

SPECIAL ISSUE: INTRODUCTION

Bordering the GDR: Everyday Transnationalism, Global Entanglements and Regimes of Mobility at the Edges of East Germany

Ned Richardson-Little¹ and Lauren Stokes²

¹University of Erfurt, Erfurt, Germany and ²Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA
E-mail: ned.richardson-little@uni-erfurt.de

Abstract

No state has ever been as identified with its borders as the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The guest editors' introduction to this special issue analyzes the development of the historiography of the borders of the GDR, showing how new approaches to the country's history have also impacted scholarship on the everyday history of the border. We argue for approaches that understand the border simultaneously as a site of conflict and cooperation and that situate the border not just alongside its geographical neighbors, but within broader flows of natural resources, pollution, narcotics, migration, and disease. Drawing on the interdisciplinary field of border studies, we argue that global approaches can help contextualize the exceptional and encourage scholars to ask new questions about which elements of GDR bordering practices were part of the globally emerging normalcy of border regimes, and which were unique to East Germany. In these ways, this special issue seeks to reveal new aspects of East German history and, in turn, make the GDR more legible within border studies.

Keywords: GDR; borders; transnationalism; migration; global history

The Berlin Wall and the borders of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) have always carried an immense symbolic weight and loomed large in late twentieth-century European history. Not only have images of East Germany's borders come to serve as a visual shorthand for the global fault line between the capitalist and socialist systems, but “the world's most conspicuous border” has also been used to define the four decades of Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, or SED) rule. The opening of the Berlin Wall was a “global iconic event”—synonymous with the end of not only the GDR and the Eastern bloc, but the Cold War writ large.¹ Never has a single state been so identified with its border. Yet the focus of both grand narratives and public memorializations and commemorations associated with the GDR's border regime and those killed by its lethal policies overshadows the mobility and normalcy that coexisted with deadly force. Beyond

¹ Charles S. Maier, *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), ix; Julia Sonnevend, *Stories Without Borders: The Berlin Wall and the Making of a Global Iconic Event* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). On the fall of the Berlin Wall and 1989 in a global context, see James Mark et al., 1989: *A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). On legacies of the Berlin Wall post-1990, see Ben Gook, *Divided Subjects, Invisible Borders: Re-Unified Germany After 1989* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

the 140 killed at the Berlin Wall and the—as of yet—untold more at other border sites,² millions also crossed this boundary to visit family, conduct international business, visit tourist sites, and transit without major incident on foot or by car, truck, train, or airplane.³ Although the opening of the Berlin Wall has been heralded for inaugurating an era of globalization in the 1990s that continues to this day, the borders of the GDR were already sites of transnational and global interconnection well before the mass demonstrations of 1989 brought an end to both the border regime and SED rule—if not yet the GDR as a state.⁴

This special issue seeks to understand the practices that created the many borders of the GDR—most obviously those that formed the state itself, but also others, some formed by its neighbors, others by global institutions—as elements in interconnected and overlapping regimes of mobility. The articles in this special issue position the borders of the GDR within a broader history of bordering in Germany and Europe and serve as an example that continues to be relevant today, even in the supposedly globalized and borderless Europe of the Schengen Area. The five authors contributing to the special issue examine East German border practices and the making of the GDR border beyond the binaries of open versus closed, state policy versus popular agency, and transnational flows versus national boundaries.⁵ In a dictatorship as fixated on securing its outer frontier as the GDR, the realities of border control were generated by a multitude of actors: party leaders creating policy; Stasi, border and customs agents implementing that policy; and state bureaucrats and experts situating East Germany in an increasingly complex world of international law and globalizing commercial trade. The GDR's border practices were also shaped from below by the wide range of people who crossed East German boundaries—with or without the permission of the state—including migrants, workers, fishermen, drug smugglers, and globe-trotting scientists (all of whom appear in this special issue). In addition, they were also shaped by nonhuman mobility, including television and radio signals, and nature itself: the waterways and the fish that traveled within them; the air and the pollution it carried; and, of course, those great transnational actors—pests and infectious disease.⁶

The history of the bordering of the GDR and the violence inflicted at its frontiers also must be examined beyond the isolated chronology of the Cold War. The problem of defining and policing frontiers and controlling mobility across the borders of German states is centuries, not decades, old.⁷ Similarly, institutions of border control did not form in a vacuum,

² See footnote 10 for current research on border victims beyond the Berlin Wall.

³ On the “normalcy” of the Berlin Wall in particular, see Paul Steege, “Crisis, Normalcy, Fantasy: Berlin and Its Borders,” *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 3 (2014): 469–84. While many functions of the GDR border remained “normal,” they were not necessarily experienced as such. On the question of “normalization” in the GDR, see Mary Fulbrook, *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979: The “Normalisation of Rule”?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

⁴ On globalization and the Eastern bloc, see Angela Romano and Federico Romero, “European Socialist Regimes Facing Globalisation and European Co-Operation: Dilemmas and Responses—Introduction,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 21, no. 2 (2014): 157–64; James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

⁵ Alf Lüdtke, “Working the Passage: East German Border Checkpoints, 1961–90: The Case of GÜSt Bahnhof Friedrichstraße, Berlin,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 682.

⁶ On radio and television as cross-border modes of conflict, see Jochen Staadt, Tobias Voigt, and Stefan Wolle, *Operation Fernsehen: Die Stasi und die Medien in Ost und West* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008). Nicholas Schlosser, *Cold War on the Airwaves: The Radio Propaganda War against East Germany* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Heather Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014). On the campaign against the invasive Colorado beetle—dubbed the *Amikäfer* by the SED, see Lars-Broder Keil and Sven Felix Kellerhoff, *Gerüchte machen Geschichte: folgenreiche Falschmeldungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2006), 135–58.

⁷ Some recent studies include Catherine Tatiana Dunlop, *Cartophilia: Maps and the Search for Identity in the French-German Borderland* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Luca Scholz, *Borders and Freedom of Movement in the Holy Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Sarah Frenking, *Zwischenfälle im Reichsland: Überschreiten, Polizieren, Nationalisieren der deutsch-französischen Grenze (1887–1914)* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2021). For an overview of the recent boom in German border studies, see Andrew Tompkins, “Binding the Nation, Bounding the State: Germany and Its Borders,” *German History* 37, no. 1 (2019).

but built upon organizations that long predated state socialism.⁸ Furthermore, the conflicts between the GDR and the People's Republic of Poland (to take but one example) were embedded in a longer history of the German-Polish borderlands and struggles over language, identity, and nationality—even if the two states were now ideological allies.⁹ The pressure exerted on the SED by Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to impose West German migration standards on its own borders echoes the externalization of border controls to third countries by Western countries both historically and today.¹⁰

Borders are enforced by people who do border work—not just the border guards with guns who dominate public memory, but also customs agents, health officials, train conductors, coast guard officers, and airline employees. The historian Alf Lüdtke has argued that although such actors were part of a machinery of state violence, they were also workers who were not only subject to power but also agents of power.¹¹ In line with this duality, analyses of the people who crossed the border has also moved away from a binary of outright defiance and violent repression to the inclusion of smaller acts of self-will (*Eigensinn*). For Frank Wolff, individual East Germans who expressed their self-will by seeking to emigrate exploded what began as “hairline cracks” in the border regime into a full-blown emigration movement.¹² Of course, cross-border exchange and the state's capacity for repression could be mutually reinforcing. As *Détente* opened up the GDR diplomatically and commercially and traffic between the two Germanys intensified after the 1972 Basic Treaty, the Ministry for State Security also ballooned in size to prevent the destabilization of domestic political control.¹³

The initial wave of scholarship after reunification on the East German border analyzed it through the lens of *Aufarbeitung*—a historical-pedagogical approach aimed at elucidating the crimes of the SED as a dictatorship, as part of a social and political as well as a legal process of transitional justice. The main focus for this *Aufarbeitung* of the border was the study of the *Grenzregime* (border regimes): How was the border militarized, how was movement controlled, how was violence deployed by state agents? In the 1990s, such historiographical [?] efforts proliferated with the opening of the SED archives, the two official Enquete Commissions on East German history, and the trials of former SED officials and border

⁸ On passport controls in German and GDR history, see Leo Lucassen, “A Many-Headed Monster: The Evolution of the Passport System in the Netherlands and Germany in the Long Nineteenth Century,” in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, ed. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Alf Lüdtke, “Erkennen als Wieder-Erkennen? Anthropometrische Muster der Personenidentifikation. Zur Praxis der Passkontrollenheiten der DDR,” in *Re-Animation: Szenen des Auf- und Ablebens in Kunst, Literatur und Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Ulrike Hanstein, Anika Höppner, and Jana Mangold (Cologne: Böhlau, 2012).

⁹ On German-Polish borderlands, see James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Annemarie H. Sammartino, *The Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914–1922* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Brendan Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹⁰ On the externalization of borders by the United States historically and by the West today, see Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Christian Jakob and Simone Schlindwein, *Diktatoren als Türsteher Europas: Wie die EU ihre Grenzen nach Afrika verlagert* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2017).

¹¹ Lüdtke, “Working the Passage.” On the development of the role of border guards and their everyday history, see Gerhard Sälter, *Grenzpolizisten. Konformität, Verweigerung und Repression in der Grenzpolizei und den Grenztruppen der DDR 1952 bis 1965* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2009); Jochen Maurer, *Dienst an der Mauer. Der Alltag der Grenztruppen rund um Berlin* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2011).

¹² Frank Wolff, *Die Mauergesellschaft. Kalter Krieg, Menschenrechte und die deutsch-deutsche Migration 1961–1989* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019). On the concept of *Eigensinn*, see Alf Lüdtke, *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis. Historische und sozial-anthropologische Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991). Although Wolff explicitly rejects the “autonomy of migration” developed by critical sociologists in favor of *Eigensinn*, the two theoretical lenses both agree that migration precedes state responses to migration.

¹³ Although this expansion was not solely driven by *détente*, it cannot be separated from the increasing cross-border traffic due to travel agreements and international diplomatic recognition. See Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945–1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 59–65.

guards.¹⁴ As part of a wider portrayal of the GDR as a totalitarian state, this literature used the Berlin Wall, other forms of militarized border control, and the human rights abuses committed against those seeking to cross GDR boundaries as emblematic of the overarching power exercised by the SED and evidence of the immoral character of state socialist rule.¹⁵ As historian Stefan Wolle put it, “The GDR was not a state with a border, but a border with a state.”¹⁶

This view of the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat*—a fundamentally unjust and illegitimate state—based on the evidence of the border regime, extended from scholarly historical analysis to the depiction of East Germany by the courts after reunification. As Christiane Wilke has argued, in courts, “The Berlin Wall stood accused not as a border, but as a symbol of a state that was understood to illegitimately divide a nation.”¹⁷ Since the 1990s, this has been the dominant approach of publicly funded scholarship on the GDR and the work of memorial agencies in Germany such as the Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED Diktatur and the Stasi Records Archive (formerly the BStU, now the Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv). The border relied on violence, and multiple major research projects have sought to establish precise information about those who were killed at the border, or died as a result of its existence, as well as more accurate data about family separations, prisoner exchanges, and features of the border that could offer a greater understanding of the depth of the coercive power wielded by the SED.¹⁸

This history of violence at the border offers its own puzzles, such as the paradox that as the border became more physically imposing, it also became less deadly. Only 16 of the 140 victims of the Berlin Wall died in its last decade.¹⁹ It might be tempting to take this fact as

¹⁴ The first commission was held in 1992 and the second in 1995. Some of the research on the border regime produced by the commission includes Hans-Jürgen Fischbeck with Ludwig Mehlhorn und Stephan Bickhardt, “Das Mauersyndrom—die Rückwirkung des Grenzregimes auf die Bevölkerung der DDR,” in *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland* 5, no. 2 (1995), and Hans-Jürgen Grasemann, “Das DDR-Grenzregime und seine Folgen. Der Tod an der Grenze,” *Materialien der Enquete-Kommission Überwindung der Folgen der SED-Diktatur im Prozeß der deutschen Einheit* 8, no. 2 (1999). On the Enquete Commissions and the trials, see Jennifer A. Yoder, “Truth without Reconciliation: An Appraisal of the Enquete Commission on the SED Dictatorship in Germany,” *German Politics* 8, no. 3 (1999): 59–80; Peter E. Quint, “Judging the Past: The Prosecution of East German Border Guards and the GDR Chain of Command,” *The Review of Politics* 61, no. 2 (1999): 303–29; A. James McAdams, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Gerhard Sälter, “Der Rechtsstaat und das Grenzregime der DDR. Die strafrechtliche Verfolgung der Grenzdelikte in der Bundesrepublik,” in *Recht und Gerechtigkeit. Die strafrechtliche Aufarbeitung von Diktaturen in Europa*, ed. Jörg Ganzenmüller (Cologne: Böhlau, 2017), 115–30. The opening of the archives also led to re-evaluations of the political history of the decision to build the Berlin Wall and its consequences: Hans-Hermann Hertle, Konrad H. Jarausch and Christoph Kleßmann, eds., *Mauerbau und Mauerfall: Ursachen, Verlauf, Auswirkungen*, Berlin (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2002); Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953–1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ On totalitarianism and GDR historiography, see Andrew Port, “The Banalities of East German Historiography,” in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

¹⁶ Stefan Wolle, “Flucht als Widerstand?,” in *Widerstand und Opposition in der DDR*, ed. Klaus-Dietmar Henke et al. (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), 309.

¹⁷ Christiane Wilke, “Border Exceptionalism,” *New Fascism Syllabus* (<http://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/border-exceptionalism/>). On trials as generators of historical narratives through postsocialist transitional justice, see Raluca Grosecu, “Criminal Justice and Historical Master Narratives in Post-1989 Bulgaria and Germany,” *European Politics and Society* 18, no. 1 (2017): 66–80.

¹⁸ See Gerhard Sälter, Johanna Dietrich, and Fabian Kuhn, ed., *Die vergessenen Toten. Todesopfer des DDR-Grenzregimes in Berlin von der Teilung bis zum Mauerbau (1948–1961)* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2016); Klaus Schroeder and Jochen Staadt, *Die Todesopfer des DDR-Grenzregimes an der innerdeutschen Grenze 1949–1989. Ein biografisches Handbuch* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2017); Hans-Hermann Hertle and Maria Nooke, *Die Todesopfer an der Berliner Mauer 1961–1989 ein biografisches Handbuch* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2020). Projects to identify those who died in the Baltic—“Todesfälle bei Fluchtversuchen über die Ostsee” at the University of Greifswald—and at the borders of other socialist states—“Todesfälle bei Fluchtversuchen von DDR-Bürgern über die Grenzen von Ostblockstaaten” at the Free University of Berlin—are currently underway.

¹⁹ Paul Steege, “Border Fragments, Border Fantasies: Cold War Berlin in Retrospect,” in *Cold War Berlin: Confrontations, Cultures, and Identities*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, Stefanie Eisenhuth, and Scott H. Krause (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021): 223–34.

proof that walls are effective deterrents, given that fewer people risked crossing the more permanent structure. Instead, it is far more accurate to recognize that the physical structure was always only one component of the border and that the nature of border violence changed over time. Far more people filed petitions to emigrate in the 1980s, risking state persecution and prosecution to do so. For these petitioners, the violence of the border now came from the SED's arbitrary decisions about their futures.²⁰

Within the historiography of the GDR, the next generation of scholars in the late 1990s offered new approaches that questioned the complete domination of the SED, broadened understandings of state power and its limits, and interrogated how these structures were mutually constitutive with the East German border regime.²¹ This second wave of GDR border history argued that the German-German border was not simply a one-dimensional manifestation of the Iron Curtain, but a co-creation of East Germany and its neighbors. It also underlined the productive nature of borders, their multiplicity, the local contexts that shaped them, and the specific actors that created them.²² These local iterations were not established solely from "above," but also came from "below"—albeit asymmetrically—from individuals and communities who lived in the borderlands, sought to use the border or directly policed it, as the violence of division and separation also created points of commonality across the frontier through the shared experience of the border regime as an element of daily life.²³ As Lyn Marven has said about Berlin, "The border is a scar, a reminder of a wound that in fact knits the city together."²⁴ Or, as Yuliya Komska has argued, "The Iron Curtain did not exist." In other words, instead of a single immovable ideological project, the border regime existed in many localized iterations.²⁵

Although the GDR's history was largely defined by its simultaneous separation and interconnection—*Abgrenzung und Verflechtung*—with West Germany, its land border(s) with Poland and Czechoslovakia and water border(s) with Denmark and Sweden each had their own temporalities that did not necessarily correspond to those of the German-German border.²⁶ The GDR understood its borders with the Scandinavian countries as a possible route out of

²⁰ Wolff, *Die Mauergesellschaft*, 584–85.

²¹ On the "cultural turn" in GDR history, see Thomas Lindenberger, "Diktatur der Grenzen," in *Herrschaft und EigenSinn in der Diktatur*, ed. Thomas Lindenberger (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), as well as the edited volume as a whole; Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

²² An early effort to examine the political history of the GDR and its border through the insights from the cultural turn and *Alltagsgeschichte* was Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Since then, the field has proliferated. See the special issue edited by Hope Harrison of *German Politics and Society* 29, no. 2 (2011); Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Sagi Schaefer, *States of Division: Border and Boundary Formation in Cold War Rural Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Tim Grady, "A Shared Environment: German-German Relations along the Border, 1945–72," *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 660–79; Jason B. Johnson, *Divided Village: The Cold War in the German Borderlands* (London: Routledge, 2017); Astrid M. Eckert, *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Sophie Lange, "A Deal over Dirt: From a German-German Bargain to the Creation of an Environmental Problem in the 1980s" *Worldwide Waste: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 3 (2020).

²³ Although this generation of academic scholarship has had some influence on *Aufarbeitung*-oriented research, it has also been met with strong criticism by those who entirely reject both the concept of "normalization" and the idea that there were participatory elements to SED rule. See Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, "Es gab viele Mauern in der DDR," *Deutschland Archiv Online* (January 2012) (www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/61489/viele-mauern-in-der-ddr).

²⁴ Lyn Marven, "Divided City, Divided Heaven: Berlin Border Crossings in Post-Wende Fiction," in *Berlin Divided City, 1945–1989*, ed. Philip Broadbent and Sabine Hake (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 190.

²⁵ Yuliya Komska, *The Icon Curtain: The Cold War's Quiet Border* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 10.

²⁶ Christoph Kleßmann, "Verflechtung und Abgrenzung. Aspekte der geteilten und zusammengehörigen deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B 29–30 (1993): 30–41; Jasmin Nithammer, *Grenzen des Sozialismus zu Land und zu Wasser. Die tschechoslowakische Landgrenze und polnische Seegrenze im Vergleich* (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2019).

international isolation, and Sweden and Denmark both took a pragmatic and flexible approach to relations with their socialist neighbor, resisting pressure from West Germany to conform ideologically.²⁷ Conversely, the GDR's border regime with allied states was often fraught: Polish authorities feared the return of German postwar expellees, while the rise of Solidarity (Solidarność) meant that the GDR's eastern border was as much of a political bulwark as its western frontier.²⁸ Polish and Czechoslovakian tourists and cross-border shoppers were popular figures of disdain in East Germany, used as scapegoats for shortages in shops near the border due to "smuggling and speculation."²⁹

The processes of creating and policing these individual borders were entangled with each other as agreements with fraternal socialist countries in the East could set uncomfortable precedents for conflicts over the border with West Germany. Certain cross-border points of conflict, such as pollution and fisheries, aggravated relations on all sides of the GDR.³⁰ Others, such as narcotics trafficking and migration, began as Cold War conflicts with West Germany, but evolved to become sites of cooperation as solidarity with the Global South eroded, and SED elites reoriented themselves diplomatically toward the West. Cross-border public health and safety became vehicles for East-West collaboration in efforts to tackle shared technocratic problems as fellow countries from the Global North. Exploring these entanglements is one of the main goals of this special issue. As Andrew Tompkins has argued, "By examining different borders together, we can see ... how the borrowing and reuse of symbols, plans and monuments has led to unintended convergences even in the most violently contested regions."³¹

As territorialized national control began to fall apart globally in the 1970s,³² the SED only increased its efforts to secure the fixed, internationally recognized national borders it had finally gained diplomatically through the Helsinki Accords in 1975.³³ The SED actively pursued international trade, tourism, and exchange, wherein the border became a site for projecting sovereignty claims—a global calling card just as important as East German development aid or participation in international organizations. Transnationally networked groups, ranging from Christians to human rights activists, approached the border as an obstacle to be overcome in order to maintain ties to broader communities—both institutional and through informal networks.³⁴ Contract workers, refugees, foreign

²⁷ Karl-Christian Lammers, "Nachbarschaft und Nicht-Anerkennung. Probleme der Beziehungen zwischen Dänemark und der DDR (1949–1973)," in *Die DDR und der Westen. Transnationale Beziehungen 1949–1989*, ed. Ulrich Pfeil (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2001): 273–89.

²⁸ The Polish-GDR border was both a site of conflict and of intra-bloc cooperation; see Włodzimierz Borodziej, Jerzy Kochanowski, and Bernd Schäfer, *Grenzen der Freundschaft. Zur Kooperation der Sicherheitsorgane der DDR und der Volksrepublik Polen zwischen 1956 und 1989* (Dresden: Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung, 2000); Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations, 1945–1962* (London: Routledge, 2018).

²⁹ On border smuggling and unofficial cross-border commerce in the Eastern bloc, see Włodzimierz Borodziej and Jerzy Kochanowski, *Schleichwege. Inoffizielle Begegnungen sozialistischer Staatsbürger zwischen 1956 und 1989* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2010). In particular, Daniel Logemann, "'Schleichwege' als Ausgleich von Mangel und als Angebot des 'Polnischen.'"

³⁰ See, for example, Lange, "A Deal over Dirt."

³¹ Tompkins, "Binding the Nation, Binding the State," 99.

³² On territorialization, see Maier, *Once Within Borders*.

³³ William Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Hermann Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen. Die DDR im Internationalen System, 1949–1989* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007); Matthias Peter and Hermann Wentker, ed., *Die KSZE im Ost-West-Konflikt. Internationale Politik und gesellschaftliche Transformation 1975–1990* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Horst Möller et al., ed., *Die Einheit. Das Auswärtige Amt, das DDR-Außenministerium und der Zwei-plus-Vier-Prozess* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Alexander von Plato, *The End of the Cold War? Bush, Kohl, Gorbachev, and the Reunification of Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³⁴ Some examples include Bernd Schäfer, *The East German State and the Catholic Church, 1945–1989* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Stephen Brown, *Von der Unzufriedenheit zum Widerspruch. Der konziliare Prozess für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung als Wegbereiter der friedlichen Revolution in der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Lembeck, 2010); Christie Miedema, *Not a Movement of Dissidents: Amnesty International Beyond the Iron Curtain*

students,³⁵ and participants in the Leipzig Trade Fair³⁶ or the World Festivals of Youth and Students³⁷ all experienced and negotiated the border as they traveled to and from the GDR.³⁸ Foreign residents of West Germany and of West Berlin in particular also had intimate knowledge of the border; many Turkish residents of West Berlin were frequently border crossers. East German authorities were never certain if they represented “imperialist enemies” or allied working-class victims of capitalism.³⁹ Diplomatic recognition reinforced East German sovereignty, but brought with it embassies and foreign diplomats who could act as agents of ideological subversion, from Western capitalists to Chinese and Albanian Maoists.⁴⁰ Members of the US occupying forces and US visitors to the divided city also actively engaged with the border.⁴¹ US military personnel took advantage of their enhanced

(Göttingen: Wallstein, 2019); Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Julia Ault, *Saving Nature under Socialism: Transnational Environmentalism in East Germany, 1968–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

³⁵ On foreign students specifically, see Quinn Slobodian, “The Maoist Enemy: China’s Challenge in 1960s East Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 51, no. 3 (2016): 635–59; Julia Sittmann, “Illusions of Care: Iraqi Students between the Ba’thist State and the Stasi in Socialist East Germany, 1958–89,” *Cold War History* 18, no. 2 (2018): 187–202; Marcia Schenk, “Negotiating East Germany: Angolan Student Migration during the Cold War 1976–90,” *Africa* 89, no. 1 (2019): 144–66; Sara Pugach, “Eleven Nigerian Students in Cold War East Germany: Visions of Science, Modernity, and Decolonization,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 3 (2019): 551–72; Eric Burton, “Navigating Global Socialism: Tanzanian Students in and beyond East Germany,” *Cold War History* 19, no. 1 (2019): 63–83; Sara Pugach, *African Students in East Germany, 1949–1975* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022).

³⁶ On the Leipzig Trade Fair as a site of global connection, see Katherine Pence, “‘A World in Miniature’: The Leipzig Trade Fairs in the 1950s and East German Consumer Citizenship,” in *Consuming Germany in the Cold War: Consumption and National Identity in East and West Germany*, ed. D. F. Crew (Oxford: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 21–50; Karsten Rudolph and Jana Wüstenhagen, *Große Politik, Kleine Begegnungen. Die Leipziger Messe im Ost-West-Konflikt* (Berlin: Vorwärts, 2006).

³⁷ On the Weltfestspiele, see Denise Wesenberg, *Unter “operativer Kontrolle.” Die X Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten 1973 in Ost-Berlin* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2007); Andrea Ruhl, *Stalin-Kult und Rotes Woodstock. Die Weltjugendfestspiele 1951 und 1973 in Ostberlin* (Marburg: Tectum Press, 2009); Katharine White, “East Germany’s Red Woodstock: The 1973 Festival between the ‘Carnavalesque’ and the Everyday,” *Central European History* 51, no. 4 (2018): 585–610.

³⁸ More generally on foreigners and migration in the GDR, see Christian Th. Müller and Patrice G. Poutrus, ed., *Ankunft, Alltag, Ausreise. Migration und interkulturelle Begegnung in der DDR-Gesellschaft* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005). Damian Mac Con Uladh, “Guests of the Socialist Nation? Foreign Students and Workers in the GDR, 1949–1990” (PhD diss., University College London, 2005). Frank Hirschinger, *Der Spionage verdächtig. Asylanten und ausländische Studenten in Sachsen-Anhalt 1945–1970* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009); Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte, ed., *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Kim Christian Priemel, ed., *Transit—Transfer—Politik und Praxis der Einwanderung in die DDR 1945–1990* (Berlin: be.bra, 2011); Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015). On refugees, Patrice G. Poutrus, “Zuflucht im Nachkriegsdeutschland. Politik und Praxis der Flüchtlingsaufnahme in Bundesrepublik und DDR von den späten 1940er bis zu den 1970er Jahren,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35 (2009): 135–75; Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, “East Germany: Chilean Exile and the Politics of Solidarity in the Cold War,” in *European Solidarity with Chile, 1970s–1980s*, ed. Kim Christiaens, Idesbald Goddeeris, and Magaly Rodríguez García (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 2014); Sebastian Koch, *Zufluchtsort DDR?. Chilenische Flüchtlinge und die Ausländerpolitik der SED* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016). Patrice G. Poutrus, *Umkämpftes Asyl. Vom Nachkriegsdeutschland bis in die Gegenwart* (Berlin: C. H. Links, 2019).

³⁹ Jennifer A. Miller, *Turkish Guest Workers in Germany: Hidden Lives and Contested Borders, 1960s to 1980s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 112. On Turkish guest workers in West Germany and movement across the Berlin Wall, see Nevim Çil, *Topographie des Außenseiters* (Berlin: Hans Schiler, 2007); Sarah Thomsen Vierra, *Turkish Germans in the Federal Republic of Germany: Immigration, Space, and Belonging, 1961–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Stefan Zeppenfeld, *Vom Gast zum Gastwirt?: Türkische Arbeitswelten in West-Berlin* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021); Lauren Stokes, *Fear of the Family: Guest Workers and Family Migration in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁴⁰ Jacqueline Boysen, *Das “weisse Haus” in Ost-Berlin. Die Ständige Vertretung der Bundesrepublik bei der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2010); Slobodian, “The Maoist Enemy”; David Spreen, “Dear Comrade Mugabe: Decolonization and Radical Protest in Divided Germany, 1960–1980” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2019).

⁴¹ Stefanie Eisenhuth, *Die Schutzmacht. Die Amerikaner in Berlin 1945–1994* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018).

purchasing power in East Berlin, while Shinkichi Tajiri, a US expatriate artist of Japanese descent, produced the single most comprehensive photographic record of the border as part of a body of work that criticized the US militarism he had experienced as a child in an internment camp.⁴² One of the largest, most enduring group of cross-border foreigners in East Germany continued to be the occupying Red Army forces who represented not only the threat of Soviet armed intervention, but also an everyday source of trade and barter for goods from abroad.⁴³ The presence of Schönefeld International Airport in East Berlin made the GDR part of a global transport network, and its integration into East-West and South links meant that the GDR in effect bordered directly on places as far-flung as Canada, Singapore, and Pakistan.

Illicit cross-border activity went well beyond the crime of *Republikflucht* (illegal emigration) by GDR citizens and extended from local neighbors to globalized networks.⁴⁴ A number of Cuban and Vietnamese visitors to the GDR used the opportunities provided by the border—and by airport transit lounges on the way to East Berlin—to defect. Vietnamese contract workers in the GDR notoriously smuggled out mopeds and other high-end items—often via Poland—despite state efforts to contain and control their consumption.⁴⁵ East Germany also acted as a haven for spies and as a staging point for international freedom fighters and terrorist groups.⁴⁶

Over the past thirty years, the Berlin Wall has retained its remarkable ability to serve as a reference point that obscures the rest of the border regime. The wall has held this symbolic position from the moment it was constructed to the present day, utterly dominating our collective ability to think about divided Germany. To give just one example, in the 1960s, a West German organization ran two competitions for West German children to depict German division. Although the images submitted to the first competition in 1961 were remarkably diverse, the images submitted to the second competition in 1967 focused almost exclusively on the Berlin Wall.⁴⁷ Border tourism and Berlin Wall tourism enabled West German and international visitors to “enact their perceived freedom as defined against the ‘imprisoned’ communist East.”⁴⁸ Since 1989, the fall of the wall has gradually become a “joyful historical memory”; its reconstructed remains a must-see for contemporary tourists seeking freedom in reunified Berlin.⁴⁹ Although the wall was initially treated like a resource, sold off in chunks to museums around the world, the Berlin Senate developed a “master plan” for

⁴² Shinkichi Tajiri, *The Berlin Wall 1969–1972*, ed. Michael Haerdter (Baarlo: Tasba, 2005); Paul M. Farber, “Scaling the Wall: Shinkichi Tajiri, Exiled Sculpture, and the Reconstruction of the Berlin Wall,” in *A Wall of Our Own: An American History of the Berlin Wall* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

⁴³ Silke Satjukow, *Besatzer. “Die Russen” in Deutschland, 1945–1994* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

⁴⁴ On the criminalization of illicit border crossing, see Jochen Maurer and Gerhard Sälter, “The Double Task of the East German Border Guards: Policing the Border and Military Functions,” *German Politics & Society* 29, no. 2 (2011): 23–39. On deviant globalization, see Nils Gilman, Jesse Goldhammer, and Steven Weber, *Deviant Globalization: Black Market Economy in the 21st Century* (London: Continuum, 2011).

⁴⁵ Christina Schwenkel, “Rethinking Asian Mobilities: Socialist Migration and Post-Socialist Repatriation of Vietnamese Contract Workers in East Germany,” *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2014): 235–58.

⁴⁶ Bernd Stöver, *Zuflucht DDR. Spione und andere Übersiedler* (Berlin: C. H. Beck, 2009); Ulrich van der Heyden, *Zwischen Solidarität und Wirtschaftsinteressen. Die “geheimen” Beziehungen der DDR zum südafrikanischen Apartheidregime* (Münster: LIT, 2005); Matthias Bengtson-Krallert, *Die DDR und der internationale Terrorismus* (Marburg: Tectum Wissenschaftsverlag, 2017); Lutz Maeke, *DDR und PLO. Die Palästinalpolitik des SED-Staates* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).

⁴⁷ Wolff, *Mauergesellschaft*, 264–68, quoted on 267.

⁴⁸ Michelle A. Standley, “From Bulwark of Freedom to Cosmopolitan Cocktails: The Cold War, Mass Tourism and the Marketing of West Berlin as a Tourist Destination,” in *Divided, but Not Disconnected: German Experiences of the Cold War*, ed. Tobias Hochscherf, Christoph Laucht, and Andrew Plowman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 110; Astrid M. Eckert, “Greetings from the Zonal Border”: Tourism to the Iron Curtain in West Germany,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 1 (2011): 9–36.

⁴⁹ Hope M. Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall: Memory and the Making of the New Germany, 1989 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 26.

memorialization between 2004 and 2006 in order to establish its own narrative and preempt competition from memory entrepreneurs,⁵⁰ such as the privately owned Checkpoint Charlie Museum.⁵¹ This process “had a multiplier effect on Wall-related activities and even the establishment of other Wall-related sites,” leading to the creation of public history sites beyond the primary memorial at Bernauer Strasse, including an exhibit about the “ghost train stations” in Nordbahnhof, the East Side Gallery, and the Marienfelde Refugee Center Museum.⁵²

The focus on the wall produces a foreshortened memory of the border that skews our understanding thereof. First, the Berlin experience is misleadingly taken as relevant for the entire border regime—a point that has been made particularly well by scholars who have unpacked the quotidian operations of the border in rural East Germany—and disregards the borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁵³ Second, public history has tended to memorialize the border in ways that reflect the Western rather than Eastern experiences of it. The “Berlin Wall Trail” traces the path of the *western* extremity of the wall, and not the place where it began for people in East Berlin, namely the multiple layers of fortifications that expanded in size and depth over the decades, or the elaborate control zones erected at border-crossing checkpoints.⁵⁴ The memorialization of the Berlin Wall and its victims has led to an emphasis on the lethal aspects of the border regime to the exclusion of its more banal functions—“anti-climbing features, roadblocks, lanes through which to control traffic, patrol paths, and informants reporting people for using words like ‘the Wall.’”⁵⁵ The East German border regime was also deployed in pursuit of goals that were common to other states—indeed, frequently in cooperation with those other states, or as Paul Steege has commented, “Westerners, too, made the Wall and its violence normal.”⁵⁶ Westerners sometimes even used the violence of the border regime for their own purposes: West Germany worked with GDR border officials to prevent unauthorized migration, whereas the United States did so in an attempt to prevent drug smuggling. These examples of border cooperation were not always as wedded to the physical structure of the border, but they nonetheless remain part of the border regime’s history.

Since 2000, more than ten thousand kilometers of border wall have been constructed across the globe, and critical border scholars increasingly describe twenty-first-century border regimes in terms that apply equally well to many aspects of the East German border regime. Several even reference the Berlin Wall in passing as they seek to understand the trend toward border militarization. Wendy Brown has argued that the Berlin Wall presaged contemporary border walls by creating a siege mentality.⁵⁷ Conversely, Reece Jones has argued that the Berlin Wall created a stigma against building border walls that lasted for only a decade before walls came back into fashion after September 11, 2001.⁵⁸ “Just as the

⁵⁰ On memory entrepreneurs and the contestation of official commemorations in reunified Germany, see Jenny Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). On the far-right’s challenge to mainstream memorialization, see Jenny Wüstenberg, “Pluralism, Governance, and the New Right in German Memory Politics,” *German Politics and Society* 37, no. 3 (2019): 89–110; Ned Richardson-Little, Samuel Merrill, and Leah Arlaud, “Far-Right Anniversary Politics and Social Media: Alternative for Germany’s Contestation of the East German Past on Twitter,” *Memory Studies* 15, no. 6 (2022): 1360–77.

⁵¹ Jody K. Biehl und Charles Hawley, “Berlin Cold War Monument Dismantled Amid Protest,” *Der Spiegel* (online), May 7, 2005.

⁵² Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall*, 223.

⁵³ Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Sheffer, *Burned Bridge*; Johnson, *Divided Village*; Schaefer, *States of Division*.

⁵⁴ This proliferation is explored in Pertti Ahonen, *Death at the Berlin Wall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵⁵ Anna McWilliams, “The Materiality of a Metaphor: The Cold War and the Berlin Wall,” in *Walling In and Walling Out: Why Are We Building New Barriers to Divide Us?*, ed. Laura McAtackney and Randall H. McGuire (Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press, 2020): 111–30.

⁵⁶ Steege, “Crisis, Normalcy, Fantasy,” 475.

⁵⁷ Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

⁵⁸ Reece Jones, “The Material and Symbolic Power of Border Walls,” in *Walling In, Walling Out*, 195–209.

Berlin Wall represented the overreach and then collapse of the communist state,” Jones speculates as to whether the contemporary proliferation of border fencing represents a similar overreach of “the global system of place-based inequality” that anchors the current international order.⁵⁹ Other scholars have described structures of border enforcement that have totalizing aspirations. David Scott Fitzgerald argues that democracies have now begun to develop an “architecture of repulsion” out of a “medieval landscape of domes, buffers, moats, cages, and barbicans.”⁶⁰ Alison Mountz’s ethnography of the Canadian border police even argues for a form of “transnational panopticism” that encourages travelers “to practice self-regulation more effectively than the nation-state can monitor them.”⁶¹ Several scholars have also charted the development of a practice of “anticipatory border enforcement,” which seeks to identify would-be border crossers while they are still far from the border.⁶² Although these scholars largely do not consult the specialist literature on East Germany, their descriptions of contemporary border regimes recall the most sensationalized coverage of the ostensibly totalitarian border of the GDR.⁶³ What are the differences between the borders of the GDR and today’s world of walls? Is it merely that illiberal border regimes sought to keep people *in*, whereas new liberal border regimes seek to keep people *out*? Or can a careful comparison help us to better understand both? Paul Steege provides a clue about how to approach this comparison when he writes that the history of the Berlin Wall can help us “to notice how the impetus to build walls makes visible an underlying tolerance for violence that both comes before[,] and lingers after a wall is built.”⁶⁴ This issue thus seeks to trace how the “tolerance for violence” implied by a border reproduces itself in different settings, and in so doing to bring the history of the East German border back into conversation with contemporary border studies and previous scholarship that examines borders and bordering along the “closed” frontier of communist Europe.⁶⁵

The East German border is an exceptional case, but also one that contains many mundane elements shared with other border regimes across space and time when one looks beyond the spectacular episodes of violence and their symbolic weight within Cold War narratives. The GDR’s border can be compared to its successors as part of a unified Germany and a united Europe, as well as to modern borders across the West more generally because they share technocratic similarities in function, albeit not in terms of ideological justification. There are echoes of the early twentieth-century imposition of strict border controls in

⁵⁹ Reece Jones, *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 180.

⁶⁰ David Scott Fitzgerald, *Refuge Beyond Reach: How Rich Democracies Repel Asylum Seekers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 6, 9.

⁶¹ Alison Mountz, *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 155.

⁶² Gregory Feldman, *The Migration Apparatus: Security, Labor, and Policymaking in the European Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Ruben Andersson, *Illegality, Inc. Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); Jenna M. Loyd and Alison Mountz, *Boats, Borders, and Bases: Race, the Cold War, and the Rise of Migration Detention in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Fitzgerald, *Refuge Beyond Reach*; Ana Raquel Minian, “Offshoring Migration Control: Guatemalan Transmigrants and the Construction of Mexico as a Border Zone,” *American Historical Review* (2020): 89–111.

⁶³ Wendy Brown is the exception, when she invokes Greg Eghigian’s “Homo Munitus: The East German Observed,” published in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), in her book, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*.

⁶⁴ Steege, “Border Fragments, Border Fantasies,” 232.

⁶⁵ Libora Oates-Indruchová and Thomas Lindenberger, ed., “Borders in the Social and Cultural Practice of Communist and Postcommunist Europe,” special issue, *East Central Europe* 41, no. 2–3 (2014); Wolfgang Mueller and Libora Oates-Indruchová, ed., “From the Iron Curtain to the Schengen Area,” *East European Politics and Societies* 31, no. 2 (2017).

the United States, which were justified as a means to defend against “the germs of anarchy, crime, disease and degeneracy.”⁶⁶ The transnationalization and globalization of the history of the GDR border also contributes to a reevaluation of the periodization of East German and Cold War history, particularly to the perception of “failure” and the legacy of 1989. The chronology of the GDR border is usually oriented around the establishment of formal frontiers—from above and below—and the migration patterns of GDR citizens: the founding of the GDR and the establishment of the new border in 1949; the establishment of the Oder-Neisse border with Poland in 1950; the solidification of the German-German border in 1952; the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961; the transit agreements and the Basic Treaty in 1971–1972; the Helsinki Accords in 1975; the closing of the Polish border due to Solidarność in 1980; the wave of applications to exit in 1984; and finally the emigration crisis that culminated in the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989.⁶⁷ The articles in this collection demonstrate a set of cross-border flows that follow different timelines and narratives beyond this chronology, thus complicating the established dynamics of movement on the ground by East Germans and by a wide range of transnational actors, as well as SED efforts to control, restrict, and arrest them.

As Andrew Tompkins shows in “Caught in the Net: Fish, Ships, and Oil in the GDR-Poland Territorial Waters Dispute, 1949–1989,” the border settlement with Poland was complicated by ongoing conflicts over the exact location of the border in the waters between the two countries and by those crossing the border to illicitly exploit what had until recently been German fishing grounds. In “A River Runs Through It: The Elbe, Socialist Security, and East Germany’s Borders,” Julie Ault reveals how pollution moving through waterways in the 1970s required increased negotiation and collaboration between the GDR and both its eastern and western neighbors and how environmental initiatives from the western side of the border legitimized processes of economic deindustrialization after reunification. New networks of global narcotics smuggling from the Middle East and Asia transiting through GDR territory to the West prompted competition, but eventually also cooperation, between the GDR, the FRG, and the United States as Ned Richardson-Little demonstrates in “Cold War Narcotics Trafficking, the Global War on Drugs, and the East Germany’s Illicit Global Transnational Entanglement.” In “Racial Profiling on the U-Bahn: Policing the Berlin Gap during the Schönefeld Airport Refugee Crisis,” Lauren Stokes shows how a surge of refugees from the Global South via East Berlin to the West due to the international flight connections offered by the Schönefeld Airport in Brandenburg created the ironic situation of West Germany demanding greater controls over migration at the GDR’s border. Finally, in “‘Not Even the Highest Wall Can Stop AIDS’: Expertise and Viral Politics at the German-German Border,” Johanna Folland demonstrates how the spread of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic led to a collaboration between scientists and health officials on both sides of the wall in the years leading up to its fall.

The borders of the German Democratic Republic were both normal and aberrant, mundane and spectacular. By putting the operation and practices of these borders in transnational and global focus, this special issue seeks to reveal new aspects of East German history and, in turn, make the GDR more legible within border studies. Such an approach can help contextualize the exceptional, and thus encourage scholars to ask new questions about which elements of East Germany were part of the broadly emerging normalcy of globalized border regimes, and which were unique to the GDR under SED rule. Despite its collapse more than thirty years ago, the GDR border regime remains ever relevant to the

⁶⁶ Barbara Lüthi, “Germs of Anarchy, Crime, Disease, and Degeneracy: Jewish Migration to the United States and the Medicalization of European Borders around 1900,” in *Points of Passage: Jewish Migrants from Eastern Europe in Scandinavia, Germany, and Britain 1880–1914*, ed. Tobias Brinkmann (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 27.

⁶⁷ Recent work has sought to decenter 1989 as a total caesura in GDR history. See Jennifer L. Allen, “Against the 1989–1990 Ending Myth,” *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 125–47; Kerstin Brückweh, Clemens Villingner, and Kathrin Zöllner, *Die lange Geschichte der “Wende.” Geschichtswissenschaft im Dialog* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2020).

present: the flashpoints revealed in these articles—natural resources, pollution, narcotics, migration, and disease—have endured and become part of the long legacy of unification, not only in Germany and central Europe, but also, embedded in the meaning of borders in the post-Cold War world, across the globe.

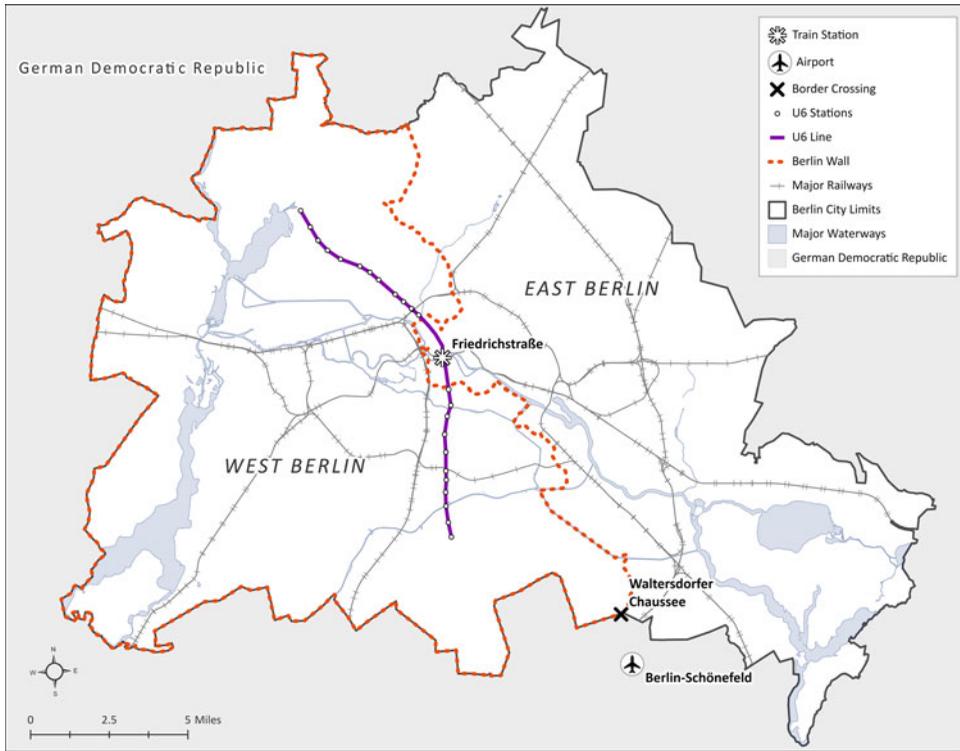
Acknowledgments. We wish to thank Adam Seipp and Jason Johnson for their helpful commentary on the panel that was the first draft of this special issue and the anonymous reviewers for their excellent suggestions. We also would like to thank the VolkswagenStiftung for financing a development workshop, and Iris Schröder, Christiane Kuller, and Patrice Poutrus for their incisive feedback.

Ned Richardson-Little (University of Erfurt) leads the research group *The Other Global Germany: Deviant Globalization and Transnational Criminality in the 20th Century*, supported by the VolkswagenStiftung's Freigeist program. His first monograph, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany*, appeared with Cambridge University Press in 2020.

Lauren Stokes is Assistant Professor of History at Northwestern University. She teaches courses on modern German history, migration history, and the history of gender and sexuality. She is author of *Fear of the Family: Guest Workers and Family Migration in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford University Press, 2022).



Map I. The German Democratic Republic by Méch E. Frazier, Geospatial Specialist, Northwestern University Libraries



Map 2. Divided Berlin by Méch E. Frazier, Geospatial Specialist, Northwestern University Libraries

Cite this article: Ned Richardson-Little and Lauren Stokes. “Bordering the GDR: Everyday Transnationalism, Global Entanglements and Regimes of Mobility at the Edges of East Germany,” *Central European History* (June 2023): 56, 159–172. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938922001017>.