

## COMPLEX COMMITMENTS

One warm spring evening in 1991, our neighbor, Hans Becker, invited us to join him on a walk to the Kella chapel (Figure 10). It was Good Friday, and although the priest had preached in church that afternoon against working on a holy day, Hans had spent the day cleaning and remodeling a cousin's home.<sup>1</sup> He dropped by our place to pick up the chapel key, which was temporarily in our care so that we could visit the local pilgrimage site with some guests from Göttingen, and invited my husband and me to join him. During the forty years of socialist rule, the chapel had been inaccessible to residents of Kella. Situated on a hill overlooking the village, it had fallen into the no-man's-land between the border fences, caged 150 yards from daily life, when the inter-German border became impermeable in the 1950s. "I have a special connection to this



Figure 10. The Kella chapel, restored shortly after the Wende, as it looked in 1992. (Photograph by the author)

chapel," he explained. "I've been working all day, and now I just feel like going to the chapel. It doesn't have to be for long. Sometimes I go alone and just sit there."

As we hiked up the steep, rocky incline, a forested area before the war that had been cleared to improve visibility along the closely patrolled border, Hans pointed to where the alarm fence had once stood, as he had on many previous walks, and reiterated how this area had been off limits for most of his life. He talked about an upcoming trip to Italy with his wife in celebration of his fiftieth birthday, and he confessed to us that he was having second thoughts about these plans—insecure about being alone with his wife for the first time in years, he wondered whether he would rather stay at home and celebrate with friends, as he had in past years when there had been no opportunity for travel—and he hoped that some time at the chapel would help him sort out his thoughts.

Once we arrived at the chapel, Hans proudly informed us that he had been largely responsible for the renovations of the building following the opening of the borders in 1989. After more than thirty years of neglect and abuse (border guards had occasionally used the space and components of the chapel to build fires for warmth), it was in need of extensive repairs. Materials were donated from *driiben* (over there, the term used in referring to the West), he said, but he had organized the labor "here" (in the East). As we entered the building, Hans went up to one of the front pews and, omitting the traditional genuflection, sat down. After several minutes of silence, he crossed himself and approached the altar, where he tenderly, almost lovingly adjusted the embroidered altar cloth, trying without success to make it hang straight. Realizing his efforts were futile because the cloth had been nailed to the altar, he gave up, looking defeated. For a strong, burly man who enjoys a high status in the village as an adept mason and hearty beer drinker, his obvious care for the chapel, embodied in a simple gesture full of emotion, revealed a sensitivity that surprised us, for such emotion is not easily or readily displayed by men in Kella. His behavior suddenly made the forty years of Germany's division and the village's isolation seem particularly absurd: what Hans had missed during the period of socialist rule was not necessarily the freedom to travel or an array of consumer goods, although certainly these had been lacking. What had been painfully absent—precisely, perhaps, because it had been so close—was simply the freedom to walk up to the chapel on a beautiful day, pull his thoughts together, and straighten the altar cloth.

Observing Hans's small ritual that day was in many respects revelatory. In subsequent visits to the chapel with other villagers, I witnessed similar gestures of care: watering the trees at the chapel's entrance, checking the flowers on the altar, making sure the information sheet for visitors was intact. Hans's display of enduring faith, his strong attachment to the chapel, his joy in being able to return there, and his pride in the role he played in its restoration poignantly captured not only particular kinds of local religious practices but also the way in which such practices reflect an interplay among religion, identity, place, and belonging.

My aim in this chapter is to explore this dynamic, particularly as it has been affected by the fall of the Wall. The study of religion during and af-

ter state socialism, I suggest, must account for a distinction as well as a dynamic interplay between popular faith and institutionalized religion. During the period of socialist rule in Kella, the interests of these religious traditions converged in opposition to the socialist state. Since the Wende, with the disappearance of this common commitment, they have largely diverged, resulting in a renegotiation and redefinition of religious identities and practices.

I have chosen religion as a category of analysis, as one of many border zones that provide a context for the articulation of different forms of identity, because of its unique role in local history as well as its relationship to other boundaries that have shaped and informed social life and identities in Kella. Although the focus here is on religious behavior and identities, underlying my argument is an assumption shared by many anthropological studies of religion, namely that religion may be viewed not as a distinct sphere of cultural life but, rather, as something that permeates, and is permeated by, complex negotiations of identity within changing political and economic structures.

#### CHURCH AND STATE UNDER SOCIALISM

Like most communist countries, the East German state hoped to virtually eliminate organized religion and replace it with the secular values of Marxism-Leninism. While there was little direct persecution of religious leaders and believers in the GDR (in contrast to other countries, such as Czechoslovakia), both the Protestant and Catholic churches were subjected to a range of controls and repressions as the state attempted to curtail their role in society. Despite the state's relative numerical success—by 1986, the number of Protestant church members had been reduced by more than 50 percent, from 14.2 million in 1946 to 6.5 million (Ramet 1991)—it was never able to eliminate the church's presence and influence, as demonstrated by the leading role the church played in the protest movements of 1989.

After largely ignoring the church during the early years of socialist rule, the state began to impose restrictions on church activities in the early 1950s. Religious instruction in schools was banned, youth organi-

zations were eliminated, church property was confiscated, and church meetings were subject to control and harassment (Smith 1985: 70). In an effort to establish socialism as a secular religion, the state introduced socialist ceremonies to replace traditional religious rituals. The "socialist name-giving ceremony" became the alternative to the Christian baptism; the "socialist marriage ceremony" aimed to supplant church weddings; and "socialist funerals" were intended to replace religious burials. In the early 1950s the state even proposed celebrating Stalin's birthday on December 21 instead of Christmas, although this suggestion was never implemented.

Introduced in 1954, the most widespread socialist ceremony in East Germany was the Jugendweihe. Local committees throughout the GDR worked with schools, parent associations, and the youth organization FDJ to ensure a high participation rate. In an effort to endow the occasion with special importance, fashion shows representing appropriate Jugendweihe dress were held in Berlin and publicized throughout the country. Performances by youth orchestras and chamber groups, as well as poetry recitations, dances, and singing, added a festive atmosphere to the ceremony. In preparing for the state's rite of passage, students learned about the responsibilities of socialist citizenship, the goals of communism, and the party line about how the antifascist socialist state had overcome the horrors of National Socialism.

This ceremony immediately became a highly contested and symbolic issue for both the Protestant and Catholic churches. Although the Protestant church at first resisted, excluding Jugendweihe participants from confirmation ceremonies, it soon became resigned to accepting the Jugendweihe after the number of confirmations began to drop sharply (Smith 1985: 72). The Catholic church's opposition to the ceremony remained consistent throughout the socialist period, although it never denied church membership to Jugendweihe participants.

The Protestant and Catholic responses to the Jugendweihe issue were, in a sense, reflective of each church's individual stance under socialism in general. The Protestant church's principal strategy was to carve out a place for itself within socialism. In 1969, it split from the all-German Evangelical Church of Germany (Evangelische Kirche Deutschland

[EKD]) to establish a separate League of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (Bund der evangelischen Kirchen der DDR [DDR-BEK]). The decision not only was indicative of a new generation of church leaders but reflected a new attitude within the church itself. Referred to as "the church in socialism," this new phase in Protestant church-state relations was characterized by the church's willingness to reach an accommodation with the state and work within its political framework; in exchange for its loyalty, the church extracted a degree of official acceptance.

A consequence of this new approach was a meeting between leaders of the BEK-DDR and Communist Party leader Erich Honecker in 1978. Emphasizing the common ground between church and state, the meeting was intended to usher in a new era of church-state relations. An agreement reached during the talks granted the Protestant church increased freedoms and privileges, including access to television; permission to erect buildings; access to prisons; help in restoring church memorials; eligibility of clergy and church workers for state pensions; and financial support for church kindergartens and cemeteries (Smith 1985: 74).

Despite an improvement in relations, tensions between the Protestant church and the socialist state remained. As the only official organization allowed to exist independently of the state, the church implicitly remained a site of potential opposition. In the 1980s, with the Protestant church as a refuge, various peace and environmental movements began to emerge in the GDR. United by their opposition to the international arms race, these groups organized peace seminars, church congresses, prayer vigils, and worship services with contemporary accompaniments. They publicly opposed state policies that, in their view, were indicative of an increasing militarization of GDR society, including mandatory military indoctrination and the military draft. Although their protests were often directed against state policy, their ultimate goal of world peace was not inconsistent with the stated values of the socialist regime.

Environmental movements similarly emerged in the shadow of the Protestant church. Widespread pollution of the air, water and soil in East Germany was the focus of this protest; the church's participation in these movements was motivated by "scriptural injunctions about stewardship of the earth" (Jarausch 1994: 37). Influenced by the rhetoric of the west-

ern Greens and the international environmentalist movement, informal circles gathered (primarily in East Berlin) to discuss ecological issues, and local groups throughout the GDR sponsored public seminars, tree plantings, and ecology days.

The experience of these grassroots groups under church protection—which by 1989 numbered 150, according to Stasi estimates—provided much of the basis for the protest movements that emerged during the fall of 1989.<sup>2</sup> Protestant clergymen were often leaders in the new civic movements, including the New Forum (Neues Forum), Democracy Now (Demokratie Jetzt) and the Democratic Awakening (Demokratischer Aufbruch). Church buildings were important spaces of protest, particularly the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig, with its reformist pastor and Monday evening prayer meetings. By early October 1989, dissenters were beginning to leave the sanctuary of the Protestant church to become a public voice as demonstrations spilled over into the streets of major East German cities (Jarausch 1994: 44; see also Maier 1997).

Despite the important influence of the Protestant church and the involvement of its clergy as leaders of the opposition, however, it never attained the status of a counterhegemonic discourse that Polish Catholicism did in its cooperation with the Solidarity movement (Kubik 1994). The Protestant church in the GDR provided an arena for political opposition; it was not an agent of it.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, the Catholic church in the GDR had a more quiescent attitude toward the state. Its small numbers—1 million members, or approximately 6 percent of the population (Fischer 1991: 211)—and withdrawal from public life made it much less visible than the Protestant church. Instead of creating a separate church as did the BEK-DDR, the Catholic church maintained its ties to the centralized Vatican. Its primary aim was to maintain the doctrine of Catholicism (Gordon 1990). Until the 1980s, the Catholic church remained skeptical of the Protestant church's "church-in-socialism" approach and largely distanced itself from public affairs. This "minimal-contact policy" meant that the church's activities were generally limited to individual parishes (Fischer 1991; Meyer 1991: 90); as a result, the Catholic church never harbored the kind of organized political opposition to the regime that the Protestant churches did.

With a new generation of church leaders in the 1980s, the Catholic

church began to emerge from its isolation to define itself as part of the socialist state. Although by 1988 church leaders and lay members had initiated their own peace movements and were participating in ecumenical conferences, the Catholic church continued to lag behind the Protestant church in terms of political activity. It was late to recognize the decline of socialism and deep crisis within GDR society and only joined the 1989 protest movements shortly before the Wall fell (Meyer 1991).

The relationship between the church and the state, particularly the situation of the Catholic church within the GDR, provided a context for religion and religious activity in Kella. As the remainder of this chapter will show, the situation of the church and religion under socialism was a critical factor in shaping the meaning and form of many religious practices here, both before and after the Wende.

## HEIMAT AND GLAUBEN

### *The Eichsfeld*

As we saw in chapter 1, Kella lies not only on the former border between East and West Germany but also on the Catholic-Protestant boundary of the Eichsfeld region. Crossing the border into Kella is thus a passage from West to East and from the predominantly Protestant federal state of Hesse to the almost exclusively Catholic Eichsfeld. This multilayered boundary was marked not only by the former border fence (which was dismantled in the summer of 1993), but also by a wooden crucifix station and a sign bearing the Catholic greeting "Grüß Gott in Kella" (Welcome to Kella), both erected shortly after the Wende.

Throughout the region's history, residents of the Eichsfeld have actively constructed and sustained a strong sense of regional identity. When unity seemed threatened by the division of 1815, for example, the local population on both sides of the new boundary became active in voluntary associations for local historical studies (Heimatvereine and *Geschichtsvereine*). Similar in form to the Heimatvereine that emerged throughout Germany in the nineteenth century (compare Applegate 1990), these organizations systematically researched the history of the Eichsfeld, emphasizing a common heritage and traditions resulting from

centuries of Mainz control (Meinhardt 1986). When the Industrial Revolution in England displaced the once prosperous local textile production, Eichsfelders who emigrated or sought seasonal work outside the region formed similar associations throughout Germany; by the early 1900s, more than eighty Eichsfeld Heimatvereine had been established (Gerlach 1985: 41). Similarly, after the boundary between East and West Germany became increasingly impermeable in the 1950s, eastern Eichsfelders who had settled in West Germany founded new Heimatvereine in order to maintain (and construct) a sense of common heritage. Many of these associations erected memorials to the "divided Eichsfeld" that depicted the region as a microcosm of divided Germany. A 1980s educational exhibit in the western Eichsfeld city of Duderstadt, for example, was entitled "Divided Eichsfeld, Divided Germany, Divided Europe" and featured displays about the regional history of the inter-German border as well as winning entries from a local drawing and painting contest for the best representation of the divided Eichsfeld within the larger context of German and European division.<sup>4</sup>

A particularly active association for people from the southern Eichsfeld (where Kella is located) is the Heimatverein Eichsfeld-Werratal. Based in Eschwege, this group sponsored the construction of a memorial to the Eichsfeld's division on the West German side of the border long before the fall of the Wall. Called "the Eichsfeld Cross," the memorial sits on a hilltop just across from the Hülfsenberg, the Eichsfeld's most sacred pilgrimage site, located ten kilometers from Kella within the highly restricted Schutzstreifen zone.<sup>5</sup> Plans were in the works when the Wall fell to erect a chapel near this cross as a "substitute pilgrimage site" for the inaccessible Hülfsenberg.<sup>6</sup> After the Wall fell, the Heimatverein helped sponsor renovations of important Eichsfeld landmarks, including the Konrad Martin Cross at the Hülfsenberg, a memorial to the native Eichsfelder and bishop of Paderborn, Konrad Martin, who was imprisoned and later died in exile during Bismarck's Kulturkampf. The association also provided substantial financial support for the restoration of the Kella chapel.

In addition to being constructed and maintained both within and outside the region, the boundaries of the Eichsfeld are also the product of an

interplay between local identity as Catholics and the Protestant identity of the surrounding region. Eichsfelders are constituted as "others" in a manner that Johannes Fabian calls "modern time/space distancing" (Fabian 1983: 27): they are distanced in time and space by emphasizing religious differences. The superstitions, rituals, icons, and pilgrimages of the Catholic Eichsfeld are perceived as backward by their neighbors in the surrounding region. Often regarded as a separate group, Eichsfelders are the object of some curiosity and the butt of jokes.

Because of the region's history as a Catholic enclave, Eichsfeld identity is often regarded as synonymous with religious sentiment. Local pilgrimages, religious traditions like the Heiligenstadt Palm Sunday procession, or the icons of faith that construct and ascribe meaning to the Eichsfeld landscape are expressions of religious devotion as well as of regional loyalty and identity. The "Eichsfeldlied" (Eichsfeld Song), commonly referred to as "our national anthem," contains numerous references to the religiosity of the region's inhabitants, as the song's last two stanzas illustrate:

The stove, at which the loyal wife  
rules in faithful modesty,  
and children, like the olive tree,  
fold their little hands in prayer;  
the house, were the Lord our God still matters,  
and not just what satisfies the stomach,  
where unwavering faith  
lifts one's view from the dust.

Eichsfelder with the love of travel in his blood  
and a breast full of song,  
home, home, is where your heart and courage are  
your purpose and your soul,  
home, where the cross towers from the hill  
and tells you of God's love.  
When your last hour arrives,  
may it be on Eichsfeld soil!

Other stanzas of the song are similarly part of a cultural construction and performance of the landscape.<sup>7</sup> The song not only renders the Eichs-

feld landscape legible by defining and highlighting critical markers and signposts but also reflects how culture may be reimagined in the landscape (Schama 1995):

If you have traveled around the world  
on every road and path,  
set up your tent in north and south  
on alpine and beach fronts:  
have you not seen my Eichsfeld?  
With its hills crowned with castles  
and merry residents  
you'll want to sing praises [of the Eichsfeld].

There, where the young Leine [river] flows,  
the Unstrut [stream] wanders to the valleys  
the Hülfsberg greets the Werra  
the Ohmberg its Hahle  
the Wipper flows through the Au  
near and far, what a show  
in valleys and hill ranges  
and tidy villages.

In Kella, nearly every adult knows all five verses of the song by heart; it is sung enthusiastically at community or social gatherings, village festivals, family outings, and group excursions. It is particularly common for people to break into this song while hiking through one of the Eichsfeld's many rolling hills and valleys, a transversal of the landscape that simultaneously inscribes and performs it.

#### *Place, Identity, and Belonging*

The "Eichsfeldlied" reflects not only the construction of a meaningful landscape but also the interdependence of religious practices and regional identities. It is, moreover, a ballad of belonging, reflecting the complex, ubiquitous, and emotional concept of Heimat. Literally translated as *the home* or *homeland*, the term *Heimat* refers to a discourse of belonging in which identity becomes grounded in place. As Celia Applegate (1990) has pointed out, the term has no one meaning. It is both inherently linked to notions of Germanness and an imagining of a local

community. It has provided emotional as well as ideological common ground for the construction and maintenance of local identities (as illustrated by the Heimatvereine associations throughout Germany, including the Eichsfeld), and it has been the focus of explorations by various writers, politicians, scholars, and filmmakers.<sup>8</sup> Entailing a dynamic interplay between invention and tradition, Heimat, as Applegate notes, "has never been a word about real social forces or real political situations. Instead it has been a myth about the possibility of a community in the face of fragmentation and alienation. In the postwar era, Heimat has meant forgiving, and also a measure of forgetting. Right up to the present, it has focused public attention on the meaning of tradition and locality for the nation itself" (1990: 19).

As the "Eichsfeldlied" and many local religious practices demonstrate, the notion of Heimat in the Eichsfeld is closely associated with religious sentiment, or *Glauben* (faith). The East German state recognized this connection between Heimat and Glauben enough to feel threatened by it: like its attempts to undermine religion and replace it with loyalty to the state, it also discouraged expressions of regional loyalty. The "Eichsfeldlied" was banned from schools, maps of the undivided Eichsfeld were locked away, and Heimatvereine were prohibited.<sup>9</sup> Despite—indeed, perhaps because of—the state's attempts to undermine regional loyalties, many of these traditionally localizing practices continued during the period of socialist rule. Whereas most residents of Kella can sing the entire "Eichsfeldlied" by heart, for example, I was told by residents of the western Eichsfeld that few people in their part of the formerly divided region can do the same.

Immediately following the Wende, many of these forbidden practices in the eastern Eichsfeld were publicly revived: local voluntary associations were reestablished, maps of the entire Eichsfeld, locked away for forty years, have reappeared on schoolroom walls, and thousands have participated in pilgrimages to the sacred sites formerly enclosed by the Sperrgebiet. In the summer of 1990, a small citizen's movement denounced the region's division into several administrative districts and states (the Eichsfeld bridges Lower Saxony and Thuringia) and called for a separate Eichsfeld Kreis belonging to Lower Saxony, in order to "preserve our identity as Eichsfelders."<sup>10</sup> Although this proposal failed, the



two Kreise of the eastern Eichsfeld, Heiligenstadt and Worbis, were united into one Eichsfeld Kreis following another citizens' initiative in 1994. Such localizing practices reflect not only the intensity and aura of durability surrounding Eichsfeld identities but also the way in which identity may be grounded in place.

These practices also reflect how processes of localization are very much intertwined with those of nation-building or even globalization (Appadurai 1996; Miller 1995; Morley and Robins 1996). Like many European "traditions," the modern idea of Heimat emerged during a period of rapid social transformation in the second half of the nineteenth century (Applegate 1990: 10). In this context, Applegate continues, Heimat "tried to make sensible at least small pieces of that changing society, brushing them with a false patina of fixedness and familiarity" (Applegate 1990: 10).

The resurgence of local Eichsfeld Heimatvereine after the fall of the Wall may be part of a similar process. Heimat, David Morley and Kevin Robins have observed, "is about sustaining cultural boundaries and boundedness" (1996: 459). As the local Heimatvereine differentiate the Eichsfeld from as well as link it to the re-united German nation (especially in presenting the Eichsfeld as a microcosm of divided and then re-united Germany), these associations and localizing practices may be a way of demarcating and making sense of a small piece of a rapidly changing society since the collapse of socialism. They may also be part of a redefinition and renegotiation of Germanness and German nationhood following re-unification.

### *The Volkskirche*

The history and construction of Eichsfeld identity, expressed and experienced in the concept of Heimat, provides the context for discourses and expressions of place, identity, and belonging in Kella. As Hans's actions at the chapel revealed, there is a strong connection between Heimat and Glauben here.

Like much of the Eichsfeld, this link is both reflected and constituted in the local landscape. Kella's landscape is embedded with markers of the

community's religious and communist pasts: the chapel between the fences; the community church near the village center, with its separate bell tower; roadside shrines and crucifixes that mark village boundaries, including one secretly erected in 1988 by the village priest and a defiant mayor; a pilgrimage path leading up to the chapel with the fourteen Stations of the Cross; and a wooden cross, built shortly after the Wende, adorned with barbed wire from the border fence. In a sense, the village is framed by a trinity of religious symbols: a crucifix marks each of the two village entrances (one from the East, one from the West); the chapel between the fences completes the triad.

Although Glauben and Heimat have been a central aspect of Eichsfeld identity as well as key elements in popular definitions and practices of religion, they have not always coincided with the interests or leadership of the Catholic church. In fact, the relationship between Eichsfeld identity and religious sentiment has occasionally been cause for conflict between parishioners and church officials. "The clergy has often reproached us for going to church simply out of local habit," explained Günter Bachmann, one of the few villagers to attend a university and receive a doctorate. "They say Catholicism in the Eichsfeld isn't as genuine as in the diaspora, where people go to church out of religious convictions." As he continued to describe this tension, Günter distinguished between a *Volkskirche* (people's church) in the Eichsfeld and the institution of the Catholic church: "I don't think the church is always in a position to understand what goes on here [in the Eichsfeld]. People aren't necessarily fanatical Catholics, but rather they hang onto the external frame that the Catholic church has provided here for the last 400 years."

According to Günter, the *Volksfrömmigkeit* (popular faith) of the *Volkskirche*, represented by certain cult-like actions, such as pilgrimages, processions, and roadside shrines, goes deeper than that of traditional Catholicism. This stems largely from the *Volkskirche*'s embodiment of Heimat and Glauben, from its ability to generate what he called an "ethnic belonging" in the region. It was the *Volkskirche*, Günter argued, that was largely responsible for the preservation of religious faith in the Eichsfeld under socialism: "If people remained true to the church here, they didn't do it because of a particular confession of faith. Instead, I think they

clung to the truth of this Volkskirche, to this community." He added with pride that his Volkskirche was not as accommodating to the regime as the orthodox institution had been.

Other residents agree, citing a struggle in the early 1980s between the community and church officials over the future of the pilgrimage chapel. The state wanted to tear it down, and the diocesan provost had approved the action. Emma Hauser, a woman in her early sixties and a "religious virtuoso," recalled:

The chapel was a thorn in the side of the whole regime. Even though it didn't do anything, it reminded them of religious life here. . . . The provost and our church's high officials, they were cowards. Today they all pretend to be martyrs, they all claim to be political martyrs. . . . At the dedication of the memorial on the Hülfsenberg, he [the provost] made a speech. He claimed to be the big resistance fighter, the provost, and then I had to think about the chapel here.

Led by Emma and her husband, Wolfgang, the community successfully fought the church, and the state, to preserve their chapel. As influential members of the local church council, without whose approval the provost and the state hesitated to authorize the demolition, they were able to convince authorities to leave the chapel standing. "The most convincing argument," Wolfgang recalled, "was what it would look like to the West if they tore down the chapel. Everyone would have been able to see that and would have said: look at how awful this state is. It even tears down beautiful chapels." Although inaccessible, they both explained, the chapel had to be preserved, for it was still a "piece of Heimat."

The Kella chapel thus came to be an important symbol of the community, the church, and religion under socialism. Like the residents of Kella, it was isolated between the fences, cut off from easy and normal contact with the rest of the world. The state's plan to demolish the chapel was similarly emblematic of its efforts to undermine religion and regional identities. Yet, like their religious faith, people kept the chapel alive through sentiments and practices associated not necessarily with the institutionalized church but with their Volkskirche—through a strong notion of the interdependence of Heimat and Glauben.

## POPULAR AND INSTITUTIONALIZED RELIGION IN AN AUTHORITARIAN SOCIETY

### *Heimat and Glauben under Socialism*

This notion of a Volkskirche or Volksfrömmigkeit as opposed to the Catholic church reflects an important distinction between popular faith and institutionalized religion. Anthropologists have long recognized this distinction and recently have pointed to the tension and dynamic interplay between the two (for example, Badone 1990; Christian 1989, 1996; Stewart 1991). Challenging monolithic, "two-tiered" models of religion, Ellen Badone defines popular religion "as referring to those informal, unofficial practices, beliefs, and styles of religious expression that lack the formal sanction of established church structures" (1990: 4, 6). In a similar vein, Caroline Brettell writes that popular religion "applies to any social situation where a conflict or dialectic emerges between official religious models proposed by the ecclesiastical hierarchy and 'unofficial' forms" (1990: 55). Popular religion may thus denote practices that are ignored, denounced, or informally sanctioned by the church. It may even entail behavior that is not intrinsically religious but takes on religious meaning in context and practice. Straightening a cloth and tending to flowers, for example, are not in themselves religious acts; yet Hans's tending to the altar cloth or similar gestures I witnessed during visits to the Kella chapel with other villagers acquire spiritual meaning because they are performed at a sacred site and because of their larger connection to religious and regional identities, to Heimat and Glauben. Such local and localizing practices also reflect a crucial interdependence between what Charles Stewart calls "doctrinal religion" and "local or practical religion—the form that religion takes in relation to the life of the community" (1991: 11).

Research on religion in Eastern Europe, however, has largely ignored the distinction and interplay between popular faith and institutionalized religion. Shaped largely by cold-war discourse, studies of religion in Eastern Europe have focused primarily on church-state relations (Osa n.d.). Unofficial definitions and local practices of religion—both sanctioned and denounced by the church—were an important means of op-



posing the state in everyday life and must also be considered if we are to understand the changing role of religion in eastern Europe.

In Kella, religious practices expressed and affirmed regional identities as well as opposition to the socialist regime. Having one's child baptized, being married in the church, and sending a child to first communion instead of the Jugendweihe were often overtly political acts (compare Nagengast 1991). As we saw in the previous chapter, when church services were prohibited in Kella in 1953 and 1954, villagers walked ten kilometers every Sunday to attend mass in a neighboring village. When the Hülfsberg became inaccessible without a special pass owing to its location in the Sperrgebiet, people applied more than five months in advance for permission to attend pilgrimages there.

In addition to the community church building, an important site and symbol of institutional religious presence in Kella was the Schwesternhaus, a church-owned facility that housed a Catholic kindergarten and a small nursing home and offered weekly office hours for nonurgent medical care. Except for a few loyal party members, who sent their children to a state-run kindergarten housed in the public facility of the village administration building, most parents sent their children to the Catholic kindergarten housed in the Schwesternhaus; it was a small gesture of defiance, a local tradition that people proudly recall today. Built in 1929, the Schwesternhaus is a conspicuous landmark within the village due to its size, unusual yellow exterior, and hillside location. The fact that Franz Iseke, Kella's resident priest between 1901 and 1947 and the driving force behind the initiative to build the Schwesternhaus, was the brother of the author of the "Eichsfeldlied" continues to be a source of local pride, providing the village with an intimate connection to the history of Eichsfeld regionalism. Although not as prominently visible as the village priest, the three nuns who lived in and ran the facility were an important presence in the community. The social services they offered through the Schwesternhaus contributed to the church's self-definition as an alternative institution to the socialist state.

Symbols of Catholicism and popular faith—ranging from roadside shrines to the crosses hanging on living-room walls—similarly represented the way in which a "collective self" was defined in opposition to

a "collective other" (the state, bureaucracy, the party) (Nagengast 1991: 140). Many of these sites and symbols have a long history not only as places of resistance but also as sites of a convergence and interplay of popular faith and institutionalized religion.

The crosses that mark the village boundaries, for example, while officially sanctioned by the church, have also been invested with certain legends, stories, and superstitions indicative of a kind of popular faith. Although both crosses were removed in the 1950s, their sites remained important spatial markers in village discourse until they were reerected, one shortly before, the other shortly after, the fall of the Wall. According to local legend, a Soviet army officer who shot once at the crucifix figure on the cross near the East-West boundary accidentally shot himself later in the knee, the same place where the Christ figure had been hit by the soldier's vandalism. The crucifix station on Kella's eastern boundary has a similar story associated with it. A school principal during the Nazi period refused to allow crosses to be hung in the schools, the legend goes, and was killed a few months later in a motorcycle accident just meters before the crucifix station. "He couldn't get past the cross," people say. Such stories and legends not only invest these sites with meaning and memory but also reflect a moral economy of values outside the official realm of institutionalized religion. Although neither sanctioned nor denounced by the church, they are circulated, reproduced and endowed with meaning in the realm of popular faith.

A year before the Wende, these meanings and memories were invoked in an unusual act of defiance and cooperation between the village priest and Kella's mayor, Ursula Meyer. Together with three other villagers, they secretly erected a cross on Kella's northeastern boundary near the neighboring village of Pfaffschwende. The priest secured a life-sized wooden crucifix from church officials in Erfurt; Ursula supplied cement for the foundation. Despite some questioning by the local policeman, who stumbled across the group digging a hole for the structure's foundation one evening, authorities left it standing, reflecting a growing relaxation in state control. The cross was dedicated in a community procession headed by the priest a week later.

Religion, both popular and institutionalized, could thus be a means of

testing or contesting state power as well as a reason for resistance.<sup>11</sup> As Emma Hauser explained:

In socialism, the world view was atheism. That means a world without God. It all happened gradually so we didn't notice it at first, but then we did. . . . When they closed our church here, we went to church in Pfaffschwende. People said "Now we're really going to go!" In wind and rain, old and young, everyone went. . . . A bit later they introduced the Jugendweihe. For me that was a serious crime—I would have seen it as betraying God if my children had participated.

Religious beliefs were cited as grounds for refusing to participate in state activities. As I noted in chapter 2, this affected party membership in Kella. Parents also objected to the Jugendweihe ceremony and mandatory military training camp for ninth- and tenth-grade boys for religious reasons. "It's because the word *Weihe* [dedication] has such important religious connotations," one man explained. Others simply claim that the Jugendweihe was an "atheistic ritual" and thus had to be resisted by true Christians.

Emma Hauser's story of her battle to keep her son from participating in the Jugendweihe reflects how the ceremony was a politically and symbolically charged issue. In 1978, her youngest son, Manfred, was in the eighth grade and thus eligible for the Jugendweihe. Despite being repeatedly called into the principal's office, along with other children whose parents were resisting the ceremony, Manfred followed his parents' instructions and refused to sign the form agreeing to participate. The school then sent a representative to visit the parents in their home. "I was so terrified," Emma recalled, "I wasn't able to sleep some nights. I must have lost ten pounds—just because the teacher was coming to see us!"

Reminding herself that this was an opportunity to demonstrate her faith in God, she prepared diligently for the teacher's visit. She familiarized herself with socialist teachings by reading *Das kleine Wörterbuch der marxistisch-leninistischen Philosophie* (Small Dictionary of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy). She discovered there that Jugendweihe was defined as "an important contribution in the education of youth in the worldview

of socialism" and noted from her other experience that the "worldview of socialism is atheism." She memorized and practiced what she would say to the teacher, and she prayed to the Holy Spirit to bless her with the right words.

Emma's prayers were answered, although indirectly, for it was her husband who did most of the talking during the meeting with Manfred's teacher. "'My family and I profess to be practicing Christians,'" Wolfgang said, "'and you can't demand of us that we acknowledge Christ on the one hand while sending our children to an atheistic ritual on the other.'" When the teacher objected, Wolfgang reminded her, as Emma had planned to, of the definition of Jugendweihe in the "Small Dictionary of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy." After the teacher admitted that the "worldview of socialism" was "atheism," Emma recalled, she realized the Hausers were not to be persuaded. She left three hours later, and Manfred avoided the Jugendweihe.

Although active church members like the Hausers were never directly threatened with deportation or imprisonment, they were monitored especially closely and often suffered discrimination in housing, building-material allotments, travel permits, and educational opportunities.<sup>12</sup> The village mayor and her secretarial assistants recall that the most frequent topic of their regular questioning by Stasi officers concerned church activities, participants, and sermon contents.<sup>13</sup> And as Emma Hauser's story illustrates, careful tabs were kept on families with children eligible for the Jugendweihe.

Many residents view these forms of opposition as part of an ongoing local tradition of resistance to an oppressive political system. Indeed, there appear to be important continuities between religious struggles, resistive practices, and the politicization of religion under both Nazi and SED rule. Memories of the Nazi period in Kella are frequently expressed in terms of religious opposition, a local narrative that is both supported and, perhaps, to some extent structured, by the church chronicle that was carefully written and assembled in 1946 by an assistant priest who had served in Kella during the war.<sup>14</sup> After the annual Corpus Christi procession through the village was prohibited by Nazi officials in 1940, for example, the congregation processed along the inside of the church prop-

erty line. There were similar struggles over religious instruction in the schools until the assistant priest assumed responsibility for this task in 1939. Support for the Nazi party was reportedly limited to a handful of villagers, most notably teachers; this claim is supported by the 1933 election results in Kella, where the National Socialist Party received less than 10.7 percent of the popular vote, in contrast to 43.9 percent nationally and 28.6 percent in the Eichsfeld.<sup>15</sup> The priest's 1946 chronicle describes local opposition to Nazi ideology:

The regional chairman of the Nazi party for the southern Eichsfeld was the teacher Raubold from Großtöpler. He worked hard to educate people about his worldview. But he lacked listeners because he mostly railed against the Bible, the Catholic church, and the Papacy. He had to resort to many tricks in order to lure Eichsfelders, who instinctively rejected this violent system, into his meetings. This is how a meeting was advertised in Kella, for example: "Tonight at 8 P.M. there will be an important meeting in the room of the new school. Each family must send one adult member." Because food-ration cards were often distributed in this manner, people naturally came. As soon as they recognized that Raubold simply want to propagandize, they left the room in protest.

Villagers in their fifties and sixties similarly remember their parents' rejection of National Socialism on religious grounds, while some (including clergy) even invoke the period of Bismarck's Kulturkampf. Recalling that, like the socialist state, the Nazi regime instituted alternative life-cycle rituals ("national socialist baptisms" or "national socialist marriages," for example), Emma Hauser remembered how her mother refused to join a national socialist women's organization because it "contradicted her Christian beliefs." Similarly, she recalled her father commenting on the Nazi regime: "A regime that rejects the cross, that rejects God, can't win a war. They may have put a cross on their flag, but as much as you can try and turn it, there will always be a hook on it." In a sense, this notion of religion as opposition is part of a teleology preached by the church and supported by popular discourses about the durability and timelessness of Christianity and local faith. "No matter what the regime," one man explained, echoing a recent pilgrimage sermon, "whether National Socialist, socialist, or capitalist, faith will prevail." As

we shall see in the final section of this chapter, however, this assumption is no longer unquestioned.

### *Heimat, Glauben, and the Wende*

The fact that religious practices and beliefs were perceived as resistance and employed in opposing the regime is especially evident in local uses of religious symbols and language at the time of the Wende. During this period of intense and rapid transition, political demonstrations emerged, though belatedly, out of the Catholic churches in the region. Immediately after the borders opened, residents of Kella cut a hole in the fence near the pilgrimage chapel to make it easily accessible. Just two weeks later, they organized a procession to the chapel, still under the scrutiny of border guards, following the fourteen stations of the cross that lead to the pilgrimage site. In preparation for the procession, a local artist helped village children paint pictures for the empty concrete stations to replace the originals, which had been lost long before. And to replace the Seventh Station, which had been totally destroyed when the border was fortified, residents constructed a cross out of tree branches near the border, adorning it with barbed wire and a small piece of the border fence (Figure 11). The barbed wire formed a circular "crown of thorns" around the intersecting branches, while the piece of fencing was affixed near the top of the cross where "INRI" is traditionally placed in Christian iconography. Despite the border guard's insistence that the cross be removed after the procession, villagers left it standing; later they secured it in a concrete base.

The fence, a very real and material symbol of the border, was thus transformed into a religious icon, an expression and interpretation of villagers' experience in their own symbolic terms. Intended as a quick, functional solution to the problem of the missing station, the cross quickly attained enormous symbolic value. A local embodiment of the transcendent and a transcendent embodiment of the local, it has, like all symbols, been invested with a multiplicity of meanings.

In different ways, the Seventh Station symbolizes for most residents the forty years of division, reflecting the ways in which larger historical



Figure 11. The Seventh Station, a substitute for a Station of the Cross that had been destroyed by border fortifications, was assembled immediately after the fall of the Wall with materials from the former border fence. (Photograph by the author)

processes are given meaning through local, proximate symbols. "The fence was our cross to bear," several people told me. Others see it as a "memorial to what was destroyed by the border" and cite everything from "Heimat," to the specific stations of the cross destroyed, to families who were separated by the division. As the cross's designer, Johannes Schneider, explained:

I decided to take wood near the station because so much [wood] was cut down [to clear space] for the border. And the metal fencing, that was to

represent everything they destroyed here on the border . . . the station, the vegetation, the trees. . . . And then I decided to put the barbed wire around the cross for the people who have suffered on and because of the border. That was my idea, and then I didn't really think much more about it. For me, it was important that a station had once stood there and that this had been destroyed.

Anna Biermann, a woman in her late twenties and a devout Catholic, similarly explained that for her, the cross is less a religious symbol than a kind of memorial:

I didn't have anything to do with [setting up] the cross. . . . I'd heard that they'd put a cross up there, but didn't really think about why, or how. At some point I went up there and said to myself, it's actually quite nice. . . . I saw it simply as a substitute for this [missing] station, and since they couldn't find anything better up there, they took the barbed wire.

Afterwards I thought the barbed wire could stand for the fence. As a symbol, na? Because basically for me, the barbed wire stands for the crown of thorns. And one can see this crown of thorns as pain. When they put the crown of thorns on Christ, he must have suffered. So, too, did the border cause suffering—this fence, this barbed wire.

At the Seventh Station, border residents, Catholics, the Eichsfeld, indeed the divided German nation, are constructed as martyrs, as victims of the border and of the SED regime. This wooden cross remains an important image of suffering in Kella, a symbol of enduring religious faith and identity, of Heimat and Glauben.<sup>16</sup>

Although supported by the church, religious behavior initiated and organized by the community, like the procession to the chapel, the construction of the wooden cross, or the chapel renovation, is typical of the kind of popular religion practiced here. Despite the tension inherent in the relation between unofficial and official religion (Badone 1990: 12) and despite numerous incidents of struggle between parishioners and clergy, the interests of the two interrelated religious traditions remained largely congruent during the period of socialist rule. Referred to as a *Zufluchtsort* (place of shelter), the church was viewed as an alternative institution preaching against official values of the socialist regime; popular religion, including local legends and superstitions as well as notions of Heimat

and Glauben, empowered its position. Ironically, therefore, the socialist state's antagonistic policies toward religion had an effect that was opposite to what it intended.

#### POPULAR AND INSTITUTIONALIZED RELIGION IN A CONSUMER SOCIETY

Since German re-unification, however, the church has lost much of its appeal and influence. Concomitantly, both popular and official religious practices have lost their meaning as political acts of opposition. As in the rest of the former GDR (as well as in many other post-socialist societies), religious activity has declined dramatically in Kella. Church attendance has decreased, contributions to the collection plate on Sundays have dropped to less than half of what they used to be, and participation in pilgrimages is far below what it was when special passes were required. For residents of Kella, the Eichsfeld, and elsewhere in the former GDR, the church's function as a shelter and forum for opposition to the regime has disappeared.<sup>17</sup> As one man explained, "You can't hide from unemployment under the protection of the church."

As it struggles to maintain its influence, the Catholic church in the Eichsfeld has drawn on a variety of rhetorical devices to make its argument. At times, the language has been strikingly similar to the socialist regime's "anti-imperialist" discourse. The border, for example, which was once referred to by the regime as an "armored shield against the West," is now referred to by the church as having been an "armored shield protecting Heimat and faith." The reason for the decline in Heimat and Glauben, says the church, is the rampant consumerism and heightened individualism inherent in the new capitalist system.

Condemning the *Nachholungsbedarf* ("the need to catch up," a reference to the perceived materialism of eastern Germans following the opening of the borders), local clergy regularly devoted sermons to the dangers of consumerism. In one instance, a visiting priest from Heiligenstadt reprimanded the Kella congregation for failing to attend his parish mission services. Acknowledging and appropriating the interrela-

tion of Heimat and Glauben in the Eichsfeld, he pointed out how both were now threatened as people pursued the "new freedom." "Faith was once determined externally," he argued. "Now this faith must be retained even though the external forces are gone. . . . Right now it's like after the war, when starving people who were finally given food ate so much that they died." Similarly, in a mass honoring the service of nuns in Kella, the local priest, Father Münster, wrote and directed a play about the dissolution of family and community caused by an insatiable appetite for consumer goods: children absorbed in their new Walkmans cease to interact with their parents; a married couple quarrels about a new car purchased in order to keep up with the neighbors. The new threat, the play concludes, is "being separate from another," and this is the result of moral decay caused by consumerism.

Often drawing on messages contained in pastoral letters, Kella's priest warned his parishioners that "consumerism is more dangerous than communism," or "capitalism is just as bad as communism." At one Eichsfeld pilgrimage, Bishop Joachim Wanke of Erfurt conveyed a similar message: "Advertisements promise happiness and joy. With the words 'buy your happiness,' industries try to obstruct peoples view of reality. . . . On the path toward a total consumer society that consists solely of acquiring, using, and then throwing away, not only car wrecks but also human wrecks are left behind." At a dedication ceremony for the renovation of the Konrad Martin Cross on the Hülfsenberg, the archbishop of Fulda preached a message along these same lines: "In the last forty years there were clear fronts to fight against. Now the assault of practical materialism is more difficult than that of theoretical materialism. In other words, theoretical materialism has been replaced by practical materialism—and temptation has become strong." In another vein, Father Münster attempted to make his argument using the language of consumerism he thought might appeal to parishioners: "Go shopping at the Aldi of God!" he urged them, referring to the western discount store Aldi, commonly associated with eastern Germans' shopping habits since the Wende.

In presenting itself as the leader in the fight against the onslaught of consumerism, the church has also invoked a glorified memory of its own

position and actions under socialism. Local clergymen remind their parishioners of the church's important role in opposing the socialist regime. At the 1991 Heiligenstadt Palm Sunday procession, for example, the presiding priest noted the important "resistance" function the procession had played during the forty years of socialist rule. Although religious practices were often performed as an expression of, or reason for, opposition to the regime, they were rarely defined as such by the Catholic church before the *Wende*.

Of course, the church's preaching against consumerism is nothing new. In fact, its message of anticonsumerism is not new since the *Wende*. What is different in this context is the way in which the church has glorified its own past as well as the socialist past. The us-versus-them attitude, with which the church was able to garner support during Communist rule, does not work in a market economy. While residents acknowledge a certain truth in the church's preachings—one of the most common laments since the *Wende* concerns a loss of community in the village—and many are quick to deplore the decline in church attendance and donations, western democratic political forms and a capitalist market economy are not perceived as being as threatening to religious identity as the socialist system had been. Most villagers maintain they are "still good Catholics," but with their new freedom of individual choice and opportunity for travel they have less time for communal expressions of religious devotion.

With the church now preaching messages its followers do not always want to hear, and with the loss of a common and urgent commitment to religious survival, the interests of official and unofficial religion have, to some extent, diverged. Although an interplay between the two remains, this divergence has forced an individual as well as collective redefinition and renegotiation of the meaning and practice of religion and religious identities. Indeed, it has resulted in new negotiations and contestations of the sacred itself. During the socialist period, for example, the church had been an important means of social control: without any alternatives to the village church, attendance at mass in Kella was closely monitored by both parishioners and the priest. The opening of the borders and increased mobility have created new opportunities and socially sanctioned

substitutes for this fundamental measurement of religious devotion. Rather than attending Sunday morning mass in Kella, for example, villagers may choose to go to Saturday evening mass in nearby Eschwege or Grebendorf. In place of Sunday mass, others may simply visit a famous pilgrimage site on a day trip. Similarly, during an excursion to Tirol sponsored by Kella's Heimatverein, several women hiked the hills at dawn on a Sunday morning, repeatedly reciting Hail Marys and singing their favorite hymns. On hearing that they had done this instead of attending mass, Kella's priest reprimanded the women, demanding that they "bring this into the confession." The women, believing that they had expressed religious devotion that day, shrugged off his criticism.

In an interesting sense, such notions and performances of devotion as individual expression suggest an extension of the individualism of the marketplace to religious practice; people come to church and express their faith on their own terms. Individual observance has not necessarily replaced community solidarity, but it may have displaced it.

Not surprisingly, Kella's priest became a central figure in negotiating these changes. A small yet domineering man in his midforties, Father Münster served in Kella from 1982 to 1996. Just as the influence of the church as an institution has declined since the fall of the Wall, so too, did Father Münster's influence and role in the community. Villagers increasingly sought out clergy in other churches for confession, thus severely limiting his control of and access to local and often privileged knowledge.<sup>18</sup> This declining influence and involvement in community affairs were also the product of the dramatic change in circumstances since the *Wende*, in which all community members have less access to shared information.<sup>19</sup>

Father Münster responded to this challenge by attempting to cling to his control, occasionally through methods and strategies of manipulation.<sup>20</sup> While he still retained a certain measure of authority invested in him as priest, Father Münster remained a fairly controversial figure in the community until his departure in the summer of 1996. According to many villagers, "he changed a lot [after] the *Wende*." Others challenged his, and the church's, accusations of materialism by pointing to the priest's new Volkswagen Jetta, fax machine, and cellular phone.



Father Münster was most controversial, however, due to his involvement in the charismatic Focolare ecclesiastical movement. Based on an ideal of "world unity" and "universal love" preached by its founder and leader, Chiara Lubich, around whom the movement's personality cult is centered, Focolare is one of the most powerful of the newer ecclesiastical movements within the Catholic church.<sup>21</sup> It demands of its adherents a high level of participation and commitment, including regular attendance at local, regional, national, and international gatherings. The opening of the borders in 1989 created new possibilities for travel within the movement; Father Münster frequently organized trips for the handful of villagers involved in Focolare activities to meetings in other parts of Germany, Italy, and Poland.

For Father Münster, this was (and, I believe, continues to be) his life's work. Having grown up outside the Eichsfeld, he had little understanding or patience for many local and popular religious practices.<sup>22</sup> Instead, he felt that he must devote himself to the Focolare movement. Many villagers resented this, not only because they were skeptical of many of the ideas and practices of the movement, but also because they believed that it divided the congregation and detracted from his responsibilities as a priest to the community, which above all, they argued, entailed presiding over local masses and pilgrimages.

The tension between Kella's priest and parishioners not only supports the notion that the relationship between priests and parishioners is "rooted in struggle" (Behar 1990; Riegelhaupt 1984), but also reflects how the practice and category of religion are subject to, and are the products of, negotiations and contestations by clergy as well as parishioners. In a sense, villagers' criticisms of the priest entailed a blurring, indeed inversion, of distinctions between popular faith and institutionalized religion: it was the parishioners who invoked traditional categories of the church and roles of the clergy to contest their priest's involvement in what they viewed as unconventional religious practices outside the realm of institutionalized religion.

Recent events in Kella reflect this continuing struggle, not only between clergy and parishioners but between the church as an institution and its members as well. In the spring of 1994, the three nuns who had

lived and worked in the Schwesternhaus were transferred out of Kella due to financial pressures on their parent house; its Catholic kindergarten is now housed in the former GDR day-care facility. Several years later, the building still stands empty, slowly showing signs of abandonment and decay with its crumbling facade and broken windows. What was once an important symbol of religious presence and opposition under socialism, particularly in the context of the community's status as a village in the Schutzstreifen, has thus now become for many residents a symbol of loss and betrayal. As one woman told me: "It makes me ill with sadness even to look up there at the Schwesternhaus." The community farewell gathering for the nuns reflected similar sentiments in poems written for and tears shed at the occasion.

This sense of loss and betrayal was heightened by the announcement in the spring of 1996 that Father Münster was to be transferred out of Kella. Most upsetting to parishioners was that the church would not be providing a replacement. Kella was thus not only losing Father Münster but a resident priest as well; the future of the parish rectory, which had recently undergone extensive renovations, was yet to be determined. Because no reason was given by the priest or the bishop for the transfer, people were left to speculate, particularly after Father Münster insisted to inquiring parishioners that he had not requested a transfer. Many viewed his removal as a normal course of events: ten years was an average tenure for a priest in any community, they argued, and this one had already exceeded his. Others pointed to the widespread shortage of priests in the Catholic church and explained the transfer as a product of diocesan reorganization and consolidation. Soon, however, rumors began circulating that the bishop had received letters of complaint from several villagers. According to local gossip, one letter was critical of Father Münster's involvement in Focolare and claimed that he was responsible for creating troublesome factions within the congregation. Another letter allegedly accused the priest of improper conduct in relation to several of his closest female parishioners. There were reportedly no charges in the letter—nor were there rumors in the village—of sexual involvement; rather, the priest was blamed for having created divisions within families and between spouses as a result of his frequent activities and

close relationships with several women in the village. Sensing a problematic and potentially disruptive situation, it was speculated, the bishop had determined that it was time for the controversial priest to move on.

Most significant about the local gossip were the changes it reflected in perceptions and attitudes toward the church as an institution. The church had not merely lost the appeal it had under socialism as an alternative institution and forum for opposition to the regime, it had now itself become a power that had to be interpreted, negotiated, and contested. Indeed, I would suggest that certain negotiations and speculations about the church's power were informed and structured by interpretations and negotiations of state power under socialism: a suspicion of the unknown, a sense that something knowable was being withheld by design, a notion of collective negotiation as a means of deciphering the enigma. Echoing similar comments I heard from several villagers, a letter to the bishop protesting Father Münster's transfer stated: "Many [of us] working in the West have learned that those in power care little about the human effects of their decisions . . . is this true in this case as well?"

The loss of a resident priest, and the villagers' reactions to the loss, also reflected an increasing divergence between popular faith and institutionalized religion. Recalling their allegiance to the church during socialism, for which many villagers had paid a price, parishioners described feeling abandoned and betrayed by the church. Of the handful of letters written to the bishop, most mentioned the painful loss of the *Schwesternhaus*: "The *Schwesternhaus* overlooks [the village] like a memorial, empty and yawning. . . . Must our rectory also stand empty and unused?" Similarly, another letter argued: "We have defended our faith over the past years. . . . And what has it brought us? We feel abandoned, especially because along with Father Münster we are losing a permanent resident priest." Several parishioners even threatened to leave the church: "Some [people] have even indicated their intention to leave the church," one letter cautioned, "They claim they don't need to pay church taxes in order to believe [in God]."

Anticlericalism, as numerous anthropological studies of religion in Europe have shown, does not necessarily imply a rejection of religion;

nor does hostility toward the church as an institution (Behar 1990; Herzfeld 1985; Mintz 1982; Riegelhaupt 1984; Taylor 1990). However, the anticlericalism and hostility toward the church in Kella are indicative of the kinds of practices that have called into question the very meaning of the church, religion, and spiritual practices in a changing world.

#### RELIGIOUS CREATIVITY

Both popular religious practices and the interaction between official and unofficial religion are thus being redefined and transformed in relation to the tremendous changes brought about by re-unification. While it is too early to ascertain the impact these transformations will ultimately have on the church's position, on religious sentiment, or on regional Eichsfeld identities associated with the notions of *Heimat* and *Glauben*, they do make especially visible the fluid and contested nature of religion and religious practices. The relationship between religion, identity, place, and belonging is always changing and often context dependent. This dynamic is what fosters the kind of religious creativity I witnessed in Kella, a creativity that often emerged from the interdependent spaces between popular faith and institutionalized religion as people struggled to make sense of a rapidly changing world. I am reminded of this borderland creativity each time I glance at the gift that Hans Becker made for us when we left Kella: a cross, made of two pieces of the border fence, adorned with barbed wire.