

## 6 Designing Women

A year into my fieldwork, several women from the village began to paint silk together (Figure 18). Although they met only six or seven times, these women were attempting to renew a community that had been lost when the factory in which they worked was closed. "This is like women *drüben*," one woman commented. "They have their bowling clubs, their crafts courses. They have to keep busy." Before long, however, the women recognized that they were not like women *drüben*. As we began to paint our scarves, women moved from project to project, picking up a paintbrush or glitter and adding whatever they saw fit to each other's artwork. At first taken aback by this and protective of my own scarf, I soon realized that a sense of collective production was at work here—a stark contrast to the individual projects in my West German silk-painting course. It was something our West German instructor



Figure 18. Painting silk, 1991. (Photograph by the author)

did not quite know how to deal with. In noting this difference, one woman from the village explained, "In the West it's every man for himself" (which in German has a less gendered connotation: *jeder für sich*). Other women agreed: "It's nicer our way, isn't it?"

At the time, this revelatory incident captured the heightened social consciousness of these women, who were re-creating for themselves, if even for a brief moment, a gendered space after their factory closed. The incident also illuminates and contextualizes some of the issues I explore in this chapter: the production and negotiation of gender identities, the simultaneous imitation of and differentiation from the West, and the gendered nature of East-West distinctions.

My principal aim in this chapter is to examine several ideological and practical tensions that informed the construction and negotiation of gender in Kella before and after the *Wende*.<sup>1</sup> The most obvious and transformative of these is a tension produced by the influx of western images and ideologies of womanhood that have challenged forty years of women's

experience under socialism as workers and mothers. I explore this tension in the second half of the chapter, and I argue that it and the social transformations of which it is a part are both deeply gendered and gendering: the real and invented distinctions between East and West are often structured in gendered terms. National identity may thus be viewed as a gendered phenomenon.

Before discussing this recent turn of events, however, I explore aspects of social life under socialism that were tension-laden in respect to gender roles and gender identities. During the socialist period, I argue, women negotiated contradictions in the state's own gender ideologies: the official proclamation of gender equality, on the one hand, and pronatalist policies that encouraged traditional women's roles, on the other. In Kella, the socialist state's ideology of gender equality was also often in conflict with the strong presence of the Catholic church and its traditional views on women. Since German re-unification, these traditional views have also been challenged by a different set of competing gender ideologies: western feminist ideas.

These diverse tensions have been, and continue to be, negotiated and contested in very subtle ways, both individually and collectively. An examination of these tensions may not only illuminate the heterogeneous production, representation, and negotiation of gender in postsocialist societies and elsewhere, I argue, but also serve as a reminder that women's experiences of socialism and the transformations since the collapse of socialist rule have been highly differentiated.<sup>2</sup>

#### MAKING CLIPS

In Kella the boundaries of gender continue to structure and organize much of the community's religious, social, and domestic space: in church, women and children fill the downstairs pews while men sit in the balcony; most social and village gatherings are similarly separated along gender lines; and domestic labor and space are divided largely according to traditional gender roles.

As in the rest of the GDR, the workforce in Kella was largely segregated by gender during the socialist period.<sup>3</sup> Ninety-nine percent of vil-



Figure 19. Women working in the Kella clips factory in the 1960s. (Photograph courtesy of Elizabeth Henning)

lage women were employed outside the home, and more than half of them worked in the local factory maintained by the state exclusively for the purpose of providing employment for women in this isolated Schutzstreifengemeinde.<sup>4</sup> Reopened in 1953 as a cigar factory, as it had been in the decades before the war, the facility was taken over by the VEB Kleinmetalwerk Heiligenstadt in 1966 for the production of suspender clips (Figure 19).<sup>5</sup> Managers from the factory headquarters often conceded that this work could have been done more effectively and efficiently by machines, but the state was committed to employing women locally and thus kept the plant in Kella operating.

In addition to being a convenient place of employment, the clips factory provided an important space for daily contact among village women and for the dissemination of local gossip and shared knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Affectionately called the "gossip factory," it was a place where local folklore, stories, gossip, and even songs were transmitted and transformed. As one woman in her late twenties explained, "You always learned the latest news there [at the factory]—everything that had happened in the village.

Everyone knew something, and they exchanged information. Some mean-spirited people used to say that if a woman worked there seven hours a day, she needed at least two hours to tell others [in the village] what she'd learned there. You came together there with people; it was familiar, you know?" Many village women spent the majority of their working lives assembling clips together. Mothers encouraged their daughters to join them when they reached working age. As throughout the GDR, brigade and factory parties, excursions, and seminars highlighted as well as reiterated the social and educational function of the workplace. For many women, the annual factory-sponsored day trip was one of the few opportunities to travel away from the village.

This focus on the importance and centrality of the socialist workplace was a critical aspect of the state's effort to promote its ideology of worker-mothers. In many GDR factories, including the toy factory in neighboring Pfaffschwende, the day-care center, the Konsum store, and even a doctor's office were housed on the factory grounds. In Kella, many of these facilities were within yards of the clips factory. A central kitchen provided a standardized meal for all workers, students, and day-care children in both villages. These policies and practices were not only a way of making it easier for women to work outside the home but also part of a process through which the state attempted to supplant certain roles and functions of the private sphere—child rearing, family meals, and so forth—with the public sphere of the socialist workplace.

The guarantee of paid employment was thus among several rights and privileges accorded to women in the GDR.<sup>7</sup> The East German constitution granted not only formal legal equality but also equal pay for equal work. Throughout the GDR, working mothers were assured of day-care services for their children that included nurseries for infants, kindergartens for preschool children, and after-school programs for pupils up to the fourth grade. All pregnant women were guaranteed pregnancy leave as well as a one-year leave at full salary after the birth of a child. In addition, women were given the right to an abortion after the state passed a law in 1972 legalizing the procedure during the first trimester of pregnancy. As part of the "mirror-imaging" process in the construction of two German states, the GDR abortion law aimed to underscore the so-

cialist state's commitment to women's rights in response to the unsuccessful proabortion battle in West Germany (Borneman 1992; Funk 1993b).

Participation in the political sphere was also part of women's rights, privileges, and obligations under socialism. The state's efforts to integrate women into party political work involved them in a variety of political functions.<sup>8</sup> Socialist gender quotas required that 30 percent of village council members be women; women formed the majority of members in certain state and local mass organizations like the German Red Cross or the senior citizens' People's Solidarity League; and women's organizations like the DFD aimed to involve women by explicitly addressing what it perceived to be, and defined as, women's concerns. The DFD was one of several channels of mediation that sought to convey the party program as well as the socialist state's gender ideologies to its female population; its diverse programs reflected the state's often contradictory images and philosophies of womanhood and women's roles. DFD meetings, at which attendance in Kella ranged from four to fifty women, addressed political topics like "The Woman in Socialism," dealt with local concerns such as renovations of the child-care facility, and offered instruction on various homemaking questions.

Other mediators of the state's gender ideologies included the educational system, work collectives, and state publications like a handbook given to newlyweds. Entitled *Unsere Familie: Ratgeber für Jung und Alt* (Our Family: A Handbook for Young and Old), this handbook was owned by most families in Kella; after the Wende, some women continued to use it as a reference. It stresses the importance and advantages of "the working woman" and offers advice and guidance for transforming "relations between the sexes" in order to facilitate women's paid employment. It urges couples to share housework and emphasizes the role of parents in creating and maintaining good "socialist family relationships" as well as in cultivating a "socialist personality" in their children.<sup>9</sup> Despite its emphasis on equal rights and women's paid employment, however, the images of women conveyed in this handbook remain tied to traditional roles: the only photographs of women are as brides or mothers, whereas men are pictured solely in the workplace.

The GDR women's magazine *Für Dich*, read sporadically by women in Kella during the socialist period, similarly emphasized women's dual role in the socialist state as workers and mothers, or worker-mothers. Yet, as Irene Dölling has pointed out, the magazine's frequent photograph caption reflecting this role, "Our mommies work like men," also conveyed a message that as "mommies," women were always second-class workers (1993: 169–71). Even stories of successful and ambitious women were tempered by the perpetuation of stereotypes like "motherliness, caring, and selflessness" (p. 174). The magazine thus reiterated what was being conveyed to women in many contexts: they were expected to combine motherhood, housework, political activism, and paid employment.

This state ideology regarding women's roles, reflected and internalized through the everyday practice of paid work, factory production rituals, political involvement, and traditional gender roles in both the domestic and public division of labor, meant that women in Kella, like women throughout eastern Europe, bore a "double" or "triple" burden. As several feminist scholars have pointed out, the rights and privileges accorded to women under state socialism as well as its ideology of worker-mothers also served to reinforce as "natural" women's traditional role in the home, thereby underscoring as well women's roles as biological regenerators of the socialist nation and as socializers of its citizens (Einhorn 1993; Funk 1993a; Nickel 1993).<sup>10</sup>

The effort to negotiate such paradoxical policies and dogma affected women's daily lives on a very personal level. Echoing aspects of the socialist state's arguments that stressed the emancipation of women in the GDR relative to the FRG, one woman in her late twenties explained, "I think women here [in the GDR] were freer. In terms of work, in terms of everything. One always heard that women were somewhat oppressed in the West because they stayed home and were housewives. Women had a say here, in politics and in work." She paused and smiled, then continued. "Women here had to do as much as men and more. They worked eight hours and then came home and kept working. But I couldn't do it all. I couldn't work eight hours, keep up my household and THEN, on top of that, say 'I raised my children to be good socialists.' I just wasn't able to do that. I'd like to see the woman who did."

A woman in her early sixties, Emma Hauser, recalled a "typical day":

In the mornings after the alarm clock rings, who gets up first? The woman. Who makes coffee? The woman. Who makes breakfast? The woman. Even though I also had to go to work. That's the way it was in most cases. The woman took care of everything, and when everyone else was out the door, I didn't take any time to drink my coffee. I just made a quick sandwich for myself, gulped it down, and left. That's what life was like here. One day like the next.

For many women in Kella, the day often began before dawn and ended after midnight. It included at least six hours of work outside the home, several hours of cooking and cleaning at home, child care, and, for many families with land in the LPG, regular work at the collective farm. A gendered division of labor existed within the sphere of the second economy as well: responsibility for securing food provisions, a time-consuming effort involving hours in queues as well as bartering and negotiating, fell primarily to women (Pine 1993). Furthermore, village women were the ones who usually heated the family home, a task that entailed building and regularly attending to a fire in the coal-burning stove; in the summer they canned fruits and vegetables from the garden for winter consumption.

In Kella, this responsibility for the domestic sphere was reinforced by the strong presence of the Catholic church. As in many areas of Europe, religion in Kella is a gendered domain in which women are held more strictly to rules of church attendance, confession, and mourning (compare Cowan 1990; Dubisch 1995). Church and state gender ideologies were thus often in conflict: while the state encouraged, indeed demanded, that women work outside the home and promoted the workplace as the central locale for social interaction, religious teachings stressed the importance of women as mothers and nurturers in the private sphere of the family. Reciting biblical teachings, the "religious virtuoso" Emma Hauser explained, "The Lord first made Adam, that was the first. The man, that's the stronger sex. And then he said, 'It's not good that he's alone,' so he made him a helper. That's what it says in the Bible, a helper. So one should know that the woman is only a helper for the

man. One hundred percent equal rights, that won't ever happen." Although the relationship between church teachings, popular conceptions of womanhood, and gender roles is itself complex and fluid, many devout women looked to the Virgin Mary as an ideal of a self-sacrificing nurturer in their daily lives (Dubisch 1996; Loizos 1988).<sup>11</sup>

Women negotiated this tension between church and state gender ideologies in different ways. A woman in her early forties, Barbara Becker, for example, fulfilled all the duties of a socialist worker-mother: she worked six hours in the clips factory, put in her required hours at the LPG, and served as a village council member. At home, however, she strove to emulate not socialist prescriptions for motherhood but, she explained, religious ideals of motherhood derived from the model of the Virgin Mary. She attended church daily, took full responsibility for domestic chores, cared lovingly for her husband and children, and silently endured verbal and occasional mild physical abuse from her senile mother. Barbara is a popular and beloved community member; her high status and resulting symbolic capital were, I believe, the product of her capacity to negotiate and demonstrate socialist and religious ideologies of womanhood.

Emma Hauser similarly attempted to negotiate this tension. Her biblical reference, for example, emerged during the same conversation in which she acknowledged and lamented a "triple burden" in the division of domestic labor. For her, the biblical reference was an explanation and justification of the gender inequalities she experienced and perceived in her daily life. When I asked if she truly believed that women were created for the purpose of assisting men, Emma laughed and replied, "No. Ach, I'm not as narrow-minded as that. On the contrary. Sometimes I tell my husband what to do. My sister-in-law, she serves her husband. Lays out everything for him to wear—including his hankie and socks. I don't do that. I just put everything in the closet. He knows where it is."

Emma's acknowledgment of the inequity of a triple burden, claims to progressive attitudes regarding women's roles, and affirmation of traditional religious ideologies of womanhood do not represent a contradiction on her part; rather, it is indicative of the diversity of representations and self-representations that are part of the construction and expression

of gender identities. The tension between traditional religious and state socialist ideologies of gender—as well as contradictions within them—and these women's negotiation of those tensions demonstrate how gender is produced heterogeneously (Ginsburg and Tsing 1990: 5). In this sense, gender may be viewed as the product of a dynamic interplay between the internalization, negotiation, and contestation of diverse and competing gender ideologies. This dynamic has become especially evident since the fall of the Wall.

#### FROM WORKER TO HOMEMAKER?

Eighteen months after the Berlin Wall fell, the clips factory in Kella closed. Women were also the first to be let go from the toy factory in a neighboring village, where most of the other women from Kella had worked. With few prospects for future employment, especially for workers over the age of forty, the majority of women were relegated to the domestic sphere and became full-time homemakers for the first time in their lives. Having viewed work as a duty rather than a right, some women welcomed this change. Most women, however, did not. The loss of access to and control of relevant information about personalities and events in the community was only one factor in these women's sudden isolation. "It was stupid work," one woman recalled, "but at least we saw each other and talked to each other. Now people just run past each other. It wasn't just the work, but the companionship."

Apart from close friends and relatives, women largely stopped seeing each other except for occasional encounters at Sunday mass or the village Konsum. Feelings of superfluousness and financial insecurity, as well as the loss of a worker identity inculcated through forty years of state ideology and physical labor, contributed to many women's confusion and depression. "My friend Sylvia," one woman told me, "she just sits at home and cries." Another woman in her midforties, who often shared with me her feelings of depression and isolation, explained sadly: "This idea that a woman should stay at home and only do her housework came all at once. It happened overnight, too quickly." And in a different con-

text, a younger woman made a similar remark: "Many women don't know what to do with themselves any more. What am I supposed to do standing over the soup pot all day?"

As in other postsocialist societies, women's participation in the political sphere has also declined dramatically due to the abolition of socialist gender quotas. We may recall from chapter 2 that Kella's mayor of ten years, Ursula Meyer, was ousted by the village council in May 1990 despite an overwhelming majority of the village popular vote; furthermore, there were no female candidates in the 1994 village council election. The dissolution of other organizations in which women had been active and of several women's groups immediately following the Wende have also contributed to a decrease in women's involvement in the public sphere.

These changes have been accompanied by the incorporation of the former GDR into a new nation-state whose social policies and legal systems direct women toward the family, motherhood, and part-time work (De Soto 1994; Rosenberg 1991). In contrast to the men who have found work following the closing of East German factories, village women who have work are employed only part-time. Although this is largely due to the West German job market for women, it is also the result of West German ideologies and images of womanhood channeled through the large and the small: from the media, to the regional Employment Bureau, to discussions and interactions with West German friends and relatives.

In the realm of everyday life, these various transformations have led to a reevaluation and reorganization of family relations, women's time and work, and gender roles. As throughout eastern Europe, the disappearance of an active second economy, informal networks, and alternative groups since the collapse of state socialism has resulted in a "newly valorized public" that, as Susan Gal has pointed out, is often conceptually defined as male while the private is defined as naturally female (Gal 1996). Furthermore, whereas under socialism many women had earned as much as or slightly less than their husbands, the decline in women's income through unemployment or part-time work has increased their economic dependence on men. Because many couples have continued to maintain separate bank accounts and share household expenses, a practice that made sense for dual income families, many women are now

struggling to manage on limited budgets while their husbands are able to afford relative luxuries. In many cases, the reduction of women's work hours has also increased their responsibilities for domestic work. "My husband used to help occasionally with the dishes or with the children," one woman told me, "but now that I'm at home while he works full-time he says I should do it."

With the closing of nurseries, day-care centers, and after-school programs, many women have also suffered from "a latent bad conscience about their children" (Nickel 1993: 147). Echoing western German suspicions of external child care as a threat to the family, women frequently expressed to me how they "now realize" that the former system of day care had been bad for children.<sup>12</sup> One unemployed young woman explained, "Now I want to take some time for the children. They used to know me only as someone who ran around frantically. . . . In retrospect I think it was actually quite bad for the kids—I didn't have any time for them, and they were in day care all day. I didn't see it at the time, only after I experienced the difference." In a similar remark, an unemployed middle-aged woman told me, "That women should work, that came from above [the state]. In many ways it was good to work, this togetherness [in the factory], but whether it was good for the family is another question." Even though this woman criticized the socialist policy of women's paid employment, she acknowledged that such rebukes have only really become common since the Wende: "Nobody said these things before."

Women's time and space have also been transformed by these changes. Many women have gone from the factory floor or village council not only to the kitchen but also to the department stores and shopping centers. During the socialist period, shopping had meant hours spent in long lines, bartering, and dealing with the numerous tensions among shoppers competing for scarce consumer goods. Shopping as recreation is thus something entirely new to women here, and many of them enjoy it. "I feel freer now," one woman told me, citing the liberating effects of frozen dinners, central oil heating, and the availability of a range of consumer goods. "I can do what I want. I go shopping, not necessarily to buy things but to look." After re-unification, women in Kella began to attend Tupperware parties in each other's homes. One woman from the village

became an Avon cosmetics representative; another began to sell Amway products.<sup>13</sup> The arrival of new catalogs from *Otto* or *Quelle* provided occasions to get together and comparison shop.

The realm of consumption, and, as noted in the previous chapter, the effort to acquire a cultural fluency in it, has not merely provided a new source of activity or entertainment. Consumption has also been a gendered initiation rite for women into the new society, a realm in which the implications of the "transition" for women have been reflected and, to a large extent, constituted. Anthropologists have widely recognized that commodities can carry with them particular cultural doctrines (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990; McCracken 1988; Miller 1995; Sahlins 1988; Wilk 1994). Frequently, I would add, these doctrines can be highly gendered.

To illustrate, I turn to a Tupperware party held in Kella more than a year after the *Wende*. Following in its decades-old tradition of home marketing, the company apparently saw a market niche in the former GDR. The enthusiastic salesperson at the gathering I attended in Kella, Sabine Schneider, was a native villager. Her training in sales tactics at a seminar for Tupperware representatives, combined with her own creative asides, provided Sabine with a story for nearly every plastic container she presented: "This one is perfect for keeping dinners warm while the men are away at *Frühshoppen*," or "I always send this one to school with the kids."<sup>14</sup> Her audience of seven women marveled at the range of offerings and possibilities: "An onion would fit in here," "This would be good for leftover ground pork," and "This is just right for milk," Sabine informed them.

Not only was consumption presented as a social and gendered activity, but the products themselves were laden with explicit and implicit gender ideologies. Above all, the plastic containers conveyed a certain cult of domesticity. A woman's domain, as the marketing's setting itself indicated (we were seated around the kitchen table), was naturally in the private sphere of the family home, caring for her husband while he partook of traditionally male activities, or for her children as they entered the outside world. The large offering and diversity of plastic Tupperware containers seemed to represent the triumph of capitalist abundance and the new possibilities it offered for women to be better nurturers and

homemakers. By the end of the evening, Sabine's audience had apparently been converted: she sold more than 500 marks' worth of Tupperware products.

The transformation from a communist to a consumption-oriented regime was perhaps best exemplified by the seminar offerings of the regional Women's Equality Office. Introduced after re-unification to address the unique needs and interests of women in the "New Federal States," these state- and local-level offices provided financial support to women's groups and funded educational programs throughout the former GDR.<sup>15</sup> Although publicized in Kella, these meetings were held thirty kilometers away in Heiligenstadt and were thus rarely attended by village women. Nevertheless, the lecture and seminar topics conveyed a message about what women had to learn in the new system. Often sponsored by the prominent West German Sparkasse Bank, seminar topics included "Wishing, Planning, Buying," "Fashioning One's Life and Consumption Behavior," "Shopping to Your Advantage," and "Mother Doesn't Work! (What Value Does Housework Have?)."

All of this would seem to support a thesis that the unemployment of women and the upgrading of motherhood and femininity since re-unification have returned women to the private sphere and transformed socialist worker-mothers into homemakers or feminine consumers (for example, Dölling 1993; Einhorn 1993; Nickel 1993). While there are certain truths to this argument in Kella, the situation in this borderland region—and, I would suggest, in other postsocialist societies as well—is more complex than that. The contrasting and competing ideologies of womanhood have produced a tension; like other tensions in social life, this one is contested both individually and collectively, often in very subtle ways.

#### NEGOTIATING GENDER IN THE BORDERLAND

One way to analyze the tension produced by contrasting ideologies of womanhood is to explore a more concrete and literal one: the tension between East and West, between Osis and Wessis. As we saw in the previous chapter, these distinctions are a part of everyday life

in the German borderland. They are also often structured in gendered terms.

Gendered distinctions and identities are constructed and expressed, for example, as village women point to the losses they have suffered as women under the new system. After nearly a year of silence following the Wende in which any mention of the advantages of the socialist system was met with accusations of being "red" or "one of them," it was women in the village who first initiated discussions about the positive aspects of life under socialism. Some began to point to the advantages and opportunities for political participation enjoyed by women in the GDR: "Women were supposed to be included [in politics]. Women had a role that was totally different from the role they have today: for example, in the village council. That really wasn't so bad, that system. Women's roles were different because they had more possibilities. Whoever wanted to could participate. And the results are better when women are part of the decision making because they have a different understanding of many things." Many women lamented the loss of state-sponsored child care and generous maternity benefits. The loss of these services, many argued, was evidence of the new state's "hostility to children" and was cited as one of the primary reasons for the drastically declining birthrate in Kella as well as throughout the former GDR.<sup>16</sup>

Both the new state and its western citizens were accused of being hostile to children. Paralleling many of the Catholic church's arguments, several women pointed to the influx of western materialist values as being responsible for the sinking birthrate. "People in the West don't want to have more than one child because it would cut into their money for house and car," one woman in her late twenties told a group of friends. Another woman agreed: "They're really hostile to children over there. It's easier to find an apartment if you have four dogs than if you have one child."

Motherhood itself thus became a contested and appropriated category.<sup>17</sup> Women in Kella mocked their western neighbors for delaying childbearing, pointing to the advantages of having children at a young age.<sup>18</sup> "They [western German women] wait until they're thirty to have their first child! And then it's too overwhelming for them." Village women working in the West reported establishing solidarity with their

eastern German colleagues by referring to their average age of child-bearing ("We had our children early, didn't we?"). Having children at a younger age was perceived not only as a result and reflection of the socialist state's commitment to children but also as a reflection of their own values and priorities.

Demonstrating how historical memory can be a complex interactional and gendered phenomenon, village women have similarly reappropriated a socialist identity as worker-mothers as a means of distinguishing themselves from West German women. During one of many discussions about women "over there," a woman in her late twenties explained, "All women could work here. What do I mean by could? All women *had* to work. What woman in Kella didn't work? In the West they don't have to. Their husbands earn enough. I know of one woman who goes swimming on Mondays, takes dance lessons on Tuesdays, goes to sauna on Wednesdays. They don't know what to do with their time." The notion that women should work outside the home remains so strong here, in fact, that several women have sought paid employment mainly to avoid village gossip. "My husband actually earns enough now, and I would rather stay at home with the children," one woman confessed to me, "but I got a job because I didn't want people to talk about me."

Many women's longing for a return to paid employment and social interaction through work was temporarily fulfilled through the institution of the "ABM School" in Kella.<sup>19</sup> This government-subsidized job and retraining program, designed not only to create jobs but also to make a dent in regional and national unemployment statistics, employed twenty-four women from Kella, most of them in their midforties; all but one were former clips-factory workers. Women in this make-work program spent three days a week working for the village: landscaping, painting public buildings or fences, or assisting in various other community improvement projects (Figure 20). There was a noticeable difference in the village's appearance after just several weeks of this work.

The other two weekdays were spent in class, where women were supposedly to be retrained as florists or gardeners. However, women were not only instructed in plant biology or other related subjects; they were also provided training in the West German political and economic sys-



Figure 20. "ABM women" doing landscape work for the village, 1992.  
(Photograph by the author)

tem with subjects like business administration and politics. In this civic education, with striking parallels to the educational function of the socialist work brigade, women learned about the structure of the West German government, the definition and functionings of a joint stock company, and the organization of the European Union. Many women used the opportunity to inquire about employee rights, unemployment laws, or maternity benefits.

A heightened social consciousness, similar to that exhibited during the silk-painting sessions, was present among women here and was recognized by other members of the community. One young woman whose mother was part of the project commented: "It's really nice. I saw the women this week walking up the hill together. They were nicely dressed and laughing, happy to be together again." Even when they began to realize how little they were actually being paid and that the planned year of training would not be enough to complete any kind of certification as florists or gardeners, most women pointed to the social function of work as its most meaningful aspect.<sup>20</sup> As one woman explained, "In a way

we're being stupid because we're being taken advantage of. But it's worth it to the women to be together." Another woman, in her use of socialist terminology, similarly reflected a sense that this temporary "school" was a reenactment of the socialist clips factory: "It's fun to be in the brigade, and good to be with the women again."

The (re)creation of this gendered space, modeled in the women's minds after their experience together in the clips factory, provided frequent occasions for village women to contrast their experience with that of women in West Germany. Discussions often consciously stressed the social function of work as well as their identity as workers. "We're used to this," many women told me, "*we're* used to working." The daily contact not only renewed an exchange of gossip and shared information that had occurred in the factory but also provided an opportunity for women to assert an identity as eastern Germans in contrast to images and stereotypes of Wessis, particularly western German women.

The image against which such identities as eastern German women have been constructed and reaffirmed, as I argued in the previous chapter, is frequently a constructed and imagined Other. In this case, it was an image that often resembled the West German homemaker of the 1960s and early 1970s. As one young woman explained, "They don't have to work *drüben* because they're too busy with their *housework!* We have often made fun of that, of women in the West who list 'housewife' as their profession." In a similar vein, another woman told me, "We used to envy women *drüben* who don't have to work. But now we don't." While this image of West German women has changed as contact between East and West increases and as villagers have learned that many West German women do work outside the home, women in Kella are often quick to point out that this is part-time work: "*We* are used to working full-time," many say.

These gendered distinctions between East and West are part of the dynamic of boundary maintenance and invention described in the previous chapter. In the construction of Otherness that entails the reading of bodies, for example, it has been women's bodies that are especially read. As one woman from Kella explained, "Women are most easily recognized [as Ossid]. You see the differences immediately. Especially with older and

[middle-aged] women. Women from drüben still wear makeup. Their hair is stylish. But here, women aren't confident enough of themselves to even speak over there. They have these unstylish, frizzy perms and no makeup."

In the first years after the fall of the Wall, when the most visible signs of difference were markers of Osis, women from the East could be identified by their clothing, makeup, hairdos, accessories, body hair, dental work, or skin complexion. Several women employed in the West were made fun of for not shaving their legs; others became obsessed with their skin complexion after advertisements and tanned West German women told them of the benefits of tanning salons. "The difference [between them and us] is noticeable," one woman commented to her group of friends. "They can afford to take care of themselves and look good. Think of how much cosmetics cost. You can just tell."

In an effort to "catch up" and blend in, many women discarded their East German clothes, changed their hairstyles, and spent their severance pay on a new kitchen (including Tupperware products) or an expensive set of pots and pans. The female corollary to the male automobile, these western products represented not merely the women's domestic sphere in contrast to male mobility; they also reflect an effort to be more like western women with the convenience of time-saving western appliances. The marketing slogan for a particular set of pots and pans sold through company-sponsored in-home demonstration parties (similar to the Tupperware presentation) appealed to this perceived image of the western woman who was liberated by technology: "Less time in the kitchen, more time for yourself." Nearly half of the village women attending these demonstrations purchased the set, despite the exceedingly high price tag of 2,000 marks (approximately U.S.\$1,200).

Women's attempts to emulate the West have also been influenced by a different set of competing gender ideologies: between traditional gender roles (mediated in part by the strong presence of the Catholic church, certain policies of the former socialist state, and an upgrading of domesticity since re-unification) and western feminist ideas (mediated by the media, contact with other West Germans, and the presence of westerners in the village—including my husband and myself). This too has influenced

religious practice and other aspects of daily life. Some women have contested and renegotiated gendered divisions of domestic labor. Others have challenged strict, gendered mourning practices by refusing to wear black for a year. In a comment that typically equated "being modern" with "being western," one woman explained: "[Mourning dress] is just not modern any more. [Such traditions] will eventually cease to exist." Thus while the laws and policies of the FRG may direct women toward the family and motherhood, other currents that contest this view have influenced women's lives and the negotiation of gender as well.

Thus the women of Kella may strive to behave and look like western German women, but they also resist the pressure to do so. As I argued in the previous chapter, this paradox reflects the complex and contradictory aspects of identity in the borderland. A conversation in 1991 with two women in their late twenties, Ingrid and Anna, about their smocks (Kittel) first brought this to my attention. The common attire of female factory workers under socialism, the Kittel was a key symbol of working women in the GDR, especially after the Wende. At a church gathering where middle-aged women were wearing their smocks while serving tables, Ingrid remarked, "You know, I never wear my smock any more. I used to run around the house all day in one, but not anymore since the Wende. It's because of those [women] drüben. Nobody there wears a smock anymore. It's not modern." During the course of her comment I noticed Ingrid becoming more interested in this topic, which she then pursued with a mutual friend, Anna, when she joined our conversation, not having heard Ingrid's first remark:

INGRID: Anna, do you still wear a smock?

ANNA: No.

INGRID: Since when?

ANNA: Since the Wende.

Several weeks later, I ran into both women independently wearing their smocks again. Because I saw both women almost daily, I knew this was a practice they had only recently renewed. When I commented on this to Ingrid, she grinned and said, "I guess after we talked about it I realized I

could wear it again." When I asked Anna, she explained, "[The wearing of smocks] subsided in the first years after the *Wende*, but somewhere it's a part of us."

The smock incident was similar to other assertions of eastern German identities described in the previous chapter. As in many of those instances, it took place in the realm of consumption—itsself a highly gendered and gendering phenomenon—where distinctions between East and West, as well as those within the village, have been expressed, experienced, negotiated, and contested, both before and since the fall of the Wall.

#### INGRID'S COLLAR

One final story will illustrate the contradictory, complex, and playful nature of borderland identities as well as illuminate the gendered aspect of boundaries and national identity. This story involves another conversation with Ingrid, who asked me one day how women in America wear their shirt collars. I told her I didn't really know. Somewhat taken aback and almost irritated by my ignorance, she said: "Well, now it's modern to wear your collar up. That's how women do it in the West. Here [in the former GDR] women wear their collars down." Ingrid seemed to be struggling to figure out not only current fashion etiquette for shirt collars but also where she, as an *Ossi* who both mimicked and resisted what she perceived to be *Wessi* standards, fit in. For weeks after our conversation, I couldn't help noticing that on some days she was wearing her collar up, on other days down. Then, one night at a dinner party, I looked across the table and saw that her collar was askew—a rare occurrence for someone as concerned with her appearance as Ingrid: one side of her collar was up, the other one was down.

To me, this probably fortuitous position of Ingrid's collar was loaded with meaning, symbolizing the interstitiality of the borderland, the way in which its residents are somehow betwixt and between East and West, as well as the constructed and gendered nature of these distinctions. Of course the uneven collar was most likely the result of Ingrid's indecision

over how to dress for the dinner party; she probably had switched the collar back and forth until she had to leave, when she apparently was unable to check it one last time. As in the preceding weeks, her tampering with the collar entailed a gendered negotiation of and play with identity—a metaphor for identity in the borderland; indeed, for identity itself.

The tensions between East and West, as well as the tension produced by each system's contrasting ideologies of gender and womanhood, continue to be assimilated and negotiated in multiple and diverse ways. The fact that women's experiences and negotiations of these changes are highly differentiated points to the need to avoid homogenizing generalizations about women in eastern Europe (Funk 1993a). Instead, we must remain alert to these tensions and the interstices they produce (Hauser, Heyns, and Mansbridge 1993), for it is in these border zones—both real and imagined—that gender and national distinctions are constructed, negotiated, contested, and experienced in everyday life.