustadters clamored for financial assistance and additional guards, in many ways the city profited from the eastern shopping sprees. Shopkeepers set highly advantageous prices and currency exchange rates, and even petitioned to remain open on Sundays during the crossings. Moreover, city leaders tried to keep out the "wild" kiosks of non-Neustadt entrepreneurs by blocking the city's southern entrance. SA-N 4404.

[14]Western measures: Willi Ankermüller, November 14, 1949. Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BArch-K) B106–15423; BayHStA LFlüV 1120, 528–532. In particular, Thuringian Interior Minister Gebhardt believed the "Sonneberg occurrences" called for additional travel restrictions throughout the GDR and also initiated a "political campaign for better discipline among the population on the demarcation line." Correspondence: December 2–14, 1949. Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar (ThHStAW) Th-MInn 1133, 29–38. Sonneberg SED-KL, December 1, 1949. StA-M SED-KL-S 303.

[15]Survey administered by Edith Sheffer; nine-page questionnaires were mailed to 250 Neustadt and 250 Sonneberg residents selected at random; 260 of the 500 responded. The SED's instigation of the mass crossings is so little known that the TV station broadcast an interview with this researcher discussing the myth. Lead feature of NecTV weekly "Magazinsendung," February 16–22, 2003.

[16]By comparison, of the 112 respondents born before 1945 who answered this question, sixty-seven percent knew of the mass crossings and ninety-three percent knew of the forced evacuations.

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exposed and deepened the extent of the divergence. Just four years after the war's end, stereotypes of a poor East and a rich West were so fixed that while thousands of easterners repeatedly rushed to sample wares in Neustadt, only a few hundred westerners ventured to Sonneberg. Partition had become enough of an established reality for the mass crossings to generate new excitement and anxiety. They were astonishing precisely because border discipline had become an internalized fact of postwar life.

Insecurity

In 1945, the four occupying powers had imposed zonal borders as a security exigency, developing similar laws to restrict the movement of refugees, displaced persons, prisoners of war, and suspected war criminals.[17] While the guarded boundaries between the U.S., British, and French zones were relatively unproblematic, the demarcation line between the western and Soviet zones immediately aggravated nascent differences. As diverging economic, political, and social systems collided, this unstable frontier mirrored the widening gap between East and West, reflecting and magnifying early Cold War tensions. From 1945 until its closure in 1952, the unfenced inter-German border was its own escalating influence. Partial partition created problems that prompted increasingly divisive solutions, so that the boundary exacerbated the instability that lent it legitimacy. Mutual insecurity fed tangled cycles of reaction as people and governments exploited it for their own purposes—and the border itself became an agent of division.

Remote Sonneberg and Neustadt, which had emerged virtually unscathed during the war, found themselves in tumult after capitulation. First, the location of the border was hotly contested. Obscured nineteenth-century stone markers, particularly unreliable in wetter areas, occasioned contentious land-grabs.[18] There were also widespread rumors of impending territorial exchanges and Soviet invasion, even a legendary story about Soviet forces attempting to march into Neustadt.[19] A number of eastern border towns appealed to transfer to Bavaria, and some communities remained in territorial limbo for months.[20]

[17]Zonal borders were first established with the London Protocol of September 1944 and were largely to follow state boundaries.

[18]In one notorious seizure in 1946, the Soviet army claimed 740 acres of Neustadt forest. Diverse incidents: OMGB-Cbg Weekly Public Safety Reports, 1945–46, NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg 1200-2.

[19]According to local lore, Soviet forces tried to enter Neustadt in early July 1945 because their map showed the Coburg region belonged to their occupation zone. When American forces stopped them at Burned Bridge, a local passerby helped translate and it became clear that the Soviet map was outdated, printed before Coburg joined Bavaria in 1920. Despite the prominence of this event in local histories, a thorough review of American war diaries and military government detachment records has yielded no mention of it.

[20]For example, BayHStA B-StK 10277 and 10859, ThHStAW Th-MInn 3033.

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Border travel and transport restrictions compounded already acute housing and food shortages. Stranded refugees and expellees congregated on the frontier and immediately swelled both towns' populations by thirty to fifty percent, while high troop concentrations aggravated violence and uncertainty. Soviet-American liaison difficulties delayed the resumption of basic services such as gas, post, rail, and electricity. As everyday life rapidly diverged between Neustadt and Sonneberg, the relative brutality and poverty of the Soviet Zone gave rise to smuggling and mass flight along the frontier.

Officials on both sides sought a stronger boundary for stability. From the start, the American and Soviet military governments each conceived of their borderlands as separate security areas. While the U.S. ultimately scrapped proposals to create a "Prohibited Frontier Zone," Soviet authorities established a "Forbidden Zone" in July 1945 that, although haphazardly enforced, portended the GDR's later border regime. With stricter curfews, ordinances, and residence and work permits, the Forbidden Zone encompassed twenty-two out of Sonneberg County's fifty-nine municipalities. Soviet forces were "to use firearms" if people entered without authorization and, since only long-standing residents were trusted to live on the frontier, those who had moved into the area after 1941 were given twenty-four hours to pack up their things and leave.[21]

Things in the American Zone never went that far, but U.S. forces did build the first road blocks and border posts between Neustadt and Sonneberg in mid-1946, severing the 104 roads and innumerable foot paths that crisscrossed the demarcation line. Although military government authorities rightly worried this initiative to systematize the border would have "serious international political implications," the U.S. Constabulary was more immediately concerned with curbing illegal traffic.[22] In response, Soviet authorities promptly increased their troop strength, built their own barriers and posts (higher than the Americans' 1.8 meters) and, in some locations, added fences and barbed wire.[23]

Still, from 1945–52 most of the green border was easily traversable. Stemming the torrent of illegal crossers fell to undisciplined Allied and German border sentries. Far from taming the wild frontier, however, these poor protectors were themselves destabilizing. Endemic security lapses intensified both sides' desire for stronger security, and the guards of East and West themselves became part of the volatile cycle of division.

Western border forces were largely ineffective. American Constabulary troops generally displayed a "lack of understanding concerning occupation policies,

[21]Weinland, July 9, 1945; and correspondence 1945–46, SA-S C16-172. Hans-Jürgen Schmidt, *Coburg und die amerikanischen Streitkräfte 1945–1990* (Coburg: Historischen Gesellschaft Coburg, 1995), 34.

[22]James McCraw, July 3, 1946. NACP RG260, OMGUS-CAD-PS: 326–8.

[23]6th-CReg, July 16, 1946; 6th C-Sq, July 1 and August 2, 1946, NACP RG407, 6th-CReg 18400 and 18423. OMGB-Cbg, August 3 and 23, 1946. NACP RG260, OMGB-CAD-PS 67-3.

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arrogance, and immaturity," an assessment sheepishly corroborated by soldiers formerly stationed in Neustadt. Norm Green explained, "I was an eighteen-year-old kid at the time. We had the Russian Army a few yards from us and could have cared less. Lots of refugees, black market, wine, women, and song."[24] The Bavarian Border Police were hardly more forceful, forbidden by the U.S. to discharge weapons within one kilometer of the demarcation line "regardless of circumstances"—even when fired upon.[25] Because of the danger of escalating incidents, German guards along the Soviet zonal boundary were stripped of firearms two months after their formation, in May 1946, until early 1947 (though they remained armed on the French and British zonal borders), which damaged the sentries' effectiveness and triggered more problems than it solved. Vulnerable to corruption, assault, and abduction, the Bavarian guards were "openly laughed at in border towns."[26]

By contrast, eastern forces' surfeit of power was destabilizing. Billeted in border villages, the Thuringian People's Police monopolized the choicest food, furniture, and housing, and ran roughshod over local government. Confiscatory incentives allowed the guards to keep ten percent of goods seized from crossers for themselves, while abuse of the notorious *Schießbefehl*, the authority to shoot border violators, claimed numerous victims.[27] Still, the most disruptive force on the border by far was the Red Army. Soviet violence was especially pronounced along the frontier because of high troop levels, and the Soviet administration's dubious claim of authority to pursue illegal crossers up to one kilometer into American territory provoked ongoing disputes.[28] In the immediate postwar years marauding soldiers made daily jaunts to the West—in pursuit of food, goods, intelligence, and border crossers. In June 1946, Coburg-area forces reported nineteen Soviet border violations, five shootings, one death, one attempted rape, five abductions, two thefts, and several instances of harassment and assault.[29] Though there are no systematic records for these early years and incidents were likely underreported, it appears that border shootings

[24]Frederick Robie, July 20, 1947. NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg 1200-3. Norm Greendel, personal correspondence with the author, January 25, 2001.

[25]Josef Heppner, April 9, 1946. BayHStA B-StK 10859.

[26]OMGB-Cbg, June 29, 1946, NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg 1200-2.

[27]Vogt, December 22, 1949. ThHStAW Th-MInn 1193, 36–39. Correspondence: November 21–29, 1946: ThHStAW BMPr 1144, Film 102, 164–166; Th-MInn 1135, 64–69. Implausibly, the Thuringian Border Police reported an average of two to five "warning shots" from Sonneberg forces per month and around 200 in the entire state, resulting in fewer than five injuries monthly. The frequent shootings along the frontier were blamed on ever-elusive "Polish bandits" or "perpetrators from the West." Charisius, Border Police Reports: Köppelsdorf and Thuringia, 1947–48. ThHStAW Th-MInn 1126–1133.

[28]Escalating to an official U.S. protest: Lucius Clay to Vasily Sokolovsky, February 29, 1948. NACP RG260, OMGUS-CAD-PS 459-12. Overview: "Raids by Russians Arouse Bavarians," *The New York Times*, February 27, 1948.

[29]Heppner, July 5, 1946. NACP RG260, OMGUS-CAD-PS 356-4.

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occurred at least weekly in the region and that one or two killings were reported each month from 1945–47.[30]

Soviet forays unsettled everyday life in Neustadt. Soldiers frequently abducted Bavarian residents to the east for intelligence interrogations, taking farmers from their fields at gunpoint or tricking western guards into unwittingly crossing the demarcation line—sometimes to be traded back profitably for liquor or cigarettes. Troops would unexpectedly pop in at Bavarian homes demanding food or watches, and locals feared attack when walking near the border, especially on the meandering path to the popular Mountain Mill tavern. Soviet soldiers could attack women on and over the border in Bavaria with greater impunity than inside the Soviet Zone. In fact, rape along the frontier was so common that local women quickly learned not to "go over the border without a man."[31]

In this mayhem, Neustadters lobbied the Bavarian and American occupation governments for stronger security. Both zones authorized yearly increases in force strength not only to curb crossers, but to avoid being outnumbered by the other side.[32] But successive force escalations further destabilized both the reality and the politics of the early frontier. This protracted one-upmanship aggravated uncertainty and increased locals' desire for law and order. Ironically, the border's insufficiencies enhanced its legitimacy, as locals grew increasingly fearful of the unpredictable demarcation line and desired a well-regulated border between East and West.

As the physical border emerged, it expanded in people's imaginations. Shrouded in mystery and danger, the boundary embodied all that had gone wrong since capitulation and, more ominously, represented a future too chaotic to comprehend. Today people say that the immediate postwar years were so turbulent they had to believe the border was a temporary problem. Consumed by daily needs and anxieties, people could not think the crisis could persist or worsen. It may be true that people saw the boundary as temporary—at one level. But in many ways Neustadters and Sonnebergers adapted to the specter in their midst. The extraordinary became everyday. "Everyone knew of certain dangers" and for the most part the mysterious "incidents,

[30]Most comprehensive regional incident records: Coburg Border Presidium Reports, 1946–49, BayHStA PrBGP 116–118. The Coburg District Attorney investigated thirty-seven alleged Soviet border killings between August 1945 and September 1947, yet was able to prosecute only five (plus five shootings, four cases of abduction, and one American shooting). Bavarian State Police Coburg, August 5, 1960. Staatsarchiv Coburg (StA-C) Register, and StAnw-54, 20–26.

[31]Sonneberg Post Office Christmas skit, December 1948. SA-S C2-23. Incidents of rape and assault diminished over time, especially after the dramatic expansion of the eastern border police in 1948. Discussion of Soviet measures to curb violence in Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 90–97.

[32]Most notably in this region, U.S. outposts at Wildenheid and Rodach were constructed after repeated Russian incursions at the request of residents. Sidney Klein, February 8, 1946. NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg 1200-2. Rodach Mayor, May 2, 1947. StA-C LRA 15131.

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disappearances, arrests, and pursuits" were "not discussed out loud," but "whispered behind one's hand."[33] In their mental maps of this "wild West," the frontier became an incontrovertible part of the postwar landscape.[34]

From the outset, the border severed the cities' regular passage of workers, farmers, families, and friends. Allied tensions allowed only erratic provisions for legal crossing. For the first year after capitulation, the occupation governments placed the administration of informal *kleiner Grenzverkehr*, or "petty frontier traffic," in the hands of local authorities and whatever ad hoc systems they managed to devise; one community leader resorted to trading shoes and boots to Soviet officers in exchange for crossing permits.[35] Eventually, around 1,000 laborers on each side were granted frontier passes for regular commuting, but this small exchange (fifty to one hundred a day) was continually interrupted by increasingly sharp Allied disputes over checkpoints, permit requirements, and the arbitrary actions of Soviet Zone officials.[36] Since agriculture and manufacture were highly intertwined, these ongoing obstacles significantly stalled economic recovery.[37]

Formal interzonal travel was even more difficult. Permits required political clearance and evidence of zonal economic necessity, a labyrinthine process whose ever-evolving parameters were the subject of much inter-Allied dispute. Burned Bridge, one of a handful of contentious checkpoints along the U.S.-Soviet border, was lightly trafficked. Only five to fifteen people crossed per day in the initial postwar years, growing to fifty to two hundred a day by 1951.[38] The vast majority were not local. Of Neustadt's 17,000 inhabitants, just 1,500 to 2,800 traveled to the Soviet Zone each year with an interzonal travel pass, roughly 250 to 350 of whom registered as visitors in Sonneberg.[39]

[33]Interview with Gerhard Oppermann; Neustadt, May 2, 2003. Edgar Grams, *Als bei uns die Grenze war. Geschichten und Erzählungen aus der Zeit der Teilung unseres Landes* (Sonneberg: Trautmann, 1996), p. 11.

[34]Interview with Kurt Geis; Sonneberg, July 1, 2002.

[35]Adolf Knauer, February 4, 1946. StA-C LRA 14671. The replacement of these makeshift arrangements by a more centralized system of Control Council Directives in mid-1946 did little to improve Allied cooperation.

[36]Olga Brückner, May 7, 1952. Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch-B) D0 1–3911. Hans Thomsen, November 6, 1950. NACP RG466, HICOG-LCB-ID EEI-3-1.

[37]Severance hit Sonneberg particularly hard since it had always been oriented southward toward Franconia; two-thirds of its food supply was imported from Bavaria, and its main transportation networks passed through Neustadt to the larger cities of Coburg, Bamberg, and Würzburg. Coburg County claimed the highest number of West German farms in the GDR, with 305 cross-border fields (276 hectares) out of the FRG's total 2,318. Meanwhile, East Germans owned 137 hectares in Coburg County. "Grenzdurchschnittene land- und forstwirtschaftliche Grundeigentum," 1954. Auswärtiges Amt (AA) B10, Abt. 2 Bd. 452, Nr. A 7342, 271–275.

[38]Compiled PS and BBP reports, 1946–51. Martin, November 9, 1954. BayHStA PrBGP 1629. Traffic at Burned Bridge was less than ten percent of total legal traffic between Bavaria and the GDR.

[39]"Verwaltungs- und Tätigkeitsbericht," May 1952. SA-N 5698, 52. "Register westdeutscher Personen," 1947–1948. SA-S C3-69-70. Sonneberg registered an average of 230 interzonal visitors a month, thirty percent of whom were from the Coburg region, including the ten percent from Neustadt. Neustadt's city council complained the U.S. was too restrictive in pass allotments, but many found the city's opportunistic price increase to 4 DM prohibitively expensive. File: SA-N 3021.

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Meanwhile, legal crossing was always much harder for Sonnebergers, and became increasingly rare by 1952.[40]

The green border was still physically quite permeable, however, and locals frequently braved the dangers of illegal travel on foot. People crossed for a variety of reasons, ranging from dancing to berry-picking to visiting family. More than ninety percent, however, were eastern refugees and small-time smugglers. The region saw a considerable, though not unusual, amount of unregulated traffic—representing less than ten percent of illicit crossing along the entire border. Guards on each side apprehended 50 to 150 people a day out of an estimated 300 to 900 illegal crossers.[41]

More striking, perhaps, was that so many people abided by this new border. Most residents chose to obey the law, out of fear or on principle, and simply didn't cross. Westerners, in particular, were rarely lured eastward. Since the archival record is largely silent on the compliant, it is difficult to estimate their proportion with accuracy. But surprisingly many locals today say they had little connection to their sister city after 1945. And of the 105 survey respondents who lived in the region from 1945–52, fully sixty-two percent of Neustadters and thirty-five percent of Sonnebergers said they had "never" crossed the border—either legally or illegally—in these seven years! Fewer claimed to have crossed one to four times (thirty-one percent of Neustadters and thirty-nine percent of Sonnebergers), and the smallest proportion crossed five or more times (seven and twenty-six percent, respectively). There is no information available on how often people went back and forth before 1945, but by all accounts it was much more frequent. Indeed, seventy-five percent of this same subset of survey respondents stated that since reunification they cross the former boundary at least once a month.[42] The green border, though physically porous and in comparison to later decades no serious obstacle, divided the valley from its inception.

A growing sense of separateness was manifest in subtle but ubiquitous ways. Though mild in comparison to what the Cold-War idiom would soon become, early administrative practices in East and West encouraged a vocabulary of difference. Officials justified actions in the interests of "our" economy or

[40]ThHStAW LBdVP 175, 191–195 and 231–232.

[41]More densely populated regions to the west and north posed far greater problems for border forces. Crossing estimates vary widely in the fragmentary archival record according to reporting agency, variance in force strength, and patrol distances. Ranges derived from numerous daily, weekly, and monthly reports. For example, NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg 1200-2, 1205-2/3; BayHStA LFlüV 1120, 19–26; and ThHStAW Th-MInn 1126–1133.

[42]Moreover, many of the respondents were children during this period, among the most frequent crossers. Some may have been unwilling to confess to illegal crossings in their (anonymous) answers, but typically locals boast of such courageous early adventures. Of all the 260 respondents, ninety-five percent said they cross today at least once a year, eighty-one percent at least monthly, fifty-three percent at least weekly, and seventeen percent almost daily.

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"our people," local political parties campaigned on images of divergence, and nascent borderland policies established that proximity to the other zone merited "specific rights."[43] Meanwhile, newspapers on both sides portrayed the boundary as an insurmountable reality, rhetorically decrying its existence but sidestepping it as a concrete, solvable problem—its "ways" more "mysterious" than God's.[44] As early as 1947, Neustadt's *Neue Presse* launched a column on events in Sonneberg entitled "A Look over There."

Such everyday adaptations to partition suggest an almost reflexive expectation of permanence. After all, the proportion of American Zone residents believing Germany would reunite in the near term dropped dramatically from seventy percent in the winter of 1945–46 to under twenty percent by January 1948.[45] On the frontier, people tended to see the border as beyond their influence, a *fait accompli* amid Germany's postwar crises. Neustadters and Sonnebergers had not wanted a boundary to sever their valley, but when it did, they quickly accommodated and instrumentalized its precepts. The early adoption of the physical border helped to propel its ongoing expansion.

Transgression

The emerging lines of East and West, buttressed with posts, guards, policies, and rhetoric, became clearest when violated. As occupation and local governments increasingly criminalized unauthorized traffic, frontier residents began to enforce and denounce each other for transgressing this new border. Initiatives against social vagrancy were, of course, nothing new in Germany, predating the rise of National Socialism. Remarkable, though, is how readily Neustadters and Sonnebergers accepted "border-going" (*Grenzgängerei*) as a new category of offense and extended its stigma to their neighbors.

Border smugglers in Sonneberg and Neustadt came from every strata of the community, ranging from innkeepers to exporters, farmers, and officials. Easterners usually transported toys, glass, and other wares, while westerners mainly orchestrated or facilitated the exchanges. Illicit commerce became quite profitable for easterners, especially after currency reform in 1948, and creative side-businesses proliferated—from border-guides to border-bellhops. Neustadters' resentment grew. Not only were precious "calories wandering over the border," but crossers' purchasing power increased the prices and scarcity of goods.[46]

[43]Konrad Müller, September 30, 1946. SA-S C2-2. Heinz Woltz, November 5, 1947. SA-N 5697.

[44]"Bajuwarische Grenzen," *NP*, October 8, 1947.

[45]Richard Merritt, *Democracy Imposed: U.S. Occupation Policy and the German Public, 1945–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 319, 332.

[46]"Kalorien wandern über die Grenze," "Preise klettern in die Höhe," "Illegale Grenzgängerei wird zur Landplage," *NP*, February 7, November 2 and 27, 1948.

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Meanwhile, newspapers in each city placed this "sordid business" at the heart of the frontier's physical, economic, and moral dangers. Sonneberg's *Thüringer Volk* regularly itemized contraband uncovered at "hamster nests" and "plague spots" in mouth-watering detail, and warned that border-going brought profiteers, provocateurs, and various forms of pestilence from the West—such as polio, foot and mouth disease, and potato beetles.[47] Neustadt's *Neue Presse* was more accurate, especially in reporting eastern forces' violence, but likewise sensationalized the shadowy milieu of locals' border-going—with investigative reports on the tactics of voice and light signals, camouflage, and impersonation. Both newspapers warned of the "road plague"of "venereal diseased"women who lurked along the frontier, decrying the trespassers from the other side who had "sunken the morals of our people" through their "brazenness and impertinence."[48] The borderland became an imagined haunt of criminals and contagion, a breeding ground for literal and figurative "epidemics of all kinds."[49]

The contamination of children was of particular concern. Since youths were exempt from arrest, an estimated 300 Sonnebergers skipped school and crossed into Neustadt each day. They typically "dressed up as 'east-zonal,'" with ill-fitting shoes and ripped clothing "in order to arouse sympathy," suggesting that westerners expected easterners to appear needy and that easterners were fully aware of this stereotype.[50] Hannelore Reuther, who smuggled doll eyes in her preteen bra, remembers that Neustadters gave her money out of "pity"; but she admits, like most other former child-crossers, she and her sisters went door to door mostly for "adventure," pocket money, and ice cream.[51] Neustadters grew less tolerant of these exploits. The press routinely cataloged the crimes of these "juvenile pilferers," while Mayor Weppler proclaimed that "through their thefts of great audacity, insolent behavior, and begging, the crossing children have become a plague."[52] So youths ventured further south to Coburg, Bamberg, and even Munich. These larger cities likewise took action against the "begging and loafing," sending lists of "wayward" youths to Sonneberg's criminal police. In Bamberg, the Catholic Diocese actually requested the Soviet Zone better guard the frontier, while the city council

[47]"Coburger Hamsternest ausgehoben," "Eine Pestbeule wurde aufgestochen!" *Thüringer Volk* (*TV*), May 2 and December 14, 1946.

[48]"Wirtschaftliche Folgen durch illegale Grenzgänger," "'Späte Mädchen' im Scheinwerferlicht," *NP*, December 16, 1948 and September 12, 1950. R. Wricke, "Große und kleine Sünder an der 'Grenze,'" *TV*, August 21, 1948.

[49]"Penicillin und Insulin für Coburg," *NP*, March 6, 1946.

[50]"Kinder kommen über die Grenze," *NP*, October 23, 1948. "Besprechung betr. Schulschwänzerei—Grenzgängerei," October 19, 1949. SA-S C10-3.

[51]Interview with Hannelore Reuther; Neustadt, June 27, 2002.

[52]Weppler to Hans Ehard, November 18, 1948. SA-N 2050. "Jugendliche Langfinger," *NP*, May 12, 1948.

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institutionalized the children until their parents could travel to Bavaria and pay the bill, a tall order.[53]

Sonneberg's leaders scrambled to fix this humiliating problem. The city council targeted the parents of the "asocial," "depraved," and "work-shy" youths, organizing school and SED neighborhood meetings, threatening legal action and, more ominously, "harsh proceedings" from Soviet officials and secret police.[54] Sonneberg's leaders warned Thuringia's state parliament that since the West had handled "this shameful problem quite publicly," the crossing children "through their behavior and poor clothing" endangered the "political reputation of the East Zone."[55] Unable to feed, reform, or contain the young border-goers—and under continued pressure from Bavarian cities—Sonneberg ultimately built an embarrassing transit home for compulsory committals of the "willful youths."[56]

Endemic border-going remained problematic for both sides throughout this period. Soviet Zone officials worried that bedraggled crossers gave "a false impression of our living conditions," while the *Thüringer Volk* admonished its readership neither to beg in Neustadt telling "fairy tales" of hardship nor to be photographed by western journalists.[57] Meanwhile in the West, people worried that border-going had "greatly impaired the morals" of Neustadters. Four thousand gathered in the largest protest the city had ever seen to demand the closure of all "profiteering and illicit trading locales" and declare that "asocial elements of all kinds belonged in a work camp."[58]

This antipathy shaped authoritarian police practices along the frontier. In both cities, precipitous arrests, raids, and closure of locales frequented by "dark riff-raff and border-goers" became commonplace.[59] Measures in Neustadt were much less repressive than in Sonneberg, but initiatives for preventing and prosecuting illegal crossing in the West were certainly more surprising. Moreover, Neustadt became quite vocal in its campaign, the city council issuing a "cry for help" to Bavarian and American offices in November 1948 to warn that border smuggling endangered the food supply and "robbed" the city of

[53]Riedel, August 16, 1950. NACP RG466, HICOG-ID-Brd 1-2. Bamberg Diocese Caritas Union, November 7, 1947; plus file of police reports and correspondence between Sonneberg and Bavarian municipalities, 1947–49: SA-S C10-3.

[54]Sonneberg city council meeting—77, June 14, 1948. SA-S C10-3.

[55]Chairman of Sonneberg community councils, January 11 and 24, 1949. SA-S C3-97. Children's crossing also reached "catastrophic proportions" elsewhere along the zonal border, but was most pronounced in Sonneberg. Stempel, November 10, 1949. ThHStAW BMPr 1854, 4. Film 151.

[56]"Ernste Aufgaben für das Arbeitsamt," *TV,* October 12, 1949. Sonneberg city council—74, June 3, 1948. SA-S C2-7. Jugendheimstätte Kronach, September 11, 1951. BayHStA LFlüV 1152, 37–46.

[57]"Ein Kind wird zum Verbrecher," "Wir wollen Lehren daraus ziehen!" *TV,* May 20 and November 12, 1949.

[58]Weppler, November 18, 1948. "Machtvolle Streikkundgebung," *NP,* January 28, 1948.

[59]Woltz, August 22, 1946. SA-N 5697.

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vital tax revenue. Mayor Weppler demanded an increase in border forces and a system of "effective summary courts."[60] The Bavarian government promptly responded, and ensuing talks in Coburg decided the important provision to prosecute the "attempted export of wares."[61]

Thus, the brunt of Neustadt's new judicial system fell on local eastern traders. Of the more than 1,000 defendants hurriedly processed in its summary trials between January 1949 and October 1950, a staggering ninety-one percent were easterners from Thuringia (eighty-four percent from Sonneberg County)—ninety-five percent of whom had crossed for economic reasons.[62] A conviction in Neustadt often had consequences in Sonneberg. Border-goer Margarete Dorst, for example, had been granted a deferred sentence because she was eight months pregnant, but when she failed to appear in Neustadt after the birth of her child, the court issued a warrant for her arrest in the GDR and Margarete spent two months in Sonneberg's prison.[63] Indeed, police in East and West cooperated well in the name of frontier security, routinely sharing investigations and defendants' criminal files.

Meanwhile, border enforcement in Neustadt was a win-win proposition for western businessmen. They profited from cheaper eastern wares and, if caught, remained largely immune from prosecution. Easterners in their employ would be sentenced, yet Neustadt authorities were usually unable or unwilling to prove that the smuggling occurred with the bosses' knowledge.[64] Even if wares were confiscated, the Bavarian Border Police sold them off at steep discounts—up to fifty percent off the going price—so that, ironically, Neustadters could buy toys, dolls, and ornaments more cheaply when impounded than they could directly from eastern border-goers.[65]

Measures in Neustadt were of a piece with western actions elsewhere along the demarcation line. Faced with discontent in frontier towns and an estimated annual tax revenue loss of 800 million DM, West German officials increasingly concluded that "strengthening the border is urgent everywhere," and launched

[60]Weppler, November 18, 1948.

[61]Seifert, December 6, 1948. BayHStA B-MInn 91695.

[62]Synthesized Neustadt District Court records, 1949–1952. StA-C AG-N. Five percent of defendants were from Neustadt, mostly transplanted Sonnebergers trading with former networks in the East. Carrying around 100 DM worth of wares or food per person, at least four in ten were caught with Sonneberg-produced toys, dolls, and Christmas ornaments. Just nine percent also cited social and family reasons for crossing, one percent claimed they were leaving the East permanently—and there were hardly any political cases. Bavarian border guards typically registered first-time offenders, only bringing charges on the second or third offense for "repeated delinquent behavior." Summary court sentences were typically several weeks' probation or a choice between a 10–20 DM fine or a couple nights in jail, plus the costs of the trial and confiscation of wares.

[63]StA-C AG-N, case 168 (self-cataloged).

[64]Notable trials: StA-C AG-N, cases 59, 265, 285, 308–312, 467–469.

[65]"D-Mark als Magnet an der Zonengrenze," *NP*, October 12, 1948. Scheuerich, *Geschichte der Stadt Neustadt*, p. 246. Border police in Coburg County confiscated an average of 20,000 DM worth of goods per month from 1948–1951. BBP-Dir, Monthly Reports.

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force escalations to combat the "moral brutalization and degeneration" of "so-called backpack smuggling."[66] The customs police were given extensive executive powers and, by July 1951, had authority within ten kilometers of the boundary to stop citizens for ID controls, baggage and strip searches, and to conduct house inspections without a judicial warrant. In some locations western forces put up barbed wire fences and other border "barriers."[67] These restrictions, while startling given customary images of the West promoting an open border, still did not approach the brutality of the GDR's emerging police state. Eastern border enforcement was far harsher both in the numbers of crossers arrested and in their poor treatment. And the regime loudly publicized its "tough" punishments for "profiteers and saboteurs." In one such "big warning" in Sonneberg, glass smuggler Franz Greiner was sentenced to seven years in prison.[68]

Notwithstanding clear differences in severity, border enforcement in both Neustadt and Sonneberg drew heavily on denunciation. Informing had been prevalent during National Socialism and persisted in many aspects of postwar life—from denazification to work, housing, and the coerced testing and confinement of women placed on "venereal disease suspect lists."[69] In this ugly climate of recrimination, Neustadt's police became so inundated with spurious accusations that they asked citizens to stop sending them.[70] In Sonneberg, denunciation could be fatal. There were an appalling number of false arrests, particularly the deportation of seventy-seven Sonneberg teenagers during the winter of 1945–46 wrongly accused as "werewolves," or Nazi activists. KPD members were rewarded for their misinformation. The vice-mayor of Sonneberg-Oberlind allegedly received 2,000 *Reichmarks* for each of the fifteen youths he denounced.[71] More than half of the innocent teenagers died: twenty-nine from disease and malnutrition in the camps, one during transport to the Soviet Union, and nine from execution.[72]

[66]Riedl, April 9, 1949. NACP RG260, OMGB-B 1129-1. FRG Interior Ministry Press Release, May 12, 1950. BArch-K B106-15423. National Union for Peace and Liberty, July 19, 1951. BArch-K B137-691.

[67]"Zollkommissariat. Keine Panzersperren an der Zonengrenze," *NP*, July 21, 1951.

[68]"Entschlossene Kampfansage gegen den Schwarzhandel," *Das Volk*, November 13, 1951.

[69]Sanford Sussell, October 9, 1947. NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg: 1204-2. "Senkt die Zahl der Geschlechts-Krankheiten," *TV*, December 3, 1946. "Unescorted" women in the Coburg area were also rounded up on the street. In one notorious incident, U.S. troops took sixty-five theater-goers after a performance to the hospital. Because this raid, unlike most of the others, affected "a number of ladies from good circles," including the mayor's daughter, granddaughter, and daughter-in-law, the campaign was temporarily a subject of public outrage. Thereafter the U.S. military government directed that such "moral controls" (*Sittenkontrolle*) be "conducted in a democratic manner" and only collect women who were "infected [. . .] beyond a reasonable doubt." Totenhaupt, April 22, 1947; OMGB-IA, February 4, 1948. NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg: 1204-1; OMGB-ID: 158-6.

[70]"Anonyme Zuschriften zwecklos," *NP*, January 24, 1948.

[71]Coburg Regional Court, May 19, 1955. StA-C StAnw-403, 74–79.

[72]Benno Prieß, *Erschossen im Morgengrauen. "Werwolf"-Schicksale mitteldeutscher Jugendlicher* (Eigenverlag Benno Prieß, 2002), 122–124.

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Within this denunciatory culture, border security expanded to the entire community. Resentful Neustadters alerted the police to trespassing easterners in "justified" denunciations, so that half of those tried by the summary court were arrested while well inside the West, forty percent of whom were found inside private apartments, workshops, and taverns.[73] In Sonneberg, the regime admonished citizens to police themselves, to report crossers to local control committees, and keep their "eyes and ears open" for suspicious activities. The People's Police lauded citizens' cooperation in apprehending border violators and, by the 1950s, frontier residents were credited with initiating around twenty percent of all arrests.[74]

The East even successfully co-opted people into abducting those who escaped to the West. In the first year of occupation alone, "well over 100 people" were believed to have been taken from the Bavarian borderland.[75] These seizures took myriad forms. For example, after Thuringian guards shot at two border violators near Burned Bridge, regular "men from the community" were sent across the demarcation line to drag back the one wounded and one killed crosser from American territory.[76] One Sonneberger visited a former coworker in the West and lured him near the border while on a walk, so that he could be abducted by the People's Police.[77] In another case, Dr. Oliver Albrecht had fled to Neustadt and asked a former patient to retrieve belongings from his home and meet him at the demarcation line at a prearranged time. The man betrayed him—allegedly for just 150 East Marks—as Albrecht reached out to shake hands and was pulled over into the Soviet Zone. His twelve-year-old daughter Ursula stood there, thunderstruck.[78] Westerners, too, could be complicit in kidnappings. Once, four Neustadt policemen and a city councilor accepted 1,000 RM each to take Bernd Meusel, who had fled from Sonneberg, back across the border. He was later executed.[79] This cross-border cooperation continued. Neustadters were reportedly reluctant to cooperate in investigations given the prevailing climate of fear, but in the 1950s and 1960s, Bavaria's highest court tried an average of nine people per year from the region for *Stasi*-collaboration.[80] It is, to be sure, remarkable how readily people adjusted to such measures. While some surely feared the consequences of noncompliance,

[73]Forty percent were caught on their way westward and eleven percent going eastward. Synthesized court records, StA-C AG-N. "Eine 'gerechtfertigte' Denunziation," *NP,* September 4, 1948.

[74]"Schütze Dich selbst!" *TV,* December 17, 1948.

[75]Martin Leubner, April 23, 1960. StA-C StAnw-54, 1.

[76]Riedl to OMGB, February 19, 1948. BayHStA PrBGP 118.

[77]Correspondence Riedl-Hugunin, June 6–27, 1951. BayHStA PrBGP 119.

[78]StA-C StAnw-23. Riedl, October 11 and November 22, 1949. BayHStA PrBGP 118; NACP RG466, HICOG-ID-Brd 2–4.

[79]StA-C StAnw-403 and 54.

[80]Register, Bavarian Highest Regional Court. BayHStA BayObLG.

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actual punishments do not appear to have been especially dire.[81] It would seem the GDR enlisted collaborators mainly by just asking them.

The relative lack of controversy over early border enforcement is also noteworthy. Indeed, interviewees were typically surprised by the question of whether they had seen the new border as illegitimate. People explained that while they had feared the Soviet army and were annoyed by travel strictures, they felt they had little choice but to acquiesce to the new reality. One former Neustadt Border Policeman was confused when asked if he had ever had second-thoughts about his job. Crossing was illegal and, while he sometimes "pitied" the eastern border-goers, he had "no problems" with enforcement—the guards "were hungry, too."[82]

Ironically, the validity of the border would be questioned only several years later, once it was firmly entrenched. But in these early years stability was paramount. Border-goers were emblematic of Germany's disorder, highlighting and exploiting the growing divergence between East and West. Widespread resentment of the crossers furthered acceptance of the frontier. As locals increasingly criminalized these transgressors, the bounds of civility in the borderland were themselves transgressed.

Departure

More problematic than the unregulated to and fro over the frontier, however, was the permanent emigration of easterners to the West. As the largest adjacent towns along the green border, Sonneberg and Neustadt were a lightening rod for mass population movements. The continuous traffic of refugees from Soviet occupied territory, combined with the settlement of 2,500 to 3,000 expellees in each city, strapped local resources and fueled resentment of outsiders. And numerous Sonnebergers fled to Neustadt; it is not known how many since locals typically made private arrangements for relocation, but residents speculate that it ran into the thousands.[83] Fearing destabilization, governments on both sides progressively sought to disentangle their populations.

Yet restructuring was difficult in this poor and close-knit region. Not only were crafts industries slow to rebound after 1945, but the border interrupted the enmeshed geography of manufacture. A typical doll, for example, traditionally moved between several communities in its formation. The body might be made in Neustadt and painted in Wildenheid, sent to Sonneberg-Bettelecken to an eye-inserter, then back to Neustadt to a doll-hairdresser, then over to

[81]For example, StA-C StAnw-54. 44–46.

[82]Interview with Andreas Thiel; Neustadt, February 17, 2003.

[83]Neustadt's population grew thirty-six percent from 13,130 in 1939 to 17,860 in 1950, of which roughly half is attributable to expellees. Scheuerich, *Geschichte der Stadt Neustadt*, 394. Official records place the number of eastern emigrants at around 500.

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Sonneberg-Oberlind to a doll-clothes-maker and cobbler. This interconnection facilitated postwar flight. Since crafts did not require expensive machinery but portable skilled labor, Sonneberg artisans and exporters took advantage of their ready-made networks in the West and left in disproportionate numbers to begin anew in Neustadt. Flight to Neustadt was so widespread that Sonnebergers today often feel they need to justify why they remained in the East. Most explain they believed the border was temporary and cite attachment to family and community as reasons for staying. Many also admit to fears of starting over from scratch, having a business, vocation, or property with which they were reluctant to part. As Siegfried Tenner put it, his family "naturally wanted to" go and "had always, always" thought about it, but was reluctant to leave behind close relatives and his father's toy company. And "no one thought to just say outright that we should all just go now."[84]

Leaving Sonneberg in the late 1940s was nowhere near as difficult as it would soon become. The Soviet Zone's initial emigration policies were unclear and contradictory. And while Sonneberg's city council disliked the disorder of illegal traffic, some officials believed that legal resettlement to the West "should be supported for procuring housing space."[85] Moreover, Sonnebergers who later wanted to return home were often unwelcome as the city chafed under the additional costs of finding them new homes and ration cards. Local administrators were even less receptive toward immigrating westerners and severely restricted entrance and residence permits.[86] These early attitudes toward population loss and potential gain are certainly startling, considering that by 1952–53 the GDR went to extraordinary lengths to recruit returnees and westerners as socialist victories—and to hold in the rest of its population by force.

Indeed, Sonneberg soon rued the long-term consequences of the exodus. The city's toy, doll, and glass industries, already hurt by severance from former western export markets, suffered a fatal loss of skilled workers. In 1949 officials in Berlin worried about the restlessness of the city's 2,700 unemployed and deemed this a pressing "political problem." Also, since around 1,300 craftsmen remained in home workshops, GDR authorities decided it was these production modes of early capitalism that made "petty bourgeois" Sonnebergers so susceptible to flight and western influence.[87] Thus the state launched an initiative to "strengthen industrialization"in Sonneberg and other border counties. But, as elsewhere in the GDR, the expansion of state-owned enterprises in

[84]Interview with Siegfried Tenner, Sonneberg, February 3, 2003.

[85]Sonneberg city council meeting—55, March 2, 1948. SA-S C2-7. Scholars have interpreted early Soviet Zone emigration policy variously; see Helge Heidemeyer, *Flucht und Zuwanderung aus der SBZ/DDR 1945/1949–1961*(Düsseldorf: Droste, 1994), 62–63.

[86]Sonneberg city council meeting—76, June 11, 1948. SA-S C2-8. "Zuzug nach Sonneberg," *TV,* November 26, 1946.

[87]BArch-B DE 1-11288, 1, 5–19. One third of Sonnebergers worked in nationalized enterprises in 1950, with two thirds in small and artisan businesses.

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Sonneberg, the introduction of new factories and industries, and trade cooperatives provoked much "open resistance."[88] These changes did little to keep frontier residents at home and, if anything, alienated them even more.

By 1950–51 the GDR increasingly limited contact with the West by force, drastically reducing frontier travel and work permits, monitoring interzonal communications, and severing roads, footpaths, and rail lines that even briefly meandered over the border.[89] Sonnebergers who spent much time in the FRG were to be regarded with the "utmost caution" and, in fact, the GDR began purging borderland communities—in waves of arrests, house searches, and property seizures—well before the notorious expulsions of 1952.[90]

Still, hundreds of Sonnebergers worked across the border illegally. Easterners typically labored at rock bottom wages for long stretches, returning home to their families once a month to claim ration cards. That so many chanced this dangerous passage is testament to how pronounced economic differences were, and to how hard life in Sonneberg had become. Neustadters generally resented these undocumented workers, fearful of competition and wage pressures. Neustadt's city council restricted admittance, worried that "undesirable elements" would bring over their families and burden municipal resources.[91]

The West German and U.S. military governments were likewise wary of arriving easterners.[92] Bavarian state officials, in particular, commonly regarded the refugees as "illegals" or "asocials" who "commit thefts, sexual crimes, and other offenses" and become a "dangerous [...] burden on the state"; some even "presumed" that the GDR deliberately tried to "get rid of" those "not one hundred percent fit to work."[93] The head of the Bavarian Refugee Administration went so far as to call the influx a vast Soviet conspiracy, speculating that "mass flight to Bavaria is fostered with the intention to create chaotic conditions

[88]Preuß and Vogt, October 11, 1950. BArch-B DE 1-11425, 1–9. BArch-B DE 1-11288, 22, 24–30, 34. Siegfried Rau, "Die Entwicklung der Bündnispolitik der Arbeiterklasse unter Führung der Kreisparteiorganisation Sonneberg der SED, 1949–52s" (Schleusingen: Bezirksparteischule "W. Pieck," 1976), StA-M SED-BL-Su V/1/1/191, 41–42.

[89]The American High Commissioner and FRG officials were rather tepid in their response to this dwindling access. For example, Slater, November 9, 1951. AA Abt. 2 Bd. 451, Nr. A 7334, 29 (16–19), and Thiedick query, February–March 1950, BArch-K B106-15423. Of greatest regional concern were the commuting difficulties of 80 to 250 Bavarian miners who worked in the Thuringian Lehesten slate quarry and the 100 to 200 eastern porcelain workers who worked in the Bavarian Tettau region through successive wage restrictions, invasive controls, and arbitrary border closures. ThHStAW Th-MInn 3038, 33–57. BArch-B DO 1-8.0.296, 15–33.

[90]Sonneberg County Chairman, April 28, 1950. SA-S C3-155, C2-9. Riedl, October 21, 1950, May 15 and June 21, 1951. NACP RG466, HICOG-ID-Brd 2–3, 1–2, and 2–2.

[91]"Keine Aufenthaltsbewilligung für illegale Grenzgänger," *NP*, July 10, 1948. Measures detailed in Neustadt Economic Supervisory Board Reports, SA-N 4403.

[92]Further discussion: Heidemeyer, *Flucht und Zuwanderung*, 28–32. Volker Ackermann, *Der "echte" Flüchtling. Deutsche Vertriebene und Flüchtlinge aus der DDR, 1945–1961* (Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Rasch, 1995), 76–85.

[93]Mulzer, April 12, 1950; Riedl, May 24, 1950. NACP RG466, HICOG-ID-Brd 1–2 and 2–2.

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in our housing sector and economy and thus prepare political events," and urged a "uniform blockage of the western zones from the Russian Zone."[94]

Western Germany forcibly sent back "illegal refugees" on buses and trains. Yet the Soviet Zone regularly refused readmittance, exacerbating diplomatic tensions and causing worry in the American military government that there would be "an increase in illegal border crossers if it becomes known that we cannot return them."[95] The FRG ended compulsory return in 1949, but easterners denied refugee status were still strongly encouraged to leave on state transports. And border guards themselves had considerable power in determining who was eligible for asylum consideration. When one man crossing to Neustadt declared himself a political refugee, a Bavarian sentry reportedly "drove him like a cow back over the border," muttering "we have enough of your sort here."[96]

Inundated with 1.5 million emigrants from East Germany by 1951, the FRG progressively expanded frontier security and rejected more than sixty percent of refugee applicants.[97] After border closure in 1952, easterners would be increasingly respected as victims of totalitarianism—but during this volatile period of partial partition, the media played up their cost (two DM per person per day, a total of six million DM per month) as well as sensational stories of scams and crimes.[98] Consequently these immigrants found "difficult starting conditions" in the West, typified by "rigidity, distrust, and lack of understanding," particularly in inundated border regions.[99] There were certainly numerous acts of generosity from individuals, church groups, and voluntary associations. But for the most part, former easterners in Neustadt today say they felt like second-class citizens and turned to each other, developing their own social and employment networks. Transplant Inge Mulzer believes that locals still remain sensitive to these early

[94]Wolfgang Jaenicke, July 8 and November 30, 1947. BayHStA LFlüV 1120, 49–50, 32–36. English version: NACP RG260, OMGB-ID 153-8.

[95]HQ Third U.S. Army, November 26, 1946. NACP RG260, OMGB-ID 170-3. Bavaria negotiated the return of around 2,000 border crossers per week, but in reality returnee numbers were much smaller, around 350 weekly. BayHStA LFlüV 1120.

[96]Leonhard Schwarz, June 3 and 28, 1952. StA-C StAnw-2. In the Neustadt region an average of seventy crossers apprehended a month claimed to be political refugees and were transferred to the camp at Hof, where around half were granted asylum. Of those that weren't, only twenty-five percent chose to return to the East on state transports, the remainder "disappearing" illegally into Bavaria. "Verbrecher strömen nach Bayern," *Frankenpost*, April 4, 1949. BBP Monthly Reports, 1948–1951. Published weekly BBP reports, *NP*, 1951–52.

[97]Attitudes changed abruptly after border closure in 1952, however, and more than eighty percent of applicants were admitted throughout the 1950s. Meanwhile, an average of 50,000 westerners each year resettled in the GDR. Heidemeyer, *Flucht und Zuwanderung*, 43–46, 99–100.

[98]Ankermüller, November 14, 1949. BArch-K B106-15423. Public debate over the FRG's policy came to a head in the autumn of 1949; the headlines speak for themselves: e.g., "Flüchtlingsstrom Kritisch, Bonner Kabinett sucht nach Lösungen. Dr. Adenauer: 'Äußerst kostspielig,'" *Die Welt*, October 19, 1949; "Dunkle Wege führen nach Westdeutschland," *Süddeutscher Zeitung*, November 3, 1949; "Ostflüchtlinge werden zum Problem. Pro Monat 4000. Strengere Grenzsperre?" *Nürnberger Nachrichten*, November 18, 1949.

[99]Hans-Joachim Firgau, 1951. BArch-K B137-28.

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East-West distinctions. After sixty years in Neustadt she has "always remained a Sonneberger," and says that natives still regard her as from "another country."[100]

Stereotyped images of East and West formed early along the frontier, personified by the emigrants and border-goers who transgressed the unstable demarcation between them. Both sides criminalized crossing in the effort to purge their borderlands of these "trespassers" and "infiltrators." The early border soon expanded into a physical, legal, economic, and social barrier—as anxious occupiers, state governments, and frontier residents took ever more divisive action to fix the boundaries of East and West Germany.

Positioning

Increasingly, the border came to symbolize divergence. Whether contemporaries truly believed a transformation of civilizations had occurred since 1945, the FRG and GDR positioned the boundary as its protector from contagious threats of the other. Especially after currency reform and the Berlin Blockade, the Iron Curtain became a new idiom of expression, alternately invoked and deplored to political advantage. It was a powerful instrument to widely different constituencies, gaining in importance with manipulation and entrenchment. Rather swiftly, partition became in both sides' interest. By 1949 borderland residents already felt this acute divide; the western mayor of neighboring Coburg publicly admitted that "enormous problems would result from the fall of the 'Iron Curtain.' The completely prostrate East Zone would endanger the West Zone."[101]

Neustadt's exploitation of the border is particularly striking. An examination of local machinations provides a surprising glimpse into the role of western interests in buttressing the early boundary, shifting the conventional focus from the GDR's imposition of the Iron Curtain. In Sonneberg's shadow for more than a century, Neustadters artfully maximized the demarcation line to their advantage, remaking the region's economy within just a few years. The city saw remarkable growth with the influx of Sonneberg workers and businesses after currency reform. In fact, from 1948–51 total income rose from 1.15 to 2.9 million DM, an average of thirty-six percent a year.[102] This prosperity didn't stop local officials from doggedly lobbying for subsidies and bombarding

[100]Interview with Inge Mulzer; Neustadt, December 13, 2002. Interviews and access to private papers revealed far more extensive assistance to easterners than was apparent in governmental archives, mainly because help typically went through back channels. For example, Giesela Greiner, "Errinerungen," and Correspondence Firma Eisenhandlung Dehler, 1945–52, both Neustadt: Private possession.

[101]"Amerikanische Deutschland-Politik grundlegend geändert," *NP*, July 22, 1949.

[102]The initial postwar years had been hard on the city, but Neustadt became prosperous compared to other border regions and, despite rhetoric about the flight of industry, twice as many firms settled in Neustadt as left between 1948 and 1951 (658 to 337). "Verwaltungs- und Tätigkeitsbericht, 1948–1952," SA-N 5698, 7–8, 28. "Tätigkeitsbericht des Ordnungsamtes, 1948–51," August 15, 1951, SA-N 4403, 59–61.

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Munich and Bonn with proclamations of economic doom. Yet continual complaints about material conditions failed to convince central authorities to prioritize "Christmas ornaments over steel," and Neustadt did not originally qualify for federal Borderland Assistance because it was too well off.[103]

So Neustadt's leaders decided to revamp their rhetoric, adopting a new marketing strategy of plucky political struggle. In an April 1950 lecture on "How Neustadt Promotes Itself," Mayor Weppler urged city councilors, businessmen, and the local Working Group for Advertising and Sales to emphasize the town's "fighting optimism" against the Iron Curtain.[104] Locals duly put on a brave face for journalists and, rather than grousing about economic hardship, moralized about the communist menace and the harrowing plight of refugees. Soon, a parade of important officials traipsed through the region, posing for pensive photographs at Burned Bridge and gazing upon the East through military binoculars. Within a month of launching the new campaign, Bavarian Culture Minister Alois Hundhammer was sufficiently impressed with Neustadt's martyrdom to promise assistance "in this dead corner of a vast concentration camp wall."[105]

Amid such anti-Communist posturing Bavarian and federal authorities decided to regard the border as not just an economic demarcation, but also a political and cultural concern. Swayed by calls for self-defense in a "battle of civilizations" along the West's new "border with Asia," the FRG expanded frontier assistance from its initial economic mandate. In fact, borderland funds grew out of a Nazi-era program in eastern regions to protect against Slavic influence. Evidently, communism had already transformed East Germany into a foreign nation, necessitating protection against the "endangerment of Germandom."[106]

In Neustadt itself, residents still fretted that the boundary was not "hermetically sealed."[107] Frustrated that Munich and Bonn were not doing enough to

[103]"Konferenz über Zonengrenzprobleme," March 13, 1951. SA-N 4343, 110–123. Originally, federal Borderland Assistance was to be an economic program for severely depressed communities, particularly along the Bavarian-Czech border, where unemployment ran more than thirty percent. Ironically, these regions were soon marginalized with the escalation of the inter-German border after 1952. In 1950 Neustadt qualified as one of sixty Bavarian counties designated a depressed area (*Notstandsgebiet*), but by 1951 was upgraded to a lesser subsidized "redevelopment area" (*Sanierungsgebiet*) to the great consternation of city leaders. BayHStA B-StK 14466.

[104]"Wir kämpfen um die baldige Aufhebung der Zonengrenzen," *NP*, April 6, 1950.

[105]"Kultusminister Dr. Hundhammer in der Puppenstadt," *NP*, April 29, 1950. State visits: BayHStA B-StK 13077; SA-N 5823.

[106]B-StK, March 2, 1950, plus files: BayHStA B-StK 14466/67, and BArch-K B137-579. Erich Vieth, "Oberfranken das Aschenbrödel Westdeutschlands," *NP*, March 24, 1951. The concept of cultural endangerment along the zonal boundary was advanced by the Bavarian Party in 1949 and initially met with resistance; cultural funds were traditionally for regions bordering foreign states (e.g., the "Danish danger"). The government of Bavaria increasingly lobbied Bonn for help along the demarcation line, continuing to add Coburg County, for example, to the list of declared "depressed areas" despite federal rejections.

[107]Handwerkskammer Coburg, December 23, 1949. SA-N 4404. "Auswirkungen des Grenzverkehrs erfordern Sonderregelung," *NP*, October 18, 1949.

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protect "our economy" and "our currency" in this "state of emergency," the city council launched a series of initiatives to limit the dangers of "dirty competition" from the East. Meanwhile, it cherry-picked people and products from Sonneberg to position the town best, each time invoking the border as a pretext.[108] In a shrewd conference agenda, Mayor Weppler itemized the city's border wish list in his own words:

- Transfer of important and desired enterprises from the East Zone
- Keeping away unwanted and unreliable companies from the East Zone
- Moving allowances and accommodation for important skilled workers from the East Zone
- Departure of incorrectly placed and regionally burdensome workers into more prosperous regions
- Prevention of illegal mass imports of goods from the East Zone
- Legalization of important special imports for export needs.[109]

While denying entrance to many easterners in the name of border defense, for instance, the city council happily recruited people skilled in critical industries, wheedling from the border police work authorizations or at least "unofficial tolerance." The workers' legal residence in the West was contingent upon remaining at their initial job; if fired or fickle, they were to be sent back to the GDR.[110] Neustadt was similarly selective in admitting Sonneberg companies. More than fifty had opened branch offices after 1948, drawn by close access to free-trade privileges.[111] Western leaders worried that Sonneberg franchises could sell cheaper eastern wares directly and created a special committee in 1950 to screen out firms that were "redundant" (i.e., competing toy and doll companies and wholesalers).[112] Further, the city conducted an audit of thirty-two Sonneberg branches for tax evasion, wage violations, and illegal workers, and suspected "sham enterprises" as fronts for smugglers or communists. Neustadt businessmen also enlisted government to head off sources of eastern competition, from denying Sonneberg firms display opportunities at the Nuremberg toy fair to restricting eastern exports. In the end, the city denied relocation for dozens of companies.[113]

[108]Otto Wagner, October 2, 1949. SA-N 4404. Weppler, December 27, 1949. SA-N 2050.

[109]Weppler, July 12, 1950. SA-N 4343, 65–72.

[110]Weppler, January 20, 1950. SA-N 2050. Application screenings: SA-N 2191. This practice elsewhere in Bavaria: BayHStA LFlüV 1152.

[111]ThHStAW LBdVP 175, 28–29, 109–129. It appears that more Sonneberg firms relocated westward than the GDR's average of nine to thirteen percent, but the exact proportion is unknown. Peter Hefele, *Die Verlagerung von Industrie- und Dienstleistungsunternehmen aus der SBZ/DDR nach Westdeutschland* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998), 54–55, 116–117.

[112]Neustadt city council meeting, November 10, 1949. SA-N StRPr 024-10/1.

[113]BBP Neustadt, January 21, 1950. SA-N 4404. Files: SA-N 4343 and 4403/04.

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Meanwhile, Neustadt successfully leveraged border policy to create a profitable glass-making industry where none had existed before. Lauscha, just north of Sonneberg, had been a center of Christmas ornament and doll-eye production. Upon being cut off from vital western markets, hundreds of glass-blowers began smuggling their wares across the border. Neustadt exporters quickly found it more efficient to move people, and commonly employed the easterners as intermittent, illegal workers. Yet all was not solved by easing the flow of glass-blowers. The GDR agonized about the loss of skilled labor and, anxious the drain made remaining Lauschaers "intractable," took strong punitive measures against the crossing craftsmen as "egoists," "vermin," and "industrial thieves"—making migrant work more problematic for all concerned.[114]

Since most glass eyes continued to be crafted in Lauscha, trade restrictions after 1951 meant that Neustadt's dolls had to remain sightless. The visible doll-eye shortage received state and media attention; the city worked hard to win import exceptions from Munich and Bonn, and asked local customs offices to turn a blind eye to illicit sourcing.[115] Ultimately, Neustadt resolved to "become the center in place of Sonneberg," lobbying for state and federal funds to simply "transfer" the glass industry across the border as "an economic display window of the West." Thus in the early 1950s Neustadt constructed a state-of-the-art facility, training school, and housing settlement for eastern glass-blowers, who within a few years numbered 1,200. Ironically, the Lauscha craftsmen are today seen as escaped refugees, not the trophies of a clever city strategy.[116]

Thus Neustadt tailored the border to its needs, catapulting to new prosperity beyond the FRG's broader economic miracle. In directing the cross-border movement of workers, businesses, and industries, the western town emerged in the 1950s as the hub of toy, doll, and glass export that Sonneberg had been before. Over the years, economic self-interest and Cold-War rhetoric proved a powerful combination, and most locals today admit that Neustadt profited from the border's construction.

As Neustadt's economy stabilized in the early 1950s, material concerns gave way to political anxieties. Anti-communist rhetoric warned that the GDR plotted to create "instability" along the frontier to "recruit followers" through the "infiltration of radical ideas."[117] Neustadt's KPD, long derided as inept and innocuous, stoked fears that "Moscow had a long arm" and seemed

[114]Sonneberg County Parliament—2, March 20, 1952. ThHStAW Th-MInn 1583, 135–136. Wagner, February 14, 1951. StA-M KR-S 29. Files: StA-M KR-S 29 and 276; ThHStAW Th-MInn 1127.

[115]Weppler, November 12, 1950. SA-N 4343, 85; and 79–84, 110–123.

[116]"Haus der Oberfränkischen Spielzeugindustrie," *NP*, November 3, 1951. Konferenz über Zonengrenzprobleme, March 13, 1951. Neustadt Christmas Museum, permanent exhibition.

[117]Weppler, February 4, 1951. SA-N 4343, 94–97. "Grenzgänger der SEP," *Echo Der Woche*, February 3, 1950.

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progressively threatening amid ongoing reports that agents were "slipping across" the border in great numbers.[118] In reality, though, there was little danger of communism making significant inroads in Neustadt—rather the opposite. From 1946–1952, the electoral support for the KPD shrank from eleven to three percent, while far-right-wing nationalism grew alarmingly. Nazi discourse shaped actual politics as well as early Cold-War rhetoric. In April 1952 Friedrich Schubart, Neustadt's unrepentant Nazi area leader and mayor (1926/1934–45) ran as a staunch anti-communist and, garnering forty-seven of the vote, nearly ousted SPD Mayor Weppler, who himself was hardly soft on the GDR.[119]

The GDR's vigorous propaganda campaigns aggravated anti-communism in Neustadt, as the frontier became a battleground for the transmission and interdiction of propaganda. An estimated 1,000 pounds of eastern leaflets went to and through Coburg County each month, sent by air balloon, direct mail, or hidden in farmers' carts or hollow doll bodies.[120] Border demonstrations and torchlight parades further overwhelmed western propaganda efforts. The GDR also barraged the frontier with western "peace activists," offering all-expenses-paid trips to thousands of youths and leftists from the FRG to attend sporting events or political demonstrations in the East. Because the Federal Republic denied interzonal passes for such assemblies, the GDR helped these westerners cross illegally; Sonneberg's elaborate operation to guide 2,500–3,000 youths from the FRG to the 1951 World Youth Sports Festival in Berlin was deemed one of the "best collection points in the Republic."[121] In fact, the GDR

[118]Neustadt's court sentenced KPD member Rudolf Ahr, who had spent five-and-a-half years in a Nazi concentration camp, to two months in prison for illegal border crossing and "intimidating" a border policeman with the "threat" of Moscow's "long arm." StA-C AG-N case 377. "Moscow hat einen langen Arm," *NP*, October 13, 1951. "20 Red Agents a Day Reported Slipping Across Line Into West," *The Washington Post*, July 8, 1950.

[119]In 1950 the neo-Nazi *Deutsche Block* (DB) split the FDP vote in Neustadt, which, together with the SPD, had dominated postwar politics. FDP leaders pledged to form a coalition government with the DB in the 1952 election, and endorsed Schubart in the run-off. In the first round of voting, Schubart won thirty-eight percent to Weppler's forty-five percent, and the DB claimed six of Neustadt's twenty-one city council seats (SPD: eight, FDP: four). "Neustadt im Zweilicht," "Wiederwahl Dr. Wepplers," *NP*, April 1 and 8, 1952. Schubart had accepted responsibility for the arrest of eighty Social Democrats and the deportation of nine men to Dachau. He was interned for two-and-a-half years and, in his denazification trial, placed in category II and sentenced to time already served. Many of Neustadt's former Nazis were easily able to reenter public life, aided by the inadequacy of local denazification proceedings and people's continued deference. This was certainly not limited to Neustadt, but also included forty-four mayors in Coburg County, fifteen Coburg County councilors, and six Coburg City councilors. "Friedrich Schubart—Belasteter," *Neue Presse*, July 7, 1948. Thomas Tadross, August 9, 1948. NACP RG260, OMGB-Cbg 1199-2. Neustadt's KPD was particularly fractious and disorganized; party records: BArch BY1-290.

[120]Thomsen, July 13, 1951. NACP RG466, HICOG-B-ID: EEI 1-4. Overview of cross-border propaganda: Heike Amos, *Die Westpolitik der SED 1948/49–1961* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), 60–63.

[121]Rost, June 30, 1951, plus files: StA-M KR-S 6 and SED-KL-Sbg IV/4.07/152.

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encouraged western political crossings as itself a mode of demonstration, provoking violent border confrontations that garnered widespread media attention.[122]

In this tense climate, political crossers became a main priority of western security. Smuggling continued, but after late 1950, eighty-one percent of defendants in Neustadt's border court were political—mostly western activists transporting propaganda or attending events in the GDR. The proportion of eastern defendants from Thuringia dropped from ninety-one to just seven percent.[123] Border enforcement also became more acrimonious. Small-time smugglers had seldom resisted or protested their arrests, but the files of political activists are replete with insults, threats, bitter depositions, and indignant appeals. Neustadt's Border Police had difficulty even keeping in custody the seventy-two western "left radicals" arrested returning from the First German Peace Congress in Berlin.[124] Western authorities were far less forgiving toward unapologetic political crossers than eastern border-goers they deemed to be in need, and tended to sentence leftists more severely than smugglers caught with backpacks full of illegal wares.

In their anti-communist zeal, Bavarian guards also preemptively arrested people for intending to cross the border. Two visiting young women drinking coffee at a Neustadt border inn were actually sentenced to one week's probation for this thought-crime.[125] Bavarian Interior Minister Wilhelm Hoegner urged Bonn to create a federal law that, building upon a 1942 Nazi-era decree, would deem that any "unauthorized stay in [border] districts is considered an attempt of illegal crossing"—and thereby render intent to cross a punishable offense.[126]

Border enforcement in the Federal Republic did not ultimately go that far and approached nowhere near the severity of the GDR. Still, some western travelers were stunned by frontier measures, appealing that enforcement practices exceeded the original purpose of the demarcation line or that "honest" citizens would "later regret" enforcing border laws, just as they had the criminal laws of the Third Reich. One western crosser simply lamented the absurdity of "Germans who punish Germans because they are visiting Germans in Germany, just because the colonial masters want them to."[127]

[122]See, for example, "Red Youths Defy Inspection, Stage Sitdown at Border," *The Washington Post*, June 1, 1950. "1000 versuchten gewaltsamen Grenzübertritt," *NP*, August 9, 1951.

[123]StA-C AG-N synthesized records, November 1950–June 1952. In this second data set, seven percent of the 430 defendants claimed they were crossing for economic reasons, five percent to visit loved ones, four percent to leave the GDR permanently, and three percent seeking employment.

[124]StA-C AG-N, cases 278–279.

[125]Neustadt District Court, StA-C AG-N, case 372.

[126]Wilhelm Hoegner, December 11, 1951. BayHStA B-MInn 91700.

[127]StA-C AG-N, cases 346 and 353. Such rhetoric was invoked by numerous political activists and was common in GDR propaganda, but also appeared in various guises across the political spectrum.

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But few frontier residents voiced such objections. And as East and West grandstanded about harsh border security on the other side, hypocrisy became a matter of course. Sonneberg authorities loudly condemned the FRG's use of "terror" against leftist western crossers, yet threatened their own citizens with dire punishment for attempting passage. Neustadt's *Neue Presse* belabored stories of people wrongly detained by eastern police, yet gave only perfunctory coverage, if at all, to western abuses. Ultimately, for all of the heated rhetoric about border repression, most locals reflexively or cynically adjusted to the escalations. The border was the law, and "officials are just following orders." And beyond simply accepting this as an "unalterable reality," over time people manipulated it to their best advantage.[128] In turn, locals unwittingly laid the groundwork for severance, helping to transform an administrative demarcation into a criminal, economic, and political boundary between two new states.

Conclusion

These early divisions set the stage for 1952 and 1961. The GDR's violent closure of the border was facilitated by the accommodations of the immediate postwar period. In June 1952 the regime relied on the cooperation of local residents and officials to construct fences, clear trees, denounce and evacuate hundreds of "unreliable" citizens—and to sustain surveillance in the Restricted Zone. The quiescent response on the western side of the boundary did little to disrupt these measures. Meanwhile, as the frontier became more impermeable, East Germans who opted to flee increasingly left through Berlin, which remained open. In fact, most of the 500 Sonnebergers who fled each year during the 1950s went in relative safety through West Berlin and travel visas, not over the border in their backyards.[129] The fearsome frontier thus intensified the Berlin crisis, funneling discontented East Germans to this hole in the Iron Curtain. Mass departure through Berlin is commonly regarded as evidence of the GDR's essential weakness, unable to win over or retain millions of its citizens. But hidden behind this obvious failure was a formidable strength. After all, the exodus resulted from unprecedented control and compliance on the much longer 1,380-kilometer frontier. It was precisely the effectiveness of this other border that portended the Berlin Wall in 1961.[130]

In comparison to East Germany's draconian measures, the green border (1945–52) is now nostalgically remembered as an age of innocence. Popular understanding of severance—a belief in early unity versus a currently

[128]"Moscow hat einen langen Arm," *NP*, October 13, 1951.

[129]Synthesized border reports, primarily from Kreisarchiv Sonneberg (KrA-S) Abteilung Inneres, 1953–61. Meanwhile, Sonneberg registered a yearly average of around one hundred East German returnees and fifty West German immigrants.

[130]This important point is explored at length in my forthcoming dissertation, "Burned Bridge," which spans the entire postwar period.

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unbridgeable gap between East and West Germans—posits that societies are slow to change and underestimates the magnitude of short-term shifts. Events at Burned Bridge, however, suggest that people adjusted their allegiances rather quickly, revealing the border's emergence in the tumult of the postwar period and the heritage of National Socialism. The dynamic of division was far messier than Neustadters and Sonnebergers today would like to believe, many of whom hold to a vision of citizens without agency and a Wall without foundations.

Ironically, Sonnebergers and Neustadters were most at odds when the border was open and felt closest when it was closed. During partial partition (1945–52) and reunification (post-1990), a permeable boundary allowed disparate infrastructures to clash, fueling oppositional interests and animosities. But during severance (1952–89), limited contact enhanced rosy fantasies of generous, big-hearted *Wessis* and virtuous, grateful *Ossis*. These feelings of kinship and estrangement themselves propelled geopolitical changes—just as the disappointment of long-idealized "attachments in the head" helped to create today's "wall in the head," or "*Mauer im Kopf*."

The Iron Curtain was fundamental to East and West Germany—as well as to the Cold War as a whole. Its evolution reflected and triggered major turning points in global relations: 1948–49, 1952, 1961, 1972, and 1989–90. And, as the two Germanies defined themselves relationally, the identity of each became linked to the boundary between them. For the Federal Republic, the Iron Curtain enhanced an integrative consensus of freedom against totalitarianism. For the GDR, stemming the flight of millions was essential to viability; the state crumbled as soon as the border fell. While the border embodied the relationship between both states and their citizens, its overcoming at the Brandenburg Gate in 1989 serves as a new, positive foundational myth of which, notwithstanding current tensions, both easterners and westerners remain proud.

This story of transformation in one homogenous region casts the border as a protagonist of Germany's division, exposing its multifaceted roles to constituents on both sides. It raises questions about the effect of imposed boundaries elsewhere in the world. Politics is personal, and new borders have unforeseen consequences. While the inter-German frontier was devised in Moscow, Washington, Berlin, and Bonn, it was shaped and reinforced in lasting ways by the adaptive tactics of the people who lived along it. By polarizing interests and identities, the boundary became not just a product, but itself a producer of the Cold War—radicalizing diplomatic relations as well as the notion of divergence itself. Built from the interaction, not the isolation, of East and West, the border expanded within a few years from a territorial demarcation into an enduring barrier of chilling clarity.

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