

Cultural Anthropology / German Studies / European Studies / Sociology

“Daphne Berdahl’s wonderfully lucid study addresses the question as to what the years immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of physical boundaries between the two Germanys, cultural distinctions were not less re-created and reaffirmed. This work advances our understanding of the ‘from socialism’ by exploring the East German experience as the negotiation of a liminal condition created by the disappearance of borders. It will make excellent reading for courses on societies in radical transition.” — **John Borneman**, author of *Settling Accounts*

“Daphne Berdahl’s book is a fascinating exercise in border crossing—between history and anthropology, the local and the national, everydayness and the larger transformations of the world, GDR and FRG, socialist past and postsocialist present. She both deploys and unsettles the familiar terms of contemporary ethnography, from community and culture to identity and consumption. Finely researched and theoretically poised, this is one of the best studies of German unification and the postsocialist transition I’ve read.” — **Geoff Eley**, editor of *Becoming National*

When the Berlin Wall fell, people who lived along the dismantled border found their lives drastically and rapidly transformed. Daphne Berdahl, through ongoing ethnographic research in a former East German border village, explores issues of borders and borderland identities that have accompanied the many transitions since 1989. What happens to identity and personhood, she asks, when a political and economic system collapses overnight?

Berdahl concentrates especially on how these changes have affected certain “border zones” of daily life—including social organization, gender, religion, and nationality—in a place where literal, indeed concrete, borders were until recently a very powerful presence. Borders, she argues, are places of ambiguity as well as of intense lucidity; these qualities may in fact be mutually constitutive. She shows how, in a moment of headlong historical transformation, larger political, economic, and social processes are manifested locally and specifically. In the process of a transition between two German states, people have invented, and to some extent ritualized, cultural practices that both reflect and constitute profound identity transformations in a period of intense social discord. *Where the World Ended* combines a vivid ethnographic account of everyday life under socialist rule and after German re-unification with an original investigation of the paradoxical human condition of a borderland.

Daphne Berdahl is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Global Studies at the University of Minnesota.

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Where the World Ended

Unification and Identity in the German Borderland

Daphne Berdahl

“A humane, absorbing, and elegant example of ethnography at its best.”
Michael Herzfeld