

CHAPTER I

Birth of a Borderland

“I still see the great open place in the forest, ringed with vast spruce trees, where we were told that we had crossed the border,” wrote twenty-six-year-old Hans Christian Andersen after his 1831 trip to Saxony and Bohemia.¹ Andersen was impressed that a state border, an institution that stood out impressively on maps, appeared invisible—almost irrelevant—on the ground. Had Andersen looked, he might have found one of the stone markers that identified the political frontier then as they do today. But by gazing at the forest around him, rather than hunting for stones among tree roots, Andersen discovered what local people already knew—that nineteenth-century Central European political borders were of limited relevance to the people who lived along them.

Until the middle to late nineteenth century, international boundaries played little role in most peoples’ daily lives. Life centered on the village—expanded perhaps by occasional trips to a provincial market town. In the first half of the century, a variety of barriers impeded the movement of people, goods, and ideas. Austria still required people to carry internal passports for domestic travel.² The northern German states, including Saxony, eased internal restrictions on their own citizens’ movement in the early nineteenth century, but Bohemian travelers needed permits to travel within Saxony.³ Until the 1830s and 1840s, most German states still required citizens to have passports to leave their territories.⁴ For those who traveled regularly—merchants, peddlers, journeymen, bargemen—crossing international boundaries meant paying tariffs and showing papers. But as strangers had to register with the police in every town where they stayed,

such controls were by no means peculiar to the frontier. For those who did not have to use the main roads, border controls were eminently avoidable. Peddlers and smugglers (often one and the same) crossed the “green border” on back roads and forest paths, bypassing the forces of law and order.

The forces policing the borders were not especially formidable. Gendarmes and customs agents lived where they worked—so they knew their neighbors. The Saxon folklorist Curt Müller-Löbau observed that the nineteenth-century border was rigid “only to the superficial eye.”⁵ The state boundary was part of the local landscape and rarely an object of fear. In his stories about frontier life before World War I, Franz Rösler recalled a Saxon border guard who prevailed on local boys to bring him beer from the neighboring Bohemian pub, pretending not to know where they got it. The same boys used the border gate as a slide, and when “the old bear . . . was in a good mood, he let the youths sneak over the border in the evening.”⁶ Similarly, the Bohemian migrant worker Wenzel Holek described crossing the border many times in the 1870s and 1880s without encountering frontier officials. The one time he mentioned being stopped, much to his surprise, the guards wanted to fumigate his clothing because of an outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease. With that done, they sent him on his way.⁷

Before the second half of the nineteenth-century, most Saxon and Austrian citizens never encountered the frontier. Those who did cross or lived along it knew the rules and how to avoid them. But the border was only one of many places where they ran into state restrictions. It played little part in debates about state identity, government roles, or citizens’ rights. Unlike many Central European borders, the boundary between Saxony and Bohemia was remarkably stable. Saxony and Habsburg Austria, of which Bohemia was part after 1526, had first put up border markers in 1534. The last major revision of the border had been in 1635, when Saxony acquired the Oberlausitz from Bohemia.⁸ By the time the German Empire was founded in 1871, the border’s physical location was well established. Saxon and Bohemian officials cared that the frontier was policed and that tariffs were collected. They met periodically to review policies and maintain border markers.⁹ Routine cooperation characterized their mutual dealings.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the character of the territories adjacent to the Saxon-Bohemian political frontier changed dramatically. Small-scale cross-border contact had long been integral to Saxon and Bohemian frontier life. Smugglers had eluded customs officials, manufacturers had shared markets and raw materials, and political and religious dissidents had crossed to escape arrest.¹⁰ But between the 1870s and

1914, cross-border contact grew at an unprecedented rate, creating a new sense of regional community. The border receded further from prominence as the German and Austrian economies leapt into the industrial age, as legal and economic changes unleashed swarms of migrants and travelers, and as international markets and modern transportation networks burgeoned. Frontier regions became zones of opportunity.

During this period, the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands emerged as a social, economic, and political dynamic with territorial dimensions. They were part of a rapid proliferation of overlapping spaces in which Saxons, Bohemians, and Europeans in general understood their lives in the late nineteenth century.¹¹ Central governments became more prominent in regional administration; mass mobility made people view local communities through the lens of broader experience; nationalists promoted visions of nationally delineated social space and political territory; regional leaders rethought their regions' relationships to states, nations, and European communities; and expanded foreign economic markets made industrial producers and regional officials imagine their communities in an increasingly global context.

This proliferation neither pitted different territorial conceptions and allegiances against each other nor produced tidy, predictable hierarchies. Rather, they offered historical actors multiple, overlapping ways in which to understand the spatial dimensions of their lives. Someone could be Austrian, Bohemian, Czech, a borderland resident, and an international industrial producer simultaneously, with each identity implying connection to a social and physical geography. Sometimes, one territorial context outweighed the others or even appeared at odds with another—forcing people to choose. Historical actors often disagreed about the relative importance of different affiliations. But for the most part, frontier people consciously lived their lives at the intersection of these overlapping places. The borderlands became a place in their own right—intersecting with but never fully corresponding to the states and administrative regions the border defined. But they also became representative of the many interconnected territories and communities that defined modern Central European societies at the turn of the century. They were a microcosm in which the relationships among state, local, national, and transnational communities were most apparent and most volatile. They were a product and an impetus of the sweeping changes remaking European societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, few people in frontier towns, or central governments talked about “borderlands” before World War I. They

recognized a dynamic. Only later did they decide it should be labeled, mapped, and defended.

The Physical Landscape

In 1870, the Saxon-Bohemian border extended, as it had since 1635 and still does today, from roughly Zittau and Hrádek nad Nisou/Grottau in the east to near Bad Elster and Aš/Asch in the west. For much of its length, the border runs along mountains, broken only by the Elbe River valley. Three distinct landscapes characterize the Saxon-Bohemian border (today that between Germany and the Czech Republic).

Along the western two-thirds of the border lie two mountain ranges: the Elstergebirge/Halštrovské hory and the much longer Erzgebirge or Krušné hory. These mountains divide the Bohemian plain to the south from the increasingly flat lands of northern Germany that stretch from central Saxony to the North Sea. The German and Czech names *Erzgebirge* and *Krušné hory* mean “ore mountains,” reflecting the area’s rich mineral deposits, which first drew silver miners in the Middle Ages and later yielded tin, iron, cobalt, lignite, and, in the twentieth century, uranium.¹²

Rocky, with long winters, the mountains are bad for agriculture. Since the early modern period, the mountain people have been miners and craftspeople rather than farmers.¹³ The region’s mineral wealth and, later, its industries encouraged people to find ways in and out of the mountains. As a result, people in the mountains and foothills stayed in contact with the adjoining lowlands, even shaping their development, enabling highlanders to export their goods and to import food and raw materials.¹⁴

At the eastern edge of the Erzgebirge, the Elbe River cuts across the frontier. One of Europe’s great rivers, the Elbe has connected the Central European interior to the Atlantic Ocean for centuries. It has long been a major thoroughfare for people and goods in the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands as well. In the late nineteenth century, the sandstone cliffs that flank the river near the border came to be known as the Saxon and Bohemian Switzerlands and attracted tourists from around Central Europe. Even in the twentieth century, the Elbe remained both a thoroughfare, alongside expanding road and railway networks, and a tourist destination.

Finally, the easternmost part of the border runs through the Lusatian Mountains (Lausitzer Gebirge/Lužické hory), separating the Saxon Oberlausitz from northern Bohemia and running up against the “three-state

corner” where German, Czech, and Polish territory meet today. Lower than the Erzgebirge, these mountains form a rolling landscape that nurtured one of Central Europe’s earliest textile-producing regions.¹⁵

In the nineteenth century, the densely populated mountain villages began sprouting factories and smokestacks. Between 1880 and 1900, the rail lines criss-crossing the highlands grew by more than 50 percent.¹⁶ Cities in the foothills had long connected the highlands’ mineral wealth and manufacturing to more fertile and hospitable landscapes. But in the nineteenth century, these cities grew dramatically as large-scale industries expanded on highland manufacturing traditions. On the Saxon side, Dresden, Chemnitz, Zwickau, and Plauen were part of a string of foothill cities that housed textile, glass, machine, and chemical production centers. These cities also became portals through which highland goods—bobbin lace, wooden toys, musical instruments—passed on their way to international markets. On the Bohemian side, Liberec/Reichenberg, Ústí nad Labem/ Aussig, Teplice/ Teplitz, Most/Brüx, Chomutov/Komotau, Karlovy Vary/Karlsbad, and Cheb/Eger formed a similar chain. Industrial cities on both sides of the frontier grew enormously in the last two decades of the century. Ústí nad Labem/Aussig, for example, saw a population of around sixteen thousand in 1880 swell to over thirty-nine thousand by 1910, while Most/Brüx grew from ten thousand to over twenty-five thousand in the same period.¹⁷ Such growth created new industrial landscapes. This study treats these cities, which built on the productive traditions of the mountains and connected frontier areas to the interior, as the outer limits of the borderlands.¹⁸

The geography of the Saxon-Bohemian border suggests a “natural boundary.” Yet, although distinct from the flatlands to the north and south, the mountainous borderlands proved no obstacle to humans. The valleys are riddled with villages. Old industrial buildings are reminders of the region’s past importance in international markets, and the Elbe still carries cross-border traffic, as it has for centuries.¹⁹ The mountains characterize but do not dictate the political border. As Hans Christian Andersen found, borders, though important in human imagination, are not indelibly inscribed in the natural world.

The Political Landscape

The Saxon-Bohemian border had proved one of Central Europe’s most geographically stable boundaries by the nineteenth century. Yet in the cen-

tury's second half, Central Europeans on the frontier tested new ideas about the meaning and organization of political space, ideas that changed their relationships to their states, their localities, and their cross-border neighbors. By 1900, the Saxon-Bohemian borderlands played a very different political role than they had a century earlier. They became a periphery of the German nation-state, a frontier between adjacent empires, a hotbed of socialist revolution and conservative reaction, and a target for German nationalist agitation. Above all, the borderlands became a zone with its own peculiar political dynamics.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Saxony was a midsized country sandwiched between Central Europe's most powerful states: Prussia and the Habsburg Empire. Bohemia was part of the Habsburg Empire. Both territories were considered part of Germany, a conglomeration of states defined by former membership in the Holy Roman Empire and a shared high culture but home to a variety of political, economic, and religious traditions and a diversity of peoples and languages.²⁰ Moreover, the balance of power among Central European states, ideas about state sovereignty, and conceptions of what defined Germany were in flux. By midcentury, liberal ideals of constitutional government from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, an expanding economic and professional middle class, and new economic and labor networks sparked calls for political reform. In 1848, those calls spurred a wave of revolutions across Europe. Central European revolutionaries believed that states should be defined in terms of national communities, rather than territorial sovereignty. The German camp convened a parliament in Frankfurt to merge Central Europe's politically fragmented German territories into a modern constitutional nation-state. Concurrently, revolutionaries in Hungary, Croatia, northern Italy, and Prague proposed Hungarian, Italian, and Slavic political autonomy.

Efforts to create national political territories reflected a fundamental rethinking of political and cultural landscapes. They created a new need to define the German, Czech, and Hungarian nations whose representatives claimed a place in Central Europe's political and cultural geography. Two models for a German state emerged in 1848: a *Grossdeutschland* (Greater Germany) that included both Prussia and Austria and a *Kleindeutschland* (Small Germany) under Prussian leadership that excluded Austria. Many revolutionaries understood the German nation in terms of the former Holy Roman Empire, a shared German high culture, and the ability of many peoples to assimilate to "Germanness," a view that made the Aus-

trian half of the Habsburg lands seem necessary to any true German state.²¹ But 1848 also marked the emergence of the Czech national movement as a political force in Bohemia.²² Unlike their German counterparts, Czech nationalists argued that ethnolinguistic identity, rather than legal and political precedent, proved that Bohemia was not German at all and did not belong in a German state.²³ Practical political considerations played a role as well. Neither Prussia nor Austria, the two German superpowers, wanted to cede power to the other in a *grossdeutsch* state. Furthermore, many German reformers eyed the Habsburg east with unease, certain it could neither be separated from Austria nor be considered German territory in political, cultural, or ethnolinguistic terms.

Revolutionaries failed to create a German nation-state or win Czech political autonomy in Bohemia in 1848. Yet they set in motion a vigorous debate about the nature of states, territories, and populations in Central Europe, which continued unbroken until 1946 and has reemerged in European political debates since 1989. In June 1866 and 1867, the debate pitting a *grossdeutsch* state against a *kleindeutsch* state came to a head, establishing a formal realignment of Central European political territories that lasted until 1918. Tensions among the German states and Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck's proposals for a new German national order led to war, with Austria-Hungary, Saxony, and the other significant German states on one side and Prussia on the other.²⁴ When Prussia prevailed, Saxony was incorporated, first, into the Prussian-led North German Confederation and, in 1871, into the newly created German Reich. Austria, however, was barred from the new German nation-state.

After its defeat, the Habsburg Empire faced renewed demands for domestic political reform. Hungarian leaders advocated a dualist monarchy split into separate Austrian and Hungarian administrative halves. Czech leaders argued for a federalist restructuring of the state. In 1867, the dualist model won, creating the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and relegating Bohemia to the Austrian half. Dualism also introduced constitutional government to Austria. It guaranteed equality of language as a basic civil right, expanded the voting franchise, and granted universal male suffrage in 1907. Liberals hoped the reforms would reduce nationalism's appeal in the monarchy, and indeed, Austria-Hungary did not recognize nations as having legal status before World War I.²⁵ Nevertheless, Dualism set the stage for citizens to imagine and create national social spaces and political territories within the supranational Habsburg state.

Bohemian nationalists used language laws and the state census to give

their political claims spatial dimensions from the 1870s on, leading to the Bohemian nationality conflict, also known as the Czech-German nationality conflict. The census recorded “language of everyday use,” not nationality, and ignored bilingualism. But nationalists used census statistics on language use to measure and map national populations. By 1900, it was clear that Bohemia had a majority German-speaking periphery, a largely Czech-speaking interior, and increasingly linguistically mixed urban areas. Trouble emerged at the “language frontiers” where these territories intersected and where nationalists were alarmed to find it difficult to distinguish Czech speakers and German speakers or to clearly delineate Czech and German-Bohemian territory. Nationalists saw these language frontiers as the places where people and territory could be won or lost for the nation.²⁶

Between the 1880s and 1914, Czech and German-Bohemian nationalists fought to secure their “national property” by claiming ownership of individuals, whole communities, particular industries, and entire economic sectors. This idea of national property gave material dimensions to imagined communities. School buildings, monuments, “Czech” and “German” shops and theaters, street signs, and place-names became ways to stake out physical, cultural, and political space and to measure incursions by other national groups.²⁷ By 1900, nationalists used street fighting, national songs, and economic boycotts as well.²⁸ Territorial gains—from local monuments to an administrative district—became ways for Czech and German-Bohemian nationalists to measure the abstract dimensions of political and cultural influence on the ground. As with the debates about a German nation-state, Dualism and Czech and German-Bohemian nationalist strategies were part of a proliferation of lived and imagined territories that neither directly challenged nor completely corresponded to existing states that characterized late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Central Europe. Ordinary people began to regard political units as things that could be rearranged, created, and dismantled.

After 1871, Saxon and Bohemian frontier residents faced new political realities. The border was now a boundary between a German nation-state and a multinational Austria-Hungary. Suddenly, Saxony found itself, like Bohemia, an administrative unit in a larger state. Dualism and the founding of the German Reich marked a turning point, but not the end of territorial redefinition in the borderlands. In 1867, when Saxony joined the North German Confederation, 70 percent of eligible voters opposed joining a nascent German nation-state under Prussian leadership.²⁹ Within a few years of German unification in 1871, Saxons began to accept their new

political position in a *kleindeutsch* community, as new freedoms of movement and settlement and the gradual replacement of regional legal codes with uniform Reich legislation made clear the economic and social benefits of membership in a large state.³⁰

Yet even as Saxony was integrated into the Reich, new cross-border political ties emerged. Traditional political institutions—parliamentary parties and state agencies—remained bounded by state frontiers. But by 1900, new forms of mass politics crossed state boundaries, creating popular visions of national and socialist communities with distinct territorial dimensions. German nationalists in the borderlands did not accept the German Reich founded in 1871 as the last word on German national unity. In the 1890s, Saxon and German-Bohemian nationalists again created a cross-border German nationalist politics. They imagined a territory of nationalist activism that both included and transcended the German and Austrian states. Similarly, Czech nationalists wanted to expand their efforts beyond traditional Czech linguistic territories; to assert a material, as well as a moral, presence throughout the Bohemian crown lands; and to promote Czech nationalist commitments outside Bohemia, as large-scale migration created a European Czech-speaking diaspora stretching from Vienna to Berlin. The nationalists were not alone. By 1871, Saxony was a center of the German labor movement, and after Bismarck's ban was lifted in 1890, Social Democracy became the largest political movement in Saxony. Bohemian Social Democrats developed contacts with their Reich counterparts by way of Saxony as early as the 1870s.³¹ After the expansion of the Austrian franchise in 1897 and 1907, they succeeded in building a mass politics centered in the industrial borderlands.³² On both sides, nationalists and socialists created new cross-border political networks. They read each others' publications, attended each others' events, and adopted each others' political rhetoric and strategies.

Because the borderlands were focal points for the contradictions and interconnections of populations and ideologies created by nineteenth-century social, economic, and political changes, they became a land of opportunity for the mass political movements that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s. Saxon and Bohemian frontier territories were home to both rapid industrialization and the erosion of traditional manufacturing. They faced dramatic demographic changes as mass migration created an urban population explosion, a sharp rise in ethnic and linguistic diversity, and burgeoning supraregional contacts and communication.

Some frontier people discovered advantages in these changes, while

others suffered from being plunged into an unfamiliar, constantly shifting economic and social landscape. The mix of opportunity and misfortune, coupled with a rapidly widening electorate, created perfect conditions for such mass political movements as socialism and radical nationalism to grow and prosper. Proximity to the border allowed these movements to profit from the ideas and experience of their foreign neighbors and enabled them to challenge their states and use the frontier to escape censorship and legal prosecution. Southern Saxony and northern Bohemia emerged as centers of socialist agitation and nationalist conflict, the products of their particular social and economic geographies and their mutual proximity.

The borderlands also became places where people were most likely to resist national and state classification and to express regional, nationalist, and internationalist identities. Centralizing governments repeatedly had to bow to local peoples' demands that the borderlands be governed by different, more flexible standards than other areas. Most frontier people treated flexible use of the multiple, overlapping territories in their region as a rational response to shifting circumstances. Some political leaders, especially radical nationalists, regarded such flexibility as dangerous. In response, they radicalized their tactics and rhetoric to expand their constituencies and to seize opportunities to institutionalize their political visions at home and abroad.

The Economic Landscape

Of all the developments that reshaped Saxons' and Bohemians' relationships to physical space and each other, emerging modern economic networks had the furthest reach and the longest-lasting effects. New economic networks cut across existing territorial categories, reshaping physical space and social dynamics. They provided the impetus for new political movements—powerful motivations for people across society to think and act beyond the bounds of local, national, and state communities.

In the late 1800s, economic changes led frontier people and their states to treat the borderlands as a distinct region, with its own needs and dynamics, long before they labeled it as such. Industrialization, population growth, mobility, and expanding transport and communication networks transformed the landscape and peoples' daily lives. Borderland people knowingly operated in economic territories that crossed political bound-

aries and even oceans. They elaborated on cross-border economic ties to form new social, cultural, and political relationships.

Industrialization did not develop evenly across Europe but appeared first in areas with coal, transportation, raw materials, and labor. In areas ill-suited for agriculture, people were especially ready to turn to manufacturing and industry.³³ Southern Saxony's and northern Bohemia's similar landscapes and natural resources produced economies that had more in common with each other than with other territories in their own states. As the two industrial regions developed, they increasingly depended on each other for raw materials, equipment, fuel, labor, and markets. Both Saxony and Bohemia had well-established mining, manufacturing, and industrial traditions by the late nineteenth century. Southern Saxony emerged as an important manufacturing region in the eighteenth century and was Germany's foremost industrial region by 1861.³⁴ By 1871, almost 52 percent of the Saxon population worked in industry, nearly twice the Reich average.³⁵

Except for an industrial island around Leipzig in the north, Saxon industries were concentrated in the southern part of the state. Much of the early manufacturing had taken root in the mountainous border region, and the area along the frontier continued to support small workshops and specialized industries. By the late nineteenth century, larger-scale, mechanized industries had developed further inland around such cities as Dresden, Chemnitz, Zwickau, and Plauen. These industries, while not in the immediate border area, were close enough to import raw materials, coal, and labor from Bohemia. In 1909, in fact, the Saxon government noted that the state's industries could no longer survive without Bohemian coal.³⁶

As in other early industrial regions, textiles were Saxony's first big industry. Saxony, Silesia, and Bohemia formed a linen-producing region in the eighteenth century, and by the late 1800s, Saxony's textile producers had markets around the world.³⁷ Saxony lost its edge as Germany's leading industrial region to the Ruhr in the 1880s but remained important.³⁸ Saxon industry began to diversify, especially in the machine and metal industries, creating new urban industrial areas. Saxony's traditional crafts and light consumer industries—such as toys, lace, musical instruments, and basketry—stayed alive in borderland communities. While it lacked the coal that powered the Ruhr, Saxony's regional industrial tradition kept its economy growing into the early twentieth century. The region's industries relied on a skilled, mobile labor force and worked to maintain it. Their tradition of entrepreneurial innovation and flexibility helped them adapt to changes

in local and international economic conditions. In the 1880s, for example, the Saxon towns of Markneukirchen and Klingenthal, already known for musical instruments, began producing banjos and harmonicas for American markets.³⁹

Access to transportation was critical to Saxony's economic success. As Paul Degering observed in 1907, "the denser the rail network, the denser the population, and the more prosperous the area's trade and industry."⁴⁰ Saxony had invested early in railways, and by 1900, it had the densest transportation network in Germany and the densest population in Europe, particularly in the industrial south.⁴¹ A 1904 article in the *Sächsische Industrie- und Handels-Zeitung* noted, "Ever since Aue was connected to the railway, its industries have blossomed."⁴² While Saxony lacked native supplies of coal, labor, and some raw materials, many of these were available just across the border. Between 1880 and 1900, high demand doubled the volume of material—mostly coal and timber—shipped from Bohemia to Saxony on the Elbe.⁴³ These factors won Saxony industrial success beyond what its native resources seemed to promise. Saxon industrial towns were such important exporters that the United States established consulates in Annaberg, Chemnitz, Glauchau, Plauen, and Zittau to enhance the flow of goods across the Atlantic.

Bohemia, particularly its northern border region, experienced industrialization and economic growth patterns like those of Saxony. Bohemian industry emerged in the late eighteenth century from a similar tradition of rural craft production. Its manufacturing also began with textiles, primarily linen—a regional industry whose institutions it shared with neighboring Silesia and the Oberlausitz (part of Saxony after 1635).⁴⁴ In contrast to Saxony, early Bohemian manufacturing originated on large aristocratic estates. Serious industrialization began after the 1780s, spurred by local entrepreneurs' adoption of British technology, new population mobility that followed the abolition of serfdom in 1781, and new enterprises in textiles, glass, iron, and paper. By 1840, Austria was home to more cotton spindles than the entire German Customs Union, and Bohemia itself had more spindles than did Saxony.⁴⁵ By 1910, Bohemia had the most industrial labor force in the Habsburg lands,⁴⁶ producing 75 percent of Austria's lignite, 94 percent of its anthracite, 84 percent of its cast iron, and 70 percent of its chemicals. Most Bohemian industry was in the northern borderlands.

As the shift from small-scale craft production to large-scale mechanized industry gathered steam in the 1870s and 1880s, Saxon and Bohemian

frontier producers developed new ties to one another, adapting old manufacturing traditions to new economic realities. In 1878, Saxon and Bohemian manufacturing associations visited each other, and the Gebirgsverein für die sächsisch-böhmische Schweiz marketed local handicrafts to tourists.⁴⁷ By the 1890s, some manufacturing sectors, such as hand-weaving, had dwindled in the face of mechanized factory production. Some, such as the Bohemian glass industry, produced luxury goods for established foreign export markets.⁴⁸ Other manufacturing sectors such as musical instruments, toys, and Christmas ornaments—expanded for a time by taking advantage of new transportation networks and marketing strategies.⁴⁹

Before World War I, border communities contained an economic mix of midsized mechanized factories and small-scale craft production. Many towns and villages specialized in a particular craft or industry. Sebnitz and Mikulášovice/Nixdorf, towns across the border from each other, both produced artificial flowers. They and other communities with specialized industries survived alongside large-scale industry so long as their products could not be duplicated more cheaply in factories and as long as they had ready access to railways and foreign trade.⁵⁰ Sebnitz bought wire for making flowers from Bohemia and exported its products as far as China and the United States.⁵¹ Lauter expanded its basket production in the 1870s and 1880s, when railways connected the town to markets as distant as the United States and Australia.⁵² But such communities remained vulnerable to changes in cross-border and international trade, fashion, and foreign competition. After machine-made lace displaced handmade lace, for example, the Erzgebirge's bobbin lace makers experienced first a decline, then a boom driven by post-1900 Western European and American fashions, and finally devastation by trade barriers during World War I.⁵³

In the 1880s, southern Saxony and northern Bohemia supported many similar industries, including textiles and glass. But Germany's industrial sector, including that in Saxony, was growing faster than Bohemia's. Saxon and Bohemian industry became increasingly interdependent, but in general, Bohemia supplied coal, raw materials, and semifinished goods, while Saxon industry provided technology and finished goods. Industrialization created unprecedented flows of people seeking work in borderland industries. Cities burgeoned, industrial suburbs popped up like smokestack-studded mushrooms, and frontier populations became increasingly diverse in citizenship and nationality.

Landscapes of Frontier Life

As political and economic conditions created new trade and labor migration across the frontier, cross-border contact became everyday for frontier people. Border residents shopped, peddled their goods, sought work, and visited pubs and dance halls on both sides. Sometimes, one side of the border offered something missing on the other. Other times, people were lured by lower prices or higher wages than those at home.

These choices entered frontier life in the 1870s and 1880s, partly because agreements between Saxony and Austria made the cross-border flow of people and some goods easier than before. When, for example, restrictions on Jewish merchants' mobility and trade were lifted in 1869, many Jews from northern Bohemia moved to Saxony.⁵⁴ In the 1880s, the governments agreed to build new rail lines across the border. The states aimed both to increase cross-border traffic and to monitor it more closely. Similarly, the two states stopped requiring citizens of either state to have travel documents for crossing the border, although Saxon border police were instructed to ask tactfully for some identification.⁵⁵

Austria and Saxony agreed to allow people in border districts to import small amounts of goods, especially foods, duty free. Laws in 1879 and 1887 abolished tariffs on small quantities of grain, flour, bread, meat, and butter. Consumers could bring three kilograms of flour, three kilograms of bread, two kilograms of smoked meat, and two kilograms of butter per household each week. Every household received a book for recording its weekly imports.⁵⁶ After 1900, the two states took further steps to ease tariffs and protect migrant workers and businesses operating on both sides from double taxation.⁵⁷ Border residents had long made economic use of both sides of the border, but the new regulations made legitimate cross-border consumption feasible on a larger scale than before, when cross-frontier trade had required special permits or followed ancient smuggling traditions.⁵⁸ By 1900, borderland residents from industrialists to day laborers had come to consider frontier communities' economic interdependence an indispensable right and tradition.

Saxons enthusiastically embraced their new freedom to shop across the border. Food prices in Bohemia were generally lower than in Saxony,⁵⁹ and Saxons quickly exploited the difference. But not everyone greeted the new rules enthusiastically. Some Austrian producers predicted economic ruin if Saxons and Austrians were pitched into direct competition.⁶⁰ In the 1880s and again in the early 1900s, Saxon borderland bakers protested the new

rules. They complained that cheap Bohemian bread and flour drew Saxon consumers across the border, forcing Saxon bakers to lower prices. Bakers begrudgingly conceded that some working-class consumers needed the economic advantage of the lower prices in Bohemia. But they were much less sympathetic to their better-off neighbors' use of the border. One letter to district administrators maintained that "the importers belong primarily to the better-situated border residents." Another asserted "it is all the same whether it is workers, businessmen, industrialists, or bureaucrats; they all buy Austrian flour."⁶¹ The shift in bread consumption across the border had, the bakers argued, lowered their incomes by more than 50 percent.⁶²

Bakers' arguments suggest that they saw their customers' defection more as an expression of greed than of economic necessity. They argued that the Saxon government should make the political frontier a protective economic boundary. Suggestions varied from stopping all food imports, to stricter monitoring of the amounts of foods people imported, to only allowing the neediest to import food. Saxon districts tried to monitor small-scale food imports to prevent abuses but took no more drastic measures, despite the bakers' protests. Such protests came in waves. Border residents were sensitive to price fluctuations and differences in quality.⁶³ When it was in their interest, they crossed the border to shop; when not, they shopped at home.

Disputes over cross-border bread consumption illustrated both the advantages and limits of economic integration along the Saxon-Bohemian border in this period. Consumers could shop both sides of the border, taking advantage of different price systems and supply networks, because small quantities of goods were exempt from taxes. But bakers and other producers had to buy grain and flour in bulk, and limited to supply networks on their own side of the border, they had to compete with the other side.⁶⁴ In contrast, producers who imported such materials as coal to run factories, kaolin for porcelain, and salt for food found the open border a boon, even with tariffs.

Other developments also reflected the benefits and difficulties of interconnected borderlands. Saxon and Bohemian tourism promoters held joint regional meetings; attended each other's festivals; created shared organizations, such as *Gebirgsvereine für die sächsisch-böhmische Schweiz*; and proposed to create a cross-border tourist region. They collaborated on projects, building bridges and marking hiking trails.⁶⁵ In the 1890s, innkeepers in Johanngeorgenstadt petitioned the district for permission to play dance music until 1:00 a.m. on Sundays and holidays. Expanded industry had brought population growth and young people. Young workers

wanted entertainment. When it was scarce in Saxony, they crossed the border to Bohemian pubs, where the beer was cheaper and the music played later. Saxon innkeepers complained that Saxon restrictions on dancing hurt their business. Because the border and Bohemian pubs were so close, they told officials, Saxon restrictions did little to uphold the local population's morality. In fact, they hinted, as morality was in rather shorter supply just across the border, Saxon officials would be well advised to ease local regulations to keep their constituents within Saxon jurisdiction.⁶⁶ As with bread, the truth was that Saxon publicans worked in a different economic landscape than their potential customers and Bohemian competitors. State regulations limited their choices but left them to compete with people who operated by different rules.

Conclusion

Had a frontier resident from 1800 suddenly found himself transported to 1900, he would have found a landscape with many recognizable elements that grew more unfamiliar the longer he stayed. He would have found certain dynamics strange: the freedom of cross-border movement and consumption, as well as the joint efforts of tourism promoters, Social Democrats, and nationalists. Yet these were the ones that the borderland people of 1900 defended as regional rights and traditions. They would have recognized—even embraced—some of their predecessor's territorial ideas: the political frontier's location between Saxony and Bohemia, the idea of a "German" Europe that did not conform to state boundaries. But borderland residents of 1900 overlaid these territories with others: "national" property, international markets, mass transportation networks, and integrated cross-border communities.

These new conceptions of space were both the products and the engines of the political change, industrialization, and mass mobility that swept the region in the second half of the nineteenth century. They reflected changing relationships between states and populations. By 1900, governments and their citizens were more involved in one another's daily affairs than ever before. Frontier dynamics had become the product of endless negotiations and adjustments, and the borderlands were a place where state power could be most clearly manifested yet most visibly circumscribed and circumvented. Consequently, frontier people and their governments began to think of the borderlands as a distinct region.