Introduction

This is a book about borders, boundaries, and the spaces between them. It is about how geographical borders may be invested with cultural meanings far beyond their political intentions and how their dismantling may be so destabilizing as to generate new cultural practices and identities. Arguing that articulations, ambiguities, and contradictions of identity are especially visible in moments of social upheaval, I portray the rapid transformations in everyday life of an East German border village, Kella, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. I ask what happens to people's sense of identity and personhood when a political and economic system collapses overnight, and I explore how people negotiate and manipulate a liminal condition created by the disappearance of a significant frame of reference.

My study derives from a borderland situation, where this state of transition can be observed in particularly bold relief. Kella, the village in

which I lived and conducted fieldwork between December 1990 and August 1992, is directly on, and is partially encircled by, the former border between East and West Germany. Under the socialist regime it was situated not only within the *Sperrgebiet,* a restricted zone extending a width of 5 kilometers along the boundary, but also within the more restricted *Schutzstreifen,* or high-security zone, a 500-meter strip edging the border. A single road was the village's lifeline to the rest of East Germany. Its 600 residents needed special passes to reenter Kella, and only close relatives with police clearance were permitted to visit. To deter potential "escapes," all road signs pointing to Kella were removed and, like other Schutzstreifen communities, the village was discreetly omitted from nearly every map produced in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The crest of the wooded hills surrounding the isolated village lay in the West, where a lookout point ("the window to Kella") with a parking lot large enough to accommodate several tour buses provided a site from which westerners could gaze down on and ponder the Otherness of the East.

Almost overnight, the village was thrust from this extreme margin of the GDR to the geographical center of re-unified Germany.[1] As a participant in and observer of most aspects of daily life—including parties, family gatherings, village festivals, church activities, village council meetings, weddings, funerals, shopping, cleaning, gardening, cooking, even pig slaughtering—I was able to witness and, to a large extent, experience a multitude of changes in Kella during my two-year stay. I observed, for example, the border fence being slowly dismantled, noting that as the political border disappeared, a cultural boundary between East and West was being maintained, indeed invented. I listened to the stories of many people, including former Communist Party (Sozialistsche Einheitspartei Deutschlands [SED], or Socialist Unity Party) members, struggling to come to terms with a devalued past. I witnessed the church, once an alternative institution preaching against the official values of the socialist regime, react to its diminished political function. I talked with women, those most affected by unemployment, about their feelings of superfluousness and isolation, and I watched as many villagers who were fortunate to have found work in the West struggled with feelings of humiliation and anger arising out of encounters with West

German coworkers. As face-to-face interaction in the village drastically declined through the closings of local factories and state-owned facilities, the disappearance of a barter economy, the dissolution of most village clubs and social organizations, the discontinuation of the village public-address system, and the installation in 1992 of telephones in every home, I heard people lament the loss of community—as well as occasionally applaud the loss of social control such interactions had entailed. I witnessed people negotiate their way through an influx of consumer goods as they discovered new ways of using consumption in the construction and expression of identity and difference. I observed how people responded to—and resisted—the opportunity, pressure, and desire to look and function like the West.

One of my principal aims in this project is to explore the way in which extralocal economic, political, and social processes intersect with the individual lives of people in a community, for it is "in the actions of individuals living in time and place" that these forces are embodied, interpreted, contested, and negotiated (Abu-Lughod 1991: 156). In doing so, I consider Kella as a borderland, both literally and metaphorically, a site for the construction and articulation of identities and distinctions through boundary-maintaining practices, as well as an interstitial zone, a place betwixt and between cultures. Kella is, as Gloria Anzaldúa writes of her borderland: "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (1987: 3).

This study, then, is both an ethnographic account of German reunification and an attempt to understand the paradoxical human condition of a borderland.

BOUNDARIES, BORDERLANDS, AND BORDER ZONES

Boundaries are symbols through which states, nations, and localities define themselves. They define at once territorial limits and sociocultural space. A boundary is, as Georg Simmel has noted, "not a spatial fact with sociological effects, but a sociological fact which forms

space" (1908: 623). Boundaries—cultural, geographical, and territorial—identify people; they define who is inside and who is outside. The simple crossing of a border is a "territorial passage" that may alter spatiotemporal experience (Kelleher n.d.; Van Gennep 1960). Indeed, it is an act of definition and a declaration of identity, transforming one, in an instant, from a citizen into a foreigner.

Anthropologists have long emphasized the importance of studying cultural boundaries and processes of boundary maintenance as a means of understanding the dynamics of identity formation and expression. E. E. Evans-Pritchard's classic study of the Nuer (1940) implicitly examined how group identity and boundaries are relational concepts: community, ethnic or social identities, loyalties, and allegiances are constructed largely in relation if not in opposition to other social groups. Acculturation studies of the 1950s introduced the concept of "boundary-maintaining mechanisms" to explain how "closure" was achieved in cultural systems (SSRC 1953: 975). According to this view, cultural boundaries are maintained through "devices" like ritual initiations, secret activities, or legal barriers that function to restrict knowledge to group members and to shield a culture from external influences. In an important and influential argument, Fredrik Barth challenged certain assumptions of earlier acculturation theories and pointed out that "boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them" (1969: 9). Arguing that ethnic identity becomes meaningful only at the boundaries of ethnicity, Barth insisted on shifting the focus of investigation to "the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (p. 15).

While Barth's emphasis on boundaries is extremely valuable, his theory is less concerned with how they are constructed or sustained, especially when ethnic or other differences are absent. Indeed, it can be argued that it is precisely the "cultural stuff" that impels the very dynamics of boundary construction and maintenance (Mewett 1986: 73). N. D. Fustel de Coulanges recognized this in his study *The Ancient City,* first published in 1864, in which he discussed how certain rituals, beliefs, everyday rites, and memory consecrated the "sacred bounds" of ancient cities and fortified demarcation lines between them (1980). Such practices thus functioned as "boundary-maintaining mechanisms," in that they "ex-

pressed and sustained the corporate identity of social groups" (Munn 1973: 582).

During the 1980s, several ethnographic studies of British communities stressed the symbolic construction in practice of community and cultural boundaries (Cohen 1982, 1986). Anthony P. Cohen (1987), for example, shows how practices of everyday life in a Shetland Island community provide its population with a link to the past and thereby enable people to experience and express a sense of boundedness, distinctiveness, and common identity. In this view, boundaries are both spatial delineators and territorial reifications of social processes, as Peter Mewett points out: "The territorial boundary is a secondary thing, however: it provides the physical symbol differentiating one natural unit from another, but its construction occurs in socio-cultural space. In this sense the boundary can exist only for as long as that which it bounds continues to construct it" (1986: 83). As symbolic entities constituted in human action and interaction, boundaries are constructed out of preexisting differences, which they, in their turn, act not only to reinforce but also to create; the sense of difference they mark is as important as the cultural forms and practices they enclose.

Boundaries thus may shape social life by providing a means for social classification and ordering (Heiberg 1989).[2] While the studies of British communities effectively demonstrate this, they often overlook the degree to which identities and boundaries are externally defined by, and articulate with, larger social, political, and economic processes. Further, as Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson have pointed out in a critique of this work (1994: 4), the focus on boundedness and coherence not only perpetuates "uncritical views of homogeneity" in ethnic or cultural groups that obscures significant diversities and contradictions in social life but also replicates a now widely criticized tendency within anthropology to overemphasize boundedness, coherence, and homogeneity in its study of "culture" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Rosaldo 1989).

Until relatively recently, few anthropological studies of boundaries have focused on actual national or territorial boundaries.[3] Peter Sahlins's study of the boundary between France and Spain has been particularly important in recognizing both local and external factors that contributed

to the invention of a territorial line and the formation of national identities. Challenging the notion that the nation-state was constructed from the center outward, Sahlins shows that as identity came to be grounded in territory, local interests and disputes were voiced in nationalist terms, thus giving shape to a national territorial boundary and distinct national identities. He notes, significantly, that "boundaries are privileged sites for the articulation of national distinctions" (Sahlins 1989: 271). The focus of his historical study is on the duality of the border, however, with little attention to boundary transgressions or the spaces in between.

A recent surge of interest in boundaries within anthropology, history, and cultural and literary studies has attempted to move away from such binarisms of the border by focusing on the interstitial and hybrid space of the borderland.[4] As Homi Bhabha writes, "this hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities" (1994: 4). Influenced by writings emerging out of or about the U.S.-Mexican borderland, this perspective rejects a static, bounded, and monolithic notion of culture in favor of a more dynamic understanding of the multiplicities, complexities, and contradictions of social life.[5]

The borderlands concept also offers new possibilities for theorizing and conceptualizing social space and identity. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, for example, suggest:

> The borderlands are just such a place of incommensurable contradictions. The term does not indicate a fixed topographical site between two other fixed locales (nations, societies, cultures), but an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject. Rather than dismissing them as insignificant, as marginal zones, thin slivers of land between stable places, we want to contend that the notion of borderlands is a more adequate conceptualization of the "normal" locale of the postmodern subject. (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 18)

In this view, the borderland is as much a metaphor as a physical space, or what Roger Rouse has called "an alternative cartography of social space" (1991: 9).

Renato Rosaldo, who has been at the forefront of anthropology in theorizing the concept of a borderland, retains both a literal and metaphorical notion of a borderland in arguing for studies of people living on cultural and national borders. For Rosaldo, the borderland suggests ways of "redefining the concept of culture": "borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation. . . . Such cultural border zones are always in motion, not frozen for inspection" (1989: 208, 217). Moreover, the border zones of daily life may form around a variety of social boundaries: "More than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets and eruptions of all kinds. Social borders frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste" (pp. 207–8).

In many respects, this view of borderlands and border zones offers a particularly compelling way of conceptualizing identity and social life. Such an approach not only highlights the processual, fluid, and multidimensional aspects of identity but also stresses how identities are contextually defined, constructed, and articulated. Indeed, border zones are often fields of heightened consciousness that demand articulation or identification. People's daily routines move them through a variety of contexts in which different forms of identity and identification are experienced, negotiated, and expressed. Rather than viewing these movements as productive of split, fragmented, or hybrid identities—notions that still imply stasis or coherence—the notion of a border zone, with its emphasis on motion and creative production within a particular arena of social life, suggests a more fluid and contextual notion of identity. Many of the dynamics of social and cultural life, I maintain, are the result of an interplay among these various domains.

As intersecting, overlapping, and, often, mutually constitutive cultural fields, border zones need not be spatially grounded, although they may also have real spatial dimensions and implications. Indeed, they may also form around existing (or, as in the German case, recently vanished) territorial or national borders. Although the theoretical or figurative conception of a borderland is based on literal geopolitical bound-

aries, much of the recent border theorizing has neglected the contextual specificity and dense materiality of borders in favor of an almost exclusively metaphorical and very general understanding of borders as zones of fluidity, ambiguity, deterritorialization, marginality, liminality, hybridity, resistance, or cultural diversity and difference.[6] Such depictions often overlook the fact that border zones are also places of intense and inflexible lucidity. Borders, like the one I study, generate stories, legends, events, and incidents; they are contested and negotiated in culturally specific ways by individuals and the state; they are resources for both legal and illegal exchanges of goods and services; they are sites of surveillance, control, regulation, and inspection; and they are places of secrecy, fear, danger, and desire.[7]

One of my principal aims in this study is to explore such multiple border zones—both real and imagined—in a place where tangible, indeed concrete, borders have been a powerful presence. None of the theoretical literature on borders and boundaries, in fact, deals with two of the distinguishing features of the territorial border I discuss here: its impermeability (crossing it could have been a fatal act), and then its sudden disappearance. This was a border that once divided East from West, state socialism from western capitalism, and Kella from easy and normal contact with the rest of the world. This study examines the impact of the inter-German border on daily life under socialist rule, arguing that it was not only a means by which state power was inscribed onto space and bodies but also an essential aspect of the *Zwischenraum,* a German term I employ to describe the space between the boundaries of the known in which people negotiated the limits of the possible and, in so doing, helped define them. I explore the changing meaning of the border as a symbolic construction over time, noting the kinds of borderland identities it has (en)gendered as well as recent struggles over the construction, production, and negotiation of memory surrounding the former border fence itself.

Thus I also attempt to unpack the different meanings of a borderland. Moving among different border zones, I seek to illuminate how a figurative borderland, characterized by fluidity, liminality, ambiguity, resistance, negotiation, and creativity, is dynamically heightened, accelerated, and complicated in the literal borderland of Kella, where the

specificities of both come into especially sharp relief. While I would concur with the notion of a borderland as a site of "creative cultural production" (Rosaldo 1989: 208), for example, I would caution against any tendency to celebrate the interstitiality and creativity of the borderland without attending to the reality of certain power dynamics in which it may be situated. As Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg have noted, borders are "not just places of imaginative interminglings and happy hybridities" (1996: 15).[8] Like other borderlands, the border I describe is characterized by an uneven and asymmetrical intersection of cultures. It is a site of cultural confrontation, articulation, and, to a large extent, penetration, where struggles over the production of cultural meanings occur in the context of asymmetrical relations between East and West. Although borderland residents may be in-between cultures, both geographically and metaphorically, the hegemony of the West here conveys a sense that they are, or should be, moving in a particular direction. They are not just "halfway beings" of the borderland (Castillo 1995), nor are they passive eastern Germans who have accepted and internalized western projections of them as inferior.[9] Instead, through a dynamic and subtle interplay of imitation and resistance, the inhabitants of this borderland are seeking and asserting new forms of identity.

STATES OF TRANSITION: AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF POSTSOCIALISM

As anthropological studies of socialism have argued and demonstrated, the tools of ethnographic analysis are well suited to the study of socialist societies and postsocialist transitions.[10] With their focus on the fine-grained detail of everyday life, anthropological studies not only have contributed a unique awareness of and perspective on the experiences of the "transition" but also have examined its multiple dimensions and trajectories. In doing so, anthropologists have challenged a certain linear, teleological thinking surrounding the collapse of socialism and pointed to the contradictions, paradoxes, and different trajectories of postsocialist societies.[11] Katherine Verdery, for example, has pointed to the ideological significance and triumphalist connotations of "the main

themes"—including "privatization" and the "market economy," "democratization," "nationalism," or "civil society"—of an expanding field that has come to be called "transitology" (1996: 11). At the same time, anthropologists have also begun to examine these "main themes" from an ethnographically informed perspective. Gail Kligman's focus on the process of constructing civil society in Romania (1990), for example, cautions against reifications of state–society dichotomies, while Susan Gal (1996) points to the concept's gendered dimensions. Studies collected by David Kideckel (1995) examine the impact of decollectivization and privatization on local politics, identities, and social organization in rural eastern European communities; Ladislaw Holy's study of national identity challenges certain "vacuum theories" of nationalism that attribute its ascent after 1989 to a need to fill an ideological vacuum left by the collapse of socialism (Holy 1996; see also Verdery 1996).

In contrast to many observers of the transitions in eastern Europe who tend to support a "big bang" theory of socialism's collapse (Verdery 1996), ethnographically grounded studies have emphasized important continuities between socialist and postsocialist societies. David Kideckel (1995) and Gerald Creed (1995) point to parallels between certain structures and experiences of collectivization and decollectivization. In a historical ethnography of collectivization in a Hungarian village, Martha Lampland (1995) demonstrates significant similarities between socialist and capitalist political economic practices and illuminates how commodification under socialism in Hungary helped to pave the way for many of the transitions that have followed. Carole Nagengast (1991), in a study of class and social differentiation in a rural Polish community, similarly argues that the reinstitution of capitalism in Poland does not represent a systemic rupture but reflects important "continuities in earlier, class-based *social* relations that masqueraded as *socialist* relations for four and a half decades" (p. 1, emphases in the original). In a discussion of the elaborate social and economic networks formed under socialism's "second society" in Poland, Janine Wedel (1992) also notes how critical these relations will be in shaping Poland's future. More generally, the work of Katherine Verdery (1996) has been devoted to highlighting continuities in many arenas of social, political, and economic life.

Anthropologically informed studies of postsocialist transitions have

also pointed to valuable topics outside these "main themes." Important work on the gender regimes of socialism as well as on abortion debates in many postsocialist societies have contributed to theoretical understandings of the relationship between gender and nation (De Soto 1994; Dölling 1991; Gal 1994; Goven 1993; Kligman 1992; Verdery 1996). In a different vein, analyses of ethnic and nationalist conflicts have demonstrated that these are not simply a revival of old tensions suppressed by socialist rule but hostilities that must be re-created anew (Verdery 1996: 95; see also Bringa 1995; Denich 1994; Hayden 1996). Other scholars have examined the pervasiveness of memory and the uses and burdens of the past (Borneman 1997; Hayden 1994; Lass 1994). Another important topic highlighted by anthropological studies of postsocialist transitions is the changing cultural meanings and politics of consumption (Berdahl, Bunzl, and Lampland 1999; Humphrey 1995; Konstantinov 1996; Verdery 1996). Underlying most of these studies, explicitly or implicitly, is the salient question of identity and its rearticulation in altered economic, social, and national contexts (Berdahl, Bunzl, and Lampland 1999; De Soto and Anderson 1993; Kennedy 1994; Kürti and Langman 1997; Slobin 1996). Among other things, this book addresses several of these alternative "transition themes," including national identity, memory, gender, and consumption.

For anthropology, postsocialist transitions offer opportunities to explore some of the central issues of the discipline: the relationship among economic systems, political entities, and culture; the construction of identity, ethnicity, and nationalism; social and cultural change. Similarly, anthropology's long interest in conditions of liminality offers a particularly useful tool for analyzing and conceptualizing these moments of tremendous change (Verdery 1996: 231). Defined by Victor Turner as the ambiguous, interstructural, paradoxical, "betwixt and between" status endured by initiates during a rite of passage, the liminal period is a transition "between states" (Turner 1967: 93). As Turner himself suggests, the term *state* may be interpreted very broadly—even, I would propose, quite literally.

Turner's notion of liminality is drawn from Arnold Van Gennep's writings on *rites de passage,* and it is no accident that one of Van Gennep's images for this concept is a territorial boundary. For it is here at the border,

he argues, that a transition between two worlds is most pronounced (1960: 18). In my study of a transition between two German states, I strive to wed the anthropological concept of liminality to more recent theories of borders and borderlands, where—with a few exceptions—it has been surprisingly absent.[12]

In the course of the incorporation of the East into the West, I argue, people like the residents of Kella have invented—and, in some cases, ritualized—certain forms of negotiations and rites of passage that mark a transition. Many of these negotiations and ritualizations have emerged from the interstices of social life: from walks along the former East-West boundary; from spaces between popular faith and institutionalized religion; from consumption practices shaped under a cultural order of socialism in the new context of a market economy; from tensions produced by competing gender ideologies; from the space between the boundaries of remembering and forgetting; and, under socialism, in the Zwischenraum, the space between the boundaries of the known.

The interstitiality of the borderland is thus not confined to the more literal border zone that has formed around the recently vanished territorial boundary, although it may be in this context that its in-betweenness is most visible. In addition to its spatial implications, I also use the borderland here as a temporal, political, and cultural metaphor for a state of and in transition.

PROCESSES AND PARTICULARS

An additional objective of this study, therefore, is to illuminate how people negotiate and manipulate rapid social change in a world of increasingly malleable boundaries, where identities crystallize around borders as well as transcend them. I thus highlight processes of change, contestation, and identity formation that are especially visible in moments of social discord and that take on particular significance at the former border. Throughout the book, I draw on "revelatory incidents" and "ethnographies of the particular" to describe the circumstances and experiences of individuals and a community (Fernandez 1986; Abu-Lughod 1991).[13]

This focus on particulars does not entail a privileging of microprocesses over macroprocesses, however. Instead, it is an attempt to move away from an emphasis on coherence, boundedness, and homogeneity that has characterized much of "traditional" anthropology in general (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Rosaldo 1989) and European ethnography in particular. As anthropology returned "part-way home" to study European cultures, it often carried with it the discipline's traditional focus on isolated, bounded, and homogeneous communities (Cole 1977). Viewing change as unilineal and unidirectional, European village studies have traditionally treated localities as bounded social entities and focused on issues of tradition, modernization, adaptation, and continuity in rural life.[14] An approach emphasizing local identity and culture as products of large-scale processes, while extremely valuable, may risk discounting the productive potential and rich detail of human experience, cultural practices, and individual action in social life.[15]

Although its focus is on the village of Kella, this study, like much contemporary ethnography, strives to transcend the "village-study paradigm" as well as other monolithic "culture concepts" by exploring the effects of long-term and extralocal processes as they are manifested and refracted in a multiplicity of small-scale processes, local practices, and individual actions (Abu-Lughod 1991: 143). Another aim here, then, is to tell stories that reflect particular intersections of the large and the small. Some of these stories focus on individuals, like Werner Schmidt, one of the few "really reds" in Kella; Emma Hauser, a "religious virtuoso";[16] "J. R.," nicknamed after the character in the American television series *Dallas;* or Ralf Fischer, a traveler of maps. Other stories are about places, like the Seventh Station, the Kella chapel, or the landscape of the border fence. And some stories focus on events, like the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989, or Kella's procession in honor of re-unification on October 3, 1990.

Together, the stories, anecdotes, and vignettes are an attempt to represent ethnographically "a world riven with cultural contradiction" (Limón 1991: 116). For, as Michael Herzfeld has noted, it is often these "humbler moments" or "'mere anecdotes'" that reveal what moves people to action" (1997: 24).[17] I do not claim to explain these events or experiences "as they really were" to those concerned; experience and

its recollections, reconstructions, and interpretations—including my own—are subjective, situated, and inherently dialogical.[18] Informed by the well-known critiques of anthropology, then, my ethnographic storytelling aims to avoid the distancing, totalizing, and essentializing discourses of generalization; I hope to show that people's experiences of the rapid transformations surrounding the fall of the Wall have been highly differentiated—even in a tiny border village.

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND WRITING

Ethnographic fieldwork, like most research, is often a matter of structured serendipity. Indeed, my choice of a field site and my relationships in the field were the products of a mysterious interplay of luck and systematic research. I cannot claim, for example, that the selection of Kella as a field site was a carefully calculated one. Instead, it was the only village that met my criteria in which I was able to find housing. My interest in borders and boundaries had led me to select the Catholic Eichsfeld region as a research site in order to explore issues of regional identities and boundary maintenance. My second principal criterion was a *Schutzstreifengemeinde,* a village located in the highly restricted 500-meter border zone, which limited me to approximately fifteen villages in the Eichsfeld. Because these villages had been inaccessible under socialism and the construction of new homes restricted, it was difficult to locate housing, for most homes were shared by three or four generations of one family.

As it turned out, however, Kella could not have been better suited to my research aims and interests. It is located directly on the former East-West border, which is also the Protestant-Catholic boundary of the Eichsfeld region, a Catholic enclave in Protestant central Germany with a long tradition of constructing and maintaining a strong sense of regional identity. As I discuss in chapter 1, the former GDR border also corresponds to an earlier boundary between Prussia and Hesse, which now divides Hesse from Thuringia. Furthermore, several unique places and events made Kella a particularly interesting site for my research. I discuss most

of these in the chapters that follow, including the chapel between the fences, the Seventh Station, and the procession on October 3 that was broadcast on a regional television station basing its coverage of re-unification events in the village. The videotapes of this coverage and the 1989 border opening in Kella that were sitting on the mayor's desk the day we arranged housing only seemed to confirm that I had landed there by a fortunate twist of fate.

As should be evident by the theoretical issues discussed above, "representativeness" and "typicality" are not among my major concerns here. The degree to which Kella, with its variety of "exceptional" historical circumstances—borderland location, Catholicism, Eichsfeld regionalism—may represent the practices, behaviors, and experiences of "typical" eastern Germans before and after the *Wende* (turning point, or the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of socialist rule) is, of course, questionable. While I am convinced that many of the experiences, stories, and events portrayed in this study will resonate with those of other eastern Germans—a conviction that derives from having kept careful track of discussions in the regional and national press, from conversations during visits to other areas of Germany, and from observations by friends and colleagues who have spent time in post-Wall Germany—it is not my intent here to establish representativeness by sociological measure. Instead, my aim is to explore issues of identity formation and negotiation that demand and can profit from a local focus in the context of the social, cultural, economic, and political transformations surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall and German re-unification. In doing so, I hope to generate insights not only into the politics of everyday life in re-unified Germany as well as under socialism in the GDR, but also under such conditions whenever and wherever they occur.[19]

Research Methodology and Practice

Doing fieldwork in a village that was inaccessible to outsiders for more than thirty years posed its own unique challenges.[20] When I arrived with my husband, John, in early December 1990, just days after arranging housing with the local mayor, the entire village had already