

politics, which led church officials to refrain from instructing their flock about 'good' and 'bad' political parties. However, religion did not fade away from the political stage as a result. Religiously charged debates reemerged in the 1970s, as the SPD spoke out on abortion and women's rights. Mergel asserts that religion remained influential as a frame of reference for an ethics of responsibility. He convincingly proposes to regard this development not as a form of secularization but as a trend towards inclusiveness. Whereas communication targeted at denominational affiliations was no longer effective, politicians could resort to religious vocabulary to reach a broad audience that related to it positively.

The book ends with a daring essay on the nature of the short time span between the end of the campaign and the announcement of its definitive results. This is followed by a first exploration of developments in electoral culture since the 1980s. These closing chapters illustrate the advantages of the proposed cultural approach. It provides historians with very apt instruments for interpreting electoral campaigning and a more profound understanding of the discourses employed in German politics. At the same time, it is hard to evaluate the evidence offered from these different perspectives. For instance, we may readily accept that religion has remained influential, but has its relative importance remained the same too? Such questions of evaluation elude this cultural approach and call for a reappraisal of the analytical methods of social history. Finding a connection between descriptions of cultural change and traditional analyses of social change may eventually solve the riddle of more volatile voter attitudes since the 1960s.

The cultural approach becomes problematic where Mergel claims rather than proves the existence of an independent national political culture in West Germany. Although his research does not provide us with evidence for such a uniquely national perspective, he tends to equate culture with national culture. Possible regional differences within the framework of national campaigns are thus neglected, just as the promises of a comparison between elections on the local, state and federal levels remain unfulfilled. The same holds true for transnational trends and alliances, not just among political parties, but also in the domains of the media and the voters. Against this background, it is problematic to take the United States as a frame of reference. Although Mergel himself claims the United States have not been very influential, the comparison repeatedly serves to illustrate presumed national differences. It would have been useful to take countries with a more similar political system into account.

Overall, Mergel carefully dissects and applies different approaches to his subject in his multi-faceted book. In the end, he struggles to reunite the many roads he has followed in his exploration of the cultural history of elections. This is both the book's strength and its weakness: it opens up many fascinating vistas on the subject and thus manages to reinvigorate political history. At the same time, it leaves the reader with the desire for the integration of these many perspectives into a comprehensive account of German political history. Future research will nonetheless benefit from the example Mergel has given with his bold study.

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***Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain.* By Edith Sheffer. New York: Oxford University Press. 2011. 357 pp. £29.95 (hardback).**

The fiftieth anniversary of the building of the Berlin Wall in August 2011 has resulted in a flurry of new publications on the history of the border between the two German states during the Cold War. Most studies, however, have dealt with the forced separation of East and West Berliners on 13 August 1961 as well as its prehistory. Moreover, historiography has concentrated on the impact of the erection of the Berlin Wall on diplomatic relations and the transition to *détente*. By contrast,

Edith Sheffer investigates how ordinary Germans appropriated, opposed or helped construct the Iron Curtain, as both an administrative and physical border and a mental barrier, from 1945 to 1989. By tracing the transformation of Burned Bridge, a stretch of land between the adjacent German towns of Neustadt bei Coburg (Bavaria, FRG) and Sonneberg (Thuringia, GDR), as a 'fault line in the Cold War' (p. 3), she aims to demonstrate that the Iron Curtain was not merely imposed and enforced on the Germans. In fact, Sheffer maintains that the border between the two German states also resulted from 'the mundane attitudes and actions of ordinary people', symbolizing not only 'political failure', but also 'social breakdown' (p. 6).

As early as the late 1940s, the emergence of the Cold War triggered a divergence between the two towns, which had been occupied by American and Soviet forces respectively. Frontier hostilities, violence and growing social inequality gave rise to demands for border control, both in Sonneberg and Neustadt. The forced resettlement of 8,000 'unreliable' frontier residents through Action Vermin (*Aktion Ungeziefer*) in 1952 and the suppression of the uprising of June 1953 in the GDR widened the gulf between the two German states. The Pass Law that the leaders of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) enforced in December 1957 reduced the number of refugees and obstructed cross-border relations between the residents of the two towns. Thus, they gradually accommodated to the Iron Curtain, even before the erection of the Berlin Wall and the ensuing escalations at the border in Thuringia and Bavaria. As the Iron Curtain was heavily fortified in the 1960s, it assumed a sense of inescapability and impenetrability. Whereas complacency spread in Neustadt throughout the 1970s and 1980s, many residents of Sonneberg served as informants of the state security service, the *Stasi*, and Voluntary Border Helpers. Due to the SED campaign for the diplomatic recognition and elevation of the GDR, the regime simultaneously attempted to avoid open confrontations between guards and refugees at the border and relocated controls into the hinterland of the frontier. *Détente* did not halt mutual estrangement either, as cross-border encounters between East and West Germans strengthened their perceptions of difference. Taken together, these multi-layered processes of alienation lastingly shaped identities in divided Germany, as old mental barriers resurged and new separations emerged at Burned Bridge after the brief euphoria of reunification in the early 1990s.

On the whole, Edith Sheffer demonstrates that the Germans were not only the objects of an imposed separation in the Cold War, but also actively engaged in the construction of the Iron Curtain. Residents of Neustadt and Sonneberg, for example, thereby contributed to the widening gulf that resulted in mutual estrangement. Ultimately, border controls deeply penetrated everyday life, creating 'taxonomies of transgression that determined legal rights, employment, schooling, and family status' (p. 163). Nevertheless, resistance to the increasingly fortified border persisted. In fact, the 'paradoxical fragility and terror' (p. 117) of the Iron Curtain persisted throughout the 1950s. As Sheffer emphasizes, the border remained permeable even in the following decades, both through legal travel and illegal transgression. Burned Bridge even became a site of (asymmetrical) negotiation as Sonnebergers defected to Neustadt in order to receive special gratifications if they returned to the GDR.

Yet the emphasis on 'popular participation' and the 'creation of difference' (p. 13) on the border implicitly underestimates crucial differences. Thus, the complacency of West Germans cannot be equated to the compliance of East German residents in the heavily guarded Prohibited Zone that most East Germans strongly resented. In fact, the leading party and state functionaries of the GDR ultimately enforced the border regime. Popular participation in the creation of the Iron Curtain should therefore be put in perspective. In particular, social and cultural processes of border creation, accommodation and appropriation are to be directly related to the political decisions of East and West German elites in the Cold War, both on the national and regional levels. Unfortunately, Sheffer has not spelled out the immediate impact of (temporary) defections on the border regime, for instance. In the last resort, the historic Burned Bridge that had connected Sonneberg and Neustadt before 1989 was obviously disrupted by measures imposed by the rulers of the GDR. Nevertheless, Edith Sheffer's exemplary study of the social and cultural history of the Iron Curtain

convincingly demonstrates that the demand for border control was popular both in the GDR and in the FRG. Although the measures that were to restrict violence at Burned Bridge in 1952 should not be interpreted as merely an ‘attempt at social reengineering’ (p. 99), they undoubtedly point to long-term traditions and expectations of bureaucratic regulation and state intervention ‘from above’ in Germany. Not coincidentally, East and West Germans therefore actively integrated the border into their everyday lives, albeit differently. Although the power elite in East Berlin enforced the deportations from border zone, imposed the Prohibited Zone and fortified the Iron Curtain, its stability and durability was due to processes of social and cultural appropriation ‘from below’. By meticulously reconstructing the wide scope of everyday accommodation, Edith Sheffer has not replaced, but convincingly corrected and complemented traditional interpretations of the meanings of the border in Cold War Germany.

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***Legacies of Stalingrad: Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945.* By Christina Morina. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2011. x + 297 pp. £52.25 (hardback).**

Christina Morina’s *Legacies of Stalingrad* is a systematic and comparative study of the ways the Eastern Front has been recollected, appropriated and narrated by the German political elite and veterans since 1945. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the ‘public use of history’, it begins with a reflection on the connection between war, politics and the study of memory, and a brief portrayal of the war on the Eastern Front in National Socialist propaganda. The work then examines the emergence of competing memories of the Eastern Front in postwar political culture, the character and role of these memories against the backdrop of the GDR’s most important domestic and the FRG’s foreign debates and, finally, the contours of those memories since 1990. The study pays close attention to the life trajectories of political protagonists, illustrating that political memory was formed and informed not only by ideology and politics but also by experience, worldview and circumstances.

The National Socialist crusade against ‘Jewish Bolshevism’ in the East took the lives of 2.7 of the 5.3 million German soldiers killed in World War II. If one adds the deaths of the *Endkämpfer*—those fighting during the last stand of the Third Reich—and German POWs who perished in Soviet captivity, then almost 75% of all losses occurred on the Eastern Front, thereby making it one of the costliest conflicts of World War II (p. 19). In view of its magnitude, coming to terms with Stalingrad—the climax of the Eastern Front—posed significant challenges for both emerging German states, made all the more difficult by the antagonistic ideological friction of the Cold War and diverse wartime experiences.

In her analysis of East Germany, Morina highlights the intense anti-Soviet feelings in the immediate postwar years and convincingly argues that both the antifascist myth and the attempt to imbue the East German population with positive sentiments and respect for the Soviet Union constituted the founding principle of the GDR. ‘Mobilize all means, the past included’, the slogan guiding the Soviet–German friendship project, can also be extended to the GDR’s notorious rewriting and reworking of historical narrative. By looking at crucial junctures in its history, including the campaign for the building of socialism in 1952, the June uprising in 1953 and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Morina reveals the instrumentalization of the Eastern Front as a means of obtaining and sustaining the regime’s political legitimacy. While the Eastern Front took preponderance over the persecution and murder of the Jews in the GDR’S official narratives about Germany’s role in World War II, it was the Holocaust which, over time, came to occupy a similar position in the FRG. Underpinned by Cold War tensions and the fear of Soviet expansionism, the early FRG subscribed to a consensus of democratic antitotalitarianism. The Eastern Front was