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Caitlin E. Murdock. *Changing Places: Society, Culture, and Territory in the Saxon-Bohemian Borderlands, 1870-1946.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010. 275 S. ISBN 978-0-472-02701-9.

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C. E. Murdock: Changing Places

Caitlin Murdock's book challenges scholars to reconceptualize the cultural and political meanings they assign to border- and frontier regions, both for the populations that inhabit them and for more broadly constructed national publics. The careful attention she gives to regional social, economic and cultural conditions enables Murdock to derive important and new conclusions about the changing ways in which such borderlands operated, both in the popular mind and in the formation of state policy. In the nineteenth century developments in industry and transportation created an economically and culturally integrated region out of the Bohemian-Saxon territories that technically spanned the political frontier between Austria—later Czechoslovakia—and Germany. Above all, the growing movement of people across political borders transformed adjacent territories into what came to be seen by its inhabitants as a single region.

In terms of local forms of self-identification, Murdock also argues that shared economic, religious, and cultural commonalities (to say nothing of familial relations) far outweighed any linguistic (Czech or German) differences that may have characterized inhabitants on different sides of the political border. In fact, as Murdock shows, many people in the region knew some elements of both the Czech and German languages. Neither distinct national political cultures nor linguistic differences of themselves produced an overriding sense of national or cultural distinctions between people in the region, a fact that both Czech and German nationalists around 1900 commonly lamented. This was partly the case because friendly relations between the Saxon and Imperial Austrian authorities in the nineteenth century had made the movement of labourers, consumers and tourists across state borders within the larger region possible and even easy. For German-speaking residents on different sides of the political border before 1914, the presence of Czech-speaking workers and their social clubs, for example, also constituted a normal part of regional life.

After 1918, however, Murdock demonstrates just how the political borders that had run through the region became ideologically freighted in radical new ways, given the strained relations between the new self-styled nation states of Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Germany. The ideological organization of inter-state relationships in terms of sharp nationalist divisions produced a politics—at the national level—that articulated new concepts of German (or Czech) diaspora communities that now depended on the protection of neighbouring nation states for their alleged cultural survival. These nationalized political relations strongly shaped later German, Czech, and Austrian historians' accounts of the region in the first half of the twentieth century as well. Inaccessibility of archival material during the Cold War also reinforced a nationalist historical view of the Saxon-Bohemian border region, one that presumed that nationalist differences had somehow always divided the region between warring Germans and Czechs. Murdock repeatedly demonstrates, however, that the vital traditions of informal and (after 1918) illegal cross-border movement among both people and goods in the region continued until after the Second World War. According to her research, new economic developments after 1918 (including a regional tourist industry and a flourishing black market), helped to maintain older traditions of cultural commonality and economic relatedness among people on both sides of the new political border.

With the advent in Germany of a Nazi government in 1933, however, Murdock demonstrates how the border

region was redefined in yet another critical way. Taking a cue from their colleagues in the Prussian east, radical German nationalists increasingly classified the Saxon borderlands as a culturally "threatened" eastern frontier region, due to their proximity to a Slavic enemy. Their endangered character justified demands for active moral and economic support from the rest of Germany. Murdock's account of this transformed view of the Saxon borderlands deftly shows how local entrepreneurs took good advantage of the nationalist attempt to increase popular interest in and economic commitments to their region, particularly in the realm of tourism and local crafts. Tourists, she points out, were increasingly encouraged to visit the region as a way of demonstrating their support for a nationally endangered border region of the German nation. In Czechoslovakia, meanwhile, Czech nationalist organizations demanded a more radical policy of Czechification of the region from their government, while a growing Sudeten German nationalist party portrayed the Bohemian borderlands to an interested public in Germany as a necessary bulwark against the aggressive colonizing efforts of international Slavdom. Murdock's analysis of the region in the 1930s shows that locals nevertheless continued to pursue their traditional cross-border interests, even as they often deployed the new language of nationally threatened borderlands to pursue their economic ends. Ironically, however, Germany's annexation of what became known as the *Reichsgau Sudetenland* in 1938 meant that the Saxon Bohemian borderland lost its regional distinctiveness and much of its economic rationale as a centre for cross border traffic, both legal and illicit.

In *Changing Places* Murdock offers a paradigmatic example of the kind of transnational historical approach that today's scholars perennially encourage each other to undertake, but rarely accomplish in practice. Many scholars of Central Europe suffer from conceptual and linguistic limitations that prevent them from doing serious transnational work. Murdock, however, has constructed a truly transnational history, and she has done it brilliantly, building a distinctive archive of diverse local and regional sources. She is clearly expert in several regional historiographies, having mastered the relevant Czech and German literatures as well. Murdock's sleuthing and linguistic skills enabled her, for example, to trace the ways in which quite small groups of Czech-speaking workers organized their social and work lives when they moved across the political border to Saxony from Bohemia in the period before 1918. It is not surprising then, for example, that her analysis of these pockets of Czech-speaking working-class social life in Saxony contributes critical new insights to debates about the local meanings of nationalist identities. Murdock illuminates the particular ways in which linguistic communities formulated unique group identities on a situational and transnational basis, identities whose character often contradicts the claims made for them today by Czech and German national historiographies. The latter tend to presume a self-conscious link between language use and a static form of national identity that Murdock's evidence and analysis repeatedly belies.

In a larger sense, Murdock's analysis of the quotidian social and economic relationships that constituted this border society enables her to convey the ways in which very different concepts of space in the region continued to operate simultaneously at different levels of society and government. One of the most interesting and useful insights her book conveys is how regional continuities stretching back to the mid-nineteenth century continue to structure certain local perceptions and expectations of place, even as massive political, ideological, and demographic changes have given new meanings to regional and national interests. Since 1989, as she points out, new local actors have created forms of cross border trade, smuggling, and tourism in the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands, while joint cultural and educational undertakings in the region have flourished.

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