

4 Consuming Differences

One of the more amusing and frequently trying aspects of fieldwork in Kella was learning nicknames. A common feature of European village life, the limited number of family names in the community necessitated the use of nicknames to identify particular individuals.¹ Ethnographic studies of European villages point out how the use and shared knowledge of nicknames can express a sense of communal belonging (Mewett 1982, 1986; Peace 1986). They may also be categories of social classification, the way inequalities are talked about in village discourse.

In Kella, the local nickname for one of the village's most affluent residents under socialism was "J. R.," a name taken from the wealthy, avaricious character in the American television series *Dallas*.² Another village nickname, "Alexis," was similarly derived from the American television show *Dynasty*. Transmitted through West German television, whose air-

waves easily crossed the otherwise impermeable border even before the official ban on western television was lifted in 1971, both shows were extremely popular in Kella and in the rest of the GDR during the 1980s. The localization of these mass-mediated icons of capitalist excess reflected not only villagers' symbolic positioning of themselves within a larger transnational social space but also an ironic deployment of western cultural forms that contested official versions of a "class-free" socialist society. The nicknames themselves also allude to the importance of conspicuous consumption in the formation of village inequalities under socialism.

This chapter analyzes Kella as a social field, exploring the production and reproduction of inequality in village social relations over time. Like other types of border zones, social boundaries of distinction are fluid, relational, and always under construction. Focusing on the kinds of constructions used to classify social differentiation, my discussion attempts to situate village inequalities in the context of national and regional class formation. The chapter moves chronologically through a series of village events that have influenced the formation of inequalities there. I begin with the pre-World War II period, when property ownership was the principal basis of class organization. I then discuss the first years of socialist rule, when nearly half of the large property owners fled or were evacuated from Kella and the remaining landholders were forced into the agricultural collective. With the removal of the old village elite and the disappearance of traditional economic capital as a means of social differentiation, a largely new group of local elites asserted itself through the social capital of connections. I argue that these new practices of distinction occurred primarily in the realm of the second economy, where social capital was accumulated, exchanged, and displayed. In the interstices of official state production and distribution, consumption became productive in new and strategic ways: it both reflected and constituted difference. The "consuming frenzy" for which East Germans were criticized and ridiculed after the fall of the Wall was, in a sense, nothing new. It was merely an extension, or exaggeration, of a cultural order formed in an economy of shortages. Ironically, commodity fetishism was an integral part of daily life in "actually existing socialism."

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN
THE PRESOCIALIST YEARS

During the first half of the twentieth century, village social groups were divided primarily into *Arbeiter* (wage laborers) and *Bauern* (property-owning farmers). The majority of the population were worker-peasants: *Arbeiter* who cultivated less than one hectare (approximately 2.5 acres) of land, primarily for themselves, through a patronage-labor arrangement with the *Bauern*. Following in the tradition of Eichsfeld migrant workers (Schnier and Schulz-Greve 1990), which peaked in the mid-nineteenth century when the Industrial Revolution displaced local cottage industries, many villagers were forced by economic necessity to seek employment outside the Eichsfeld region. Except for several women who worked in a cigar factory established in Kella in 1911, most villagers commuted to the neighboring Hessian town of Eschwege. Many others found seasonal employment far outside the region: men worked as construction workers in Essen, Hanover, Mainz, or the Rhineland, while women were employed as seasonal agricultural laborers in Magdeburg or Egeln. As I have previously noted, in 1924 more than 26 percent of the working age population (134 men and 32 women) left the village for extended periods of time as migrant laborers (Müller and others 1966: 11).

Eight *Großbauern* families constituted the village elite during the presocialist period (1900–1949).³ The *Großbauern's* social position was reflected in village spatial organization: their large farmhouses are clustered centrally on the main street and form the core of the village. Due to the practice of partible inheritance that fractionalized landholdings, intermarriage between these elite families became a means of consolidating property ownership and thus a strategy of social reproduction. As David Sabeian has argued, the language of class was thereby also expressed in kinship terms (1990, 1998). Even after the collectivization of agriculture, there were still marriages among these *Großbauern* families.

The *Großbauern* status as elites derived not only from the size of their landholdings but also from their positions of relative power in relation to other villagers. The majority of wage laborers in the village had small landholdings and no draft animals to cultivate them. In exchange for

their labor, villagers would seek out a *Bauer* as a patron, known as an *Ackersmann* (plowman), to plow their fields. As one former *Großbauer*, Heinz Müller, recalled, one hour of plowing with a team of horses cost each household approximately seven hours of labor in the *Bauer's* fields. Women usually fulfilled these obligations to the *Ackersmann*, by harvesting potatoes and beets or cutting wheat and hay with a sickle and tying them into bundles. Several generations would remain with one family as their *Ackersmann*. "Every *Bauer* had his regular people," Heinz Müller explained. "They would come to us and say, 'Can you cultivate my land. I'll help you then.'"

One woman whose family had worked for the *Ackersmann* Peter Kohl did not recall the arrangement quite so fondly:

We only had half a hectare of land, which we couldn't cultivate ourselves. Everyone had his *Ackersmann* at that time, and those were the *Bauern*. And each *Bauer* had so and so many people whose land he plowed. For that we had to work for them in the fields. It was like a feudal system! Our family was with the Kohls—my friend Sylvia's parents—for more than forty years. Her father had horses. One could say that in those times, Sylvia was the richest girl in the village. The *Bauern* always thought they were better than we were. They were the rich people, and we were the poor people. They had a *Bauern* pride.

Although the village economy was not agriculturally based, agricultural labor was a major part of daily life for most villagers in garden plots, in small fields, or in the larger fields of the *Bauern*. The number and kind of livestock reflected the size of one's property holdings, the most common measurement of economic capital. Social differences were thus classified in these terms: "We were poor because we only had goats," "They owned a cow," or "They were rich—they had horses" are frequently still used to describe villagers' social and economic status through 1945. One woman, Gretel Schmidt, recounted a story that described earlier village status hierarchies: "We were the little people—not in terms of body size," she added, concerned that her petite figure might confuse me, "but because we hardly had any land. We only had goats." She thought for a minute and then continued:

I want to tell a story about my cousin Katharina. Her family had a cow, and they thought they were better than we were. Now their oldest daughter, Anna, had a boyfriend, and his family had two cows. And they imagined themselves to be the big people. And because Anna only had one cow, his parents didn't want them to get married. When Anna died suddenly and her boyfriend married another woman years later, her mother said to us, "We weren't good enough for them because we only had one cow. But now he has lowered himself even more. He's going to marry someone who only has goats." That's how things were measured—"A cow hides all poverty," that was the saying.

As symbols of wealth through property ownership and patronage, draft animals like horses and, to a lesser extent, cows, remained categories of social prestige and inequality until the collectivization of agriculture in the 1950s, after which, as Gretel later said, "even the richest farmer's daughter had to go to work in the factory like us, like the little people."

DEPORTATION, EMIGRATION, AND COLLECTIVIZATION

Two events in 1952, often conflated now in the memory of villagers, fundamentally transformed the basis of village social organization and differentiation under socialism. The first was the deportation and emigration of five families in the spring of that year. The second was the collectivization of agriculture that forced the remaining Bauern into the local agricultural cooperative, the Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft (LPG).

As I noted in chapter 2, it is still not known whether the three Großbauern families who left voluntarily shortly before the evacuation of the other two families were truly slated for deportation. It is, however, quite plausible that these families were on the list of deportees, given the fact that the majority of those deported were farmers with landholdings of more than five hectares (Potratz 1993: 63). Regardless of whether they left involuntarily or at their own initiative, and even though only three of the eight Großbauern families fled, what is generally agreed on in local

memory is that this day in May 1952 marked the moment when the Großbauern left Kella.⁴

One of the reasons this date is so frequently associated with the removal of the old village elite is that it coincides roughly with the collectivization of agriculture, which drove all landholders, including the remaining five Großbauern families, into the LPG. Kella had not been affected by the initial land reform begun under Soviet occupation in 1945–1949, when the large Junker estates (more than 100 hectares) were split up. In 1952, the state began urging (more forcibly in some areas than in others) voluntary collectivization among all independent farmers. After describing the deportations, one woman's narrative flowed seamlessly into the next major—and, in her mind, related—event: the day the functionaries came to Kella and ordered all the Bauern into the mayor's office.

That was a grim day, too. The Bauern were all ordered to come to the mayor's office and then they were worked over.⁵ . . . What a drama that was with our neighbor, Arnold Hartmann! He had a very small farm, only two hectares, and he didn't want to join the LPG. They [the functionaries] came to his courtyard, where there was a chopping block and an ax next to it. He threw his head down on the block and yelled, "Here! Just chop off my head! I don't want to live anymore! They want to take away everything I've built up!"

She added that the farmers did not know at the time how much less work and worry the LPG would be than independent farming. Later, she said, one of the Bauern wives told her they were doing much better in the LPG than when farming alone due to an easier workload and a higher standard of living.

By 1958, two years before the nationwide accelerated collectivization, only four *Mittelbauern* (owners of five to ten hectares), along with the village's most adamant Communist, Werner Schmidt's father, had joined the local LPG. By 1960, however, all landholders with more than one hectare of arable land had been collectivized, including the remaining five Großbauer families. In the 1970s, as part of state planners' aims to modernize agricultural production on a large scale, Kella's LPG was

merged with two farm collectives in the region, and farming was divided between plant and animal production.

Collectivization thus fundamentally transformed agricultural labor and production. Instead of the entire family having to work the fields, as under the previous system of individual family farms, only one member of the household (usually the male in whose name the property was registered or his widow) was required to be a member of the LPG. This membership and its attendant responsibilities was inherited along with the property that had been collectivized. Frequently one or more family members would be employed full-time by the collective, although not all LPG employees were former Bauer.⁶ Out of 144 village households, 57 had land in the collective and were thus considered LPG members; all members were obligated to work a certain number of hours every year, depending on the amount of land they had in the collective. Members as well as nonmembers who needed livestock feed (most households in Kella raised at least one pig for slaughter each year) or potatoes for their own consumption worked additional hours for the LPG.

In an arrangement similar to the earlier one with Großbauern, villagers—again, usually women doing stoop labor—fulfilled their obligatory work for the LPG during the spring planting and fall harvesting of potatoes and sugar beets. According to most villagers, the average 100 hours of work per year for the LPG was not as difficult as work for the Ackersmann had been. Indeed, the state seems to have been successful in promoting a sense of collective responsibility in this area. Rather than fulfilling obligations to an individual of power, as under the Ackersmann patronage system, LPG work is often remembered fondly as an easier way of earning livestock feed as well as a way of becoming acquainted with people from neighboring villages who worked for the same regional LPG.

Together, the events of 1952 to 1960—the deportation and emigration of several property holders and the beginnings of agricultural collectivization—essentially removed the village elite through the elimination of private property as economic capital. With the disappearance of this principal means of social distinction, new strategies of social differentiation emerged that produced and maintained a largely new group of elites.

SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND ORGANIZATION UNDER SOCIALISM

Inequality under Socialism

With the virtual elimination of private property, the collectivization of agriculture and industry, the restructuring of occupational rewards and remunerations, and the increase in occupational mobility, socialist planners in the GDR (as elsewhere) aimed to achieve an egalitarian society under the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Scholars of Eastern Europe have long recognized that this goal remained illusory and have pointed to the creation and evolution of new hierarchies in socialist systems. While most researchers agree that the new hierarchy was different due to the elimination of wealthy entrepreneurs and large landowners, opinions regarding the nature of inequality in socialist societies have differed. Concerned with the parallels between the capitalist property-owning class and political bureaucrats under socialism, Milovan Djilas’s classic study argued that a “new class” had been formed in socialist societies, comprising those with “special privileges and economic preferences because of the administrative monopoly they hold” (Djilas 1957: 39). In this view, the bureaucracy became the locus of political power and social reproduction under socialism; positions of power in the bureaucratic state apparatus were a principal means of maintaining privilege (Cole 1985).

Scholars who acknowledge the formation of a political ruling class have pointed to the role of the intelligentsia, either as separate from the political class (Baylis 1974; Ludz 1972) or as a dominant subcategory of it (Konrad and Szelenyi 1979). Particularly in post-Stalinist Eastern Europe, intellectuals became a critical part of this new elite as planners, or “redistributors of the social surplus” (Konrad and Szelenyi 1979: 145; see also Verdery 1991) and as members of the party bureaucracy. Other studies of inequality in Eastern Europe have focused on occupational strata (Connor 1979; Kolosi and Wnuk-Lipinski 1983) as an index of social stratification. Taken together, these studies argue that a new hierarchy of intellectuals and bureaucrats, followed by workers and then peasants, formed the basis of social differentiation in socialist societies (Cole 1985: 250).

Social organization and differentiation in Kella took place within this broader context of hierarchy formation at the regional and national level. Party officials and bureaucrats were viewed as privileged due to their higher incomes as well as preferential access to certain goods and services, housing, and special stores. Although this was less true for village party members, they, too, were regarded as—and often resented for—having certain privileges associated with their status. In addition to their perceived political connection with the state regarding matters like the allocation of housing and building permits, certain party officials were responsible for the allotment of specific goods and services, particularly building materials, within the village.⁷ Factory managers, who were almost always SED party officials, were similarly responsible for assigning coveted union vacation homes: whereas unconnected workers often waited years for an assignment, factory managers were often able to take regular vacations.

Although political bureaucrats in the GDR did enjoy a privileged status and lifestyle—indeed, villagers often claimed that national and occasionally county party officials belonged to another social stratum—this was not the principal means of social differentiation and organization in Kella. Theories of class formation under socialism may be useful for providing a context for the structuring of local hierarchies, but they are less adequate for theorizing inequality at a microlevel, as more recent anthropological analyses have shown.⁸ Rather than delving into the complex and often contradictory arguments of class theorists in order to question whether or how social classes were constituted in socialist societies, I prefer to employ a more dynamic notion of distinction, hierarchy, and differentiation.

Although some scholars of eastern Europe have cautioned against importing certain concepts of western social theory in the analysis of socialist societies, I find Pierre Bourdieu's theories of distinction and forms of capital a particularly useful way of conceptualizing social differentiation under socialism.⁹ Bourdieu argues that traditional Marxist theories of class (which have been most frequently used to analyze inequalities in socialist societies) are inadequate because they reduce the social world to an economic field alone. He extends the Marxist notion of capital to include symbolic and cultural goods, thus collapsing a tradi-

tional economic-noneconomic dichotomy. Wealth and power are determined not only by the possession of economic capital like money, property, means of production, and other material assets (Wacquant 1987: 69) but also by other forms of capital. Social capital, for example, consists of the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu 1986: 29). Social capital would thus include resources like social connections, whereas symbolic capital is "the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived as legitimate" (Bourdieu 1987: 4). A family's honor, reputation, and prestige would all be considered symbolic capital. Cultural capital, Bourdieu argues, is accumulated primarily through education—"academic qualifications are to cultural capital what money is to economic capital" (Bourdieu 1977: 187)—and can be used to generate wealth, privilege, and income.

Instead of discussing objective class boundaries, then, Bourdieu employs spatial and economic metaphors to elaborate a notion of social space, which is in many ways itself a metaphorical conception of the social world. Sociology becomes "social topology" in Bourdieu's work. Agents are distributed within the social space according to the volume and composition of capital—"fundamental social powers"—they possess. When agents occupy neighboring positions in the social space, they tend to be endowed with similar dispositions and interests that generate analogous practices, behavior, and representations. There are no clear-cut boundaries between social groups, he argues; positions within the social space are defined in relation to each other.

This concept of social space is also crucial to Bourdieu's conceptualization of the maintenance and reproduction of power relations. Objective structures of this space are internalized, and social distances are inscribed onto the body through strategies that may not even be conscious. Ranging in form from timidity to arrogance, these strategies produce a "sense of one's place" within the social field: "It is this sense of one's place which, in a situation of interaction, prompts those whom we call in French *les gens humbles*, literally 'humble people'—perhaps common folks in English—to remain 'humble,' and which prompts the others to 'keep their distance' or to 'keep their station in life'" (Bourdieu 1987: 5).

Objective power relations are thus reproduced in symbolic power relations, as Bourdieu argues: "The space of objective differences (with regard to economic and cultural capital) find expression in a symbolic space of visible distinctions" (Bourdieu 1987: 11). Taste, a form of symbolic capital as well as a culturally inculcated disposition, is an example of such a distinction that both structures and is structured by one's habitus and position within the social space (Bourdieu 1984).

While Bourdieu's discussion of the forms of capital may cause confusion by describing them "in ways that overlap" or seem "inconsistent" (Smart 1993: 393), this, I believe, is his intention. Indeed, by theorizing the different forms of capital as intersecting, converging, and overlapping, Bourdieu seems to allow more possibilities and freedom for a subject to move within the social space. In a sense, his metaphorical, multidimensional conception of the social world—in which boundaries are blurred, multilayered, and fluid—is a more accurate depiction of the flux and ambiguity of social organization and differentiation.

Following Bourdieu, therefore, I see social distinctions not as fixed objective boundaries but rather as relational concepts produced and reproduced in practice. Different forms of capital, particularly social and symbolic capital, as well as other practices like gift exchange and consumption, were critical elements in the production and reproduction of social organization and differentiation under socialism. Although forms of capital other than economic had been part of village social organization in the presocialist period, they took on new meanings and value under socialism. After the virtual elimination of private property and other forms of economic capital during socialist rule, social and symbolic capital became particularly salient in determining an individual's position in the village social field. As Bourdieu's theory suggests, in practice these forms of capital often overlapped, intersected, or were convertible into each other. These overlappings and intersections are particularly relevant in considering the second economy under socialism.

The Second Economy

Just weeks after I arrived in Kella, my neighbor told me the following joke, which was widely shared on both sides of the border fol-

lowing the Wende: "What is the most difficult [adjustment] for the Ossis since the Wall fell? Having to survive without connections." Even though I did not really understand the joke at first, I politely laughed along with my neighbor, nodding my head in feigned understanding, and recorded the conversation in my field notes that evening. Not until months later, when Michael Schmidt, a young man from the village was trying to describe a recently deceased villager, did the joke make sense. "You know who he is," Michael told me. "He's the one who worked in his garden down the street. I used to feel sorry for him. He was nothing, of no use to anybody—he had no connections [*Beziehungen*]. Unlike the carpenter Thomas Baumann. Now, HE had connections."

Michael had brought to my attention not only the identity of the man whose funeral procession I had witnessed that day but also the way in which people had categorized social differences and inequalities under socialism. The notion of "connections" or "networks" refers to a classification that, as the joke indicates, has a different meaning today. Yet it was extremely important in the GDR, as in other socialist societies, where social connections were the principal means of obtaining scarce consumer goods and services. Not only were such networks an integral part of the second, or informal, economy, they were also central to the way in which social relations were organized and reorganized during socialist rule.

The political economy of socialism was based on a logic of centralized planning, the aim of which was to maximize the redistributive power of the state.¹⁰ With its emphasis on the accumulation of the means of production and the central appropriation and allocation of surplus, socialism's locus of competition made success dependent on socialist firms' ability to bargain for and procure materials (Verdery 1996: 22). Not only did this "work of procuring," as Verdery writes, generate "whole networks of cozy relations among economic managers and their bureaucrats, clerks and their customers" (p. 22), it also encouraged (indeed necessitated) the padding, hoarding, hiding, and bartering of materials and labor that unavoidably produced what Kornai (1992) has famously called "economies of shortage."

As in other socialist societies, the second economy in the GDR arose in response to the chronic shortages of goods and services resulting from

these consequences of a planned economy.¹¹ Based on networks of family or kin groups, ties of friendship, groups of common ethnic or territorial origins, or arrangements among patrons, brokers, and clients, this informal sector depended on the exchange of goods, favors, and services to obtain scarce resources. In acknowledging its existence, the state often claimed that this sector was left over from peasant times; yet, as several scholars have pointed out (Altman 1989; Cole 1985; Sampson 1986), this fails to explain its persistence under socialism. The kinds of connections formed in socialist societies differed from informal networks found in other societies because under socialism they were vital for day-to-day existence (Sampson 1986: 50).¹² Although the activity within the second economy was largely illegal, it functioned outside as well as within bureaucratic contexts. Indeed, an important and dynamic interplay existed between these official and unofficial spheres of economic life.¹³ In the GDR (again, as elsewhere), the state came to rely unofficially on activities in the second economy to counter the shortages of goods and services present in the first. Thefts of materials or the illegal use of tools from the workplace in moonlighting work brigades were commonplace, for example, and significantly increased the number of homes that could be built or renovated. As Verdery notes, "The second economy, then, which provisioned a large part of consumer needs, was parasitic upon the state and inseparable from it" (1996: 27).

Public and private spheres, often viewed as a corollary to the first and second economies, must similarly be viewed as interrelated phenomena (Lampland 1995: 273–74). In East Germany, this traditional opposition corresponds to Günter Gaus's famous description of the GDR as a "society of niches," the private sphere of friends, family, and coveted belongings to which citizens retreated for their "real" lives: "What is a niche in the society of the GDR? It is the preferred place for people over there, the place in which the politicians, planners, propagandists, the collective, the great goal, the cultural legacy—in which all these depart so that a good man, with his family and among friends, can water his potted flowers, wash his car, play [the card game] Skat, have conversations, celebrate holidays" (Gaus 1986: 117, quoted in Maier 1997: 29).¹⁴

Certain details and practices of everyday life under socialism reflected

and constituted this public-private divide of the "niche society": the intricate red-and-white wrought-iron fences and gates, quintessential GDR style, that defined and enclosed the private space of households or gardens; birthday celebrations that turned into slumber parties because of the strict *Schutzstreifen* curfew; evenings spent crafting bricks out of homemade mortar to be used, perhaps years later, in building a new house; weekends spent retiling a bathroom with tiles laboriously obtained through a friend of a friend who had purchased them in Czechoslovakia.

Yet, as these examples illustrate, the various spheres of economic and social life—first and second economies, public and private domains—were closely intertwined and interdependent. This interdependence was particularly visible in practices of exchange and display, facilitated by the social capital of connections accumulated largely in the realm of the second economy, that crisscrossed these various spheres. Furthermore, as material from Kella illustrates, such practices of exchange and display were an essential means of social distinction under socialism.

The importance of exchange as a richly symbolic as well as economic activity has of course long been recognized by anthropologists. Marcel Mauss's classic study (1954) pointed out the importance of gift prestations in the creation and maintenance of social relations. For Mauss, the obligation of reciprocity inherent in the gift is its most distinguishable character; countergifts must be both deferred and different in order not to constitute an insult or a refusal. Extending this argument, Bourdieu points out that manipulation of timing makes possible a "misrecognition," the denial of the obligation involved in gift exchange. For Bourdieu, this use of timing and misrecognition is a critical element of the gift (Smart 1993: 395). More recently, critiques of traditional exchange theories in anthropology have noted an exaggerated distinction between gifts and other forms of exchange (Appadurai 1986; Carrier 1994). All forms of exchange may have a calculative dimension (Appadurai 1986: 13); indeed, gift giving can be strategically used to obligate the other (Beidelman 1989; Smart 1993). Thus, as Smart has argued, misrecognition entails not the inability of participants to see through the content of gift exchange but their refusal to acknowledge it: "The form of gift exchange is

not dependent on an absence of awareness of the possibility of instrumental use, but rather on the need to exclude explicit acknowledgment of such goals from the performance" (Smart 1993: 395).

It is not my intention here to enter debates on a classic topic in anthropology; rather, my aim is to draw on several insights gained from these discussions in order to explore the nature of social relations and inequalities established through exchange in the second economy under socialism. In Kella, as in many socialist societies, the exchange of favors, goods, and services for scarce resources was heightened during the difficult World War II and postwar years. Some connections established during this time continued to thrive under socialism, but most informal networks in the region originated during the socialist period. Referred to as "Vitamin B" for *Beziehungen*, connections to people with access to resources were more important than money. "You could earn lots of money," people told me, "but if you didn't have any connections, you were a poor swine."

Anyone with access to scarce resources was thus in a privileged position. Several villagers served as brokers by providing access to resources via networks (Sampson 1986: 47).¹⁵ A good relationship with a high-ranking party member, for example, might ensure a call to the director of the cement factory who could deliver much-needed building materials. Friends, relatives, and acquaintances of the three private trucking businesses in Kella might be guaranteed access to goods from factories throughout the GDR serviced by the truck driver.

Other villagers with direct access to resources became patrons. Three self-employed tradespeople in the village—a plumber, a mason, and a carpenter—were each allocated scarce building materials by the state, which they occasionally sold or traded, sometimes along with their services. Patron-client relations, no longer based on property ownership and draft power, were thus now dependent on access to resources. As one woman explained, "[under socialism] the elites were the people that you needed because of materials—the carpenter, the plumber, the mason. We were dependent on them."

Networks of friendships, acquaintances, and associates were created and maintained through gift exchange, bribes, and barter trade. Gifts, exchanged among kin, friends, or acquaintances, were often used instru-

mentally. In Kella, the reciprocity inherent in the gift was an essential element of its form. This was not merely recognized by recipients; it was frequently acknowledged openly: "You'll get this back," was a common utterance, often expressed before "Thank you," on receiving a gift. Such statements referred not to a return of the actual gift but to a comparable counter-gift. In trying to explain this expression to me, still used during the time of my fieldwork, one villager remarked: "It's stuck in us from earlier. It's very hard to accept something without feeling the need to return the favor." Another woman explained:

Whenever people gave us a present of clothing, food, coffee—especially something from the West—I would always make sure to give them something in return. Even if they told me not to. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to accept their gift. Sometimes it would take a while, but if they gave us some children's clothes, for example, eventually I would send one of the children down with something special like coffee or chocolate as a thank you.

Gift giving was usually distinguishable from other forms of exchange by the manner in which the gift was offered. Although instrumental goals may have been recognized by both parties, a gift was presented unconditionally, without the explicit expectation of reciprocity. A bribe, on the other hand, was understood by both parties as being solely instrumental. Slipping the local grocery clerk an extra twenty marks or a western chocolate bar meant that she would probably set aside a few bananas or green peppers under the counter whenever a shipment of these or other coveted fruits and vegetables came in. A homemade wurst could guarantee being bumped to the top of the waiting list at the driving school. One young man recalled that in order to have his automobile repaired after an accident, he slipped the mechanic 100 West German marks and 520 East German marks. "And it still took six months," he said. "After a while I sent a card that simply said, 'Many greetings from Peter Hartmann.' The mechanic knew what I meant." As Steven Sampson has pointed out, the privilege to buy was more important than money; the price of obtaining access could be more expensive than the product or service itself (1986: 57).

Other exchanges were presented in the form of gifts but understood as

bribes: "You always remembered the Trabi repairman's birthday or the electrician's son's first communion [with a gift of money or something scarce]," a once well-connected woman explained, "so they would be there if you needed them." She smiled and continued, "Money actually did help you: it helped maintain the connections! But the connections were most important."

Sometimes bribes could establish an ongoing relationship based on the exchange of mutual favors. If a sales clerk at the local store did not need money or homemade wurst, for example, but knew or discovered that the person paying the bribe installed heating systems, she might agree regularly to set aside particular products in exchange for his services. If she needed some plumbing work done, however, and the heating installer knew a plumber, then access to his connections might be sufficient guarantee that she would set aside some bananas for him. The products of these arrangements were called *Bückwaren* (goods for which the store clerk had to "bend down"). In Kella, the frosted pastel porcelain owned by many households reflected not their plenitude in the GDR, I learned, but exactly the opposite. "Precisely *because* they were *Bückteller* [bend-over plates]—because they were so hard to obtain—is why everyone had to have them!" one villager explained.

While bribes and money transactions were most frequently reserved for people who did not know each other, barter, the most common form of exchange in the second economy, was usually among friends, acquaintances, and distant kin.¹⁶ Trust was of paramount importance. "These kinds of connections were never among strangers," one man told me, "so that you didn't get smeared. Back then you didn't care if friends made money off you. If you needed something, you were just happy they could provide it."

Barter in Kella involved the exchange of favors, goods, and services among networks established and maintained through such transactions. "Everyone scratched each other's back," a young man explained. "I'll repair your furnace if you repair my car. That's how it worked." Villagers trained as masons, carpenters, roof layers, or electricians were able to establish connections by providing their services in exchange for other favors, particularly after renewed nationalizations in the 1970s created a shortage of craftsmen in the GDR (Maier 1997).¹⁷ A mason employed at

the local factory plastered with stucco the hospital director's home in the nearby city of Heiligenstadt. In return, his family was given preferential medical treatment when they needed it. Another mason built stairs in a mechanic's home in exchange for prompt service whenever his automobile needed repair. One villager trained as a heating installer and employed as a mechanic in the local factory had a small side business installing heating systems, often using materials allegedly stolen from the factory, in exchange for access to other goods and services, as well as cash. "His wife never wore the same thing twice," a villager told me.

Cash played a role in this unplanned economy, but a minor one. Money could be important, but one needed connections in order to spend it. Building materials and other desirable but scarce items, like porcelain, tiles, or western clothing, could be purchased with cash, but only if one knew where, or through whom, to find them. Villagers with relatives or friends in the West often received packages filled with items that could be traded or sold. Others returned from visits to the West with panty hose, jeans, coats, or electronics to be sold or traded, often after using them first. People joked about the heavy suitcases of retirees, those able to travel freely to the West, full of things requested by the younger generation.

This barter economy significantly altered consumption practices.¹⁸ A *Hamsterkauf* (a hamster, or hoarding, purchase) was the purchase of desirable goods for the purpose of later trade or sale. "If you were shopping and saw something like a bunch of towels," one woman explained, "you said, 'I'll take all of them,' because you could use them later to trade or sell for other things." People often stocked up on such items during trips abroad. Czechoslovakia, for example, was well known as a place to buy tiles and porcelain. As one man recalled, "One time we returned from Czechoslovakia with a Trabi full of tiles. We were able to get rid of all of them." Hoarding was also a regular practice in households. Women would begin stockpiling for holidays or special occasions more than a year in advance; one woman recalled, still with dismay, how a ham she had carefully arranged to obtain had gone bad before it could be used for her son's first-communion celebration.

Gifts, barter, and bribes were thus essential in the circulation of particular goods as well as a means of constructing and maintaining social

relations. While I disagree with the overly dichotomous distinctions between "instrumental" and "sentimental" friendships often found in the anthropological literature on patronage (Sampson 1986: 58; see also Loizos 1975; Wolf 1960), I would argue that these practices of consumption and exchange fundamentally transformed the character of social relations and organization under socialism. Not only was there often a strategic element in social life, but social relations themselves became an important form of capital. Connections replaced property as an indicator of social status.¹⁹

This social capital, like other forms, was expressed in the realm of visible distinctions. A nicely stuccoed house, a flush toilet, a pair of western jeans, a living room with modern furnishings, or a wall unit full of crystal and porcelain neatly arranged on crocheted doilies, represented wealth through access to connections. These goods were not only symbolic markers of objective differences; they were a form of capital in themselves. They could be used for trading or for gifts, and they symbolized the ability to trade for other people. The frequently used term *weiter-schenken*, for example, referred to a practice of passing on a gift. Because of the scarcity of most consumer goods, it was not uncommon or considered rude to recycle gifts. We frequently received items carefully packaged and wrapped that we recognized as coming from friends' walls or cupboards. To borrow a phrase from Arjun Appadurai (1986), things in Kella often had long and complex social lives. Consumption became especially productive under this system: in exchange or display, consumption practices were both reflective and constitutive of difference.

The Politics of Consumption

In the context of an economy of shortage, consumption became deeply politicized (Verdery 1996). The socialist "ideology of rational distribution"—conveyed in school propaganda, mass organizations, and factory-brigade "production rituals"—defined the centralized appropriation and distribution of surplus as being in the common interest of all citizens (Konrad and Szelenyi 1979). The fact that the promise of redistribution was rarely met was a critical factor in the "politicization of

consumption" under socialism (Verdery 1996: 28). Not only were the dust-free displays of rare crystal or the wearing of western jeans in Kella markers of distinction, they were also political acts. Similarly, a blue Aral gasoline bumper sticker pasted on the inside a cupboard, or a red-and-green adhesive packaging peeled from a West German wurst and stuck underneath the kitchen table, entailed what Verdery has described as the forging "resistant political identities" through consumption (1996: 29). From the shadows of private life, visible only to those in the know, these acts of consuming were also part of a "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990), similar to the languages of shared protestation described in chapter 2, that constituted a critique behind the back of the regime.

Consumption was also politicized under socialism by the regular promises and measure of the regime's success in material terms, reflected especially in the SED's well-known slogan alluding to West German post-war progress and abundance: "Outdistance without catching up." A booklet on local history published in 1966 to honor Kella's 825th anniversary, for example, boasts in typical socialist language of the number of locally owned cars, mopeds, washing machines, television sets, and refrigerators as evidence of the regime's achievements: "This list demonstrates that the residents of our small community have developed into prosperous citizens under socialist conditions" (Müller and others 1966: 32). Such measurements of success and frequent assurances of imminent improvements in the standard of living, combined with constant deprivations in daily life, stimulated consumer desire (Borneman 1991; Verdery 1996). As Verdery writes, "Socialist ideology defined consumption as a 'right.' The system's organization exacerbated consumer desire further by frustrating it and thereby making it the focus of effort, resistance, and discontent" (1996: 28). In the GDR, consumer appetites were further frustrated with the opening in 1974 of Intershops to East Germans, where western goods could be obtained for western currency; this was followed several years later by the introduction of exorbitantly expensive Exquisit shops that sold western goods as well as high-end East German products (made for export) for eastern marks.²⁰ This combination of deprivation and stimulation, as John Borneman points out and as we shall see in the following chapter, structured much of East Germans' behavior as con-

sumers after the fall of the Wall: "Socialism had trained them to desire. Capitalism stepped in to let them buy" (1991: 81).

In this context, many everyday products became luxury goods. Defined by Appadurai as "goods whose principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are simply incarnated signs" (1986: 38), luxury goods in Kella included all things western as well as other scarce commodities.²¹ As one woman with a closet full of clothes from western relatives explained, "That's where the boundary was drawn. Not in terms of who earned the most, but who had connections in the West and wore western clothing. Kids in eastern clothes were made fun of at school."

The tremendous symbolic value of such commodities was demonstrated in their display. Kitchens were decorated with neatly arranged packages of coffee and cocoa; bathrooms were adorned with evenly-spaced, unopened boxes of western soap and hair products.²² Deodorant and shampoo from the West were reserved only for special occasions: their display value was their most important attribute. Like luxury goods, such seemingly simple commodities were capable of signifying "fairly complex social messages" (Appadurai 1986: 38), including the successful pursuit of wealth, power, and social distinction through exchange. In describing kula exchange in Gawa, for example, Nancy Munn writes, "Although men appear to be agents in defining shell value, without shells, men cannot define their own value; in this respect shells and men are reciprocally agents of each other's value definition" (1983: 283). While it may be pushing the boundaries of good anthropological taste to equate kula exchange with the circulation of commodities under socialism in Kella, the notion of reciprocal definition between objects and people is applicable here. "We are little people," Emma Hauser assured us the first time we visited her home, "we don't have any carpets."

Those who did have carpets—or other valuables—were often the objects of much envy within a community whose isolation under socialism tended to exaggerate certain qualities of village life. Envy, in a sense, might be viewed as a form of symbolic capital here: who was envied, and why, was—and remains—an important category of social classification. In describing who in the village she thought was privileged under socialism, one woman explained: "Now, Ulrike Braun, she was often en-

vied. She always seemed to have nice things from the West. I remember once there was lots of discussion in the village about an anorak she had. She was envied because of that jacket."

Another form of symbolic capital, a family's honor or reputation, was also an important category of social classification under socialism (and remains so today). One indicator of this status, both under socialism as well as since the Wende, is the election of two church advisory boards. Every four years members of the congregation elect fifteen people to each committee. The parish council, whose members include both men and women, is responsible for community social service: care for the sick and elderly, an annual advent celebration for retirees, and birthday visits to villagers living alone or over the age of eighty. Members of this council tend to be regarded as among the most pious in the community. The all-male church board of directors, on the other hand, deals with matters pertaining to church administration: building upkeep and repairs, finances, and the like. Members of this council tend to be highly respected members of the community, including several of the self-employed tradespeople who have allegedly sometimes used their position for financial gain. The carpenter on the board of directors might be called on to do the altar renovations, for example, or the plumber might be engaged to repair the pipes in the priest's home. Under socialism, of course, the church needed these tradespeople and their access to materials as much or more than the tradespeople needed the work. Being contracted to do a job for the church, however, also placed one in line for state-allotted materials, which could always be useful. As with many group memberships, therefore, belonging to one of these councils, particularly the board of directors, was an effective means of establishing and maintaining connections during the socialist period.

Symbolic capital could thus generate other forms of capital, and vice versa. Although this is not unique to socialism, it took on different forms and meanings under this system. When a villager's status was enhanced through the prestige of connections and the symbolic display of this wealth, his chances of being elected to a church council increased, thereby expanding as well the potential for accumulating additional capital. On the other hand, a villager's reputation could translate into a

living room full of prestigious gifts for a twenty-fifth wedding anniversary or the ability to recruit members easily for an evening work brigade.²³ This is not to say that all forms of capital were convertible or overlapped; my point is simply that the volume and composition of capital is what largely determined a person's position in the social field of the village.

In the following section, I seek to illuminate the village as a social field by focusing on a few individuals and families whose stories illustrate various aspects of social differentiation and organization under socialism. Their situations depict the transformation from a largely property-based system of inequality to new strategies of social distinction, as well as how new means of differentiation were interpreted, negotiated, and constructed in everyday practice.

"J. R.," "Alexis," and Other Notables

Most village nicknames in Kella tend to stem from some identifying characteristic: a spatial marker like "Corner Elizabeth" (*Ecken Elizabeth*) for a woman who lives on a corner; a family hobby like "Hare Siegfried" (*Hasen Siegfried*) for a man whose ancestors once raised rabbits; or an unusual family name like "Heckmanns Joseph" (*Heckmanns Jupp*) for a villager whose great-grandmother married someone named Heckmann and the name has stuck with the family despite its current more common last name. Other nicknames reflect a sense of humor, while some can be undeniably cruel.

One nickname encompassing both these characteristics belongs to "J. R." His son was called "Bobby" after J. R.'s brother in the show, and occasionally women in the family were also referred to with *Dallas* names. Like other nicknames, they were used only in referring to these particular individuals, not in addressing them; unlike other nicknames, however, they were not used in the "Dallas Family's" presence. This rule was once broken during a traditional carnival skit in which a story or joke is told about each of the eleven men who make up the Fasching planning committee. When it came to "J. R.'s" turn, the commentator was silent. Just as the audience was uneasily beginning to wonder whether a mistake had been made, a faint hum of the *Dallas* theme music could be

heard coming softly from the stage. As the band grew louder, people recognized the tune and burst into laughter. "J. R." was furious.

When I asked people what the Müller family had done to deserve such ridicule, most villagers would explain that "all they cared about was money." "J. R.," or Gregor Müller, stems from one of the few *Großbauern* families who did not leave Kella in 1952, and his financial success under socialism was due to his ability to adapt to new strategies of social differentiation. Unlike several of the other former *Großbauern*, who went to work in factories or the LPG and whose earnings and other holdings dropped to those of most other villagers, Gregor worked hard to establish different kinds of connections throughout the GDR.²⁴ He joined the village council, and although he was never a member of the Communist Party, he was in good standing with village party members. At the toy factory in neighboring Pfaffschwende, he headed the tool-making division, the largest in the factory, and was able to establish connections with other factory and division managers throughout the country.

Most of his wealth, however, was earned as a middleman between the state and villagers during the fruit harvest. Kella's unique lime soil made it one of the only villages in the region that could produce substantial amounts of marketable cherries and apples. For centuries a source of supplemental income for villagers, the larger orchards were destroyed in order to clear space for the expansive LPG fields. Many gardens remained, however, and people were permitted to retain ownership and/or lease from the LPG small (half a hectare) household garden plots for their own use. Many of these plots, particularly those with fruit trees, produced not only food for villager's own consumption but substantial supplemental income as well. In a good year, many villagers earned an extra 800 to 2,000 marks—twice an individual's monthly income—through fruit sales. During the fruit harvest, Gregor collected and purchased the harvested fruit from other villagers, which he then sold to the state for a commission. "It was hard work for him," one woman recalled, "and although people resented him for it, they never really stopped to think how hard it would have been for them to get rid of their fruit if he hadn't done it for them."

"J. R.'s" money and connections enabled him to own one of the largest, most modernized homes in the village. Situated among the other large

farmhouses of the former Großbauern, his house stood out as the "whitest" house on the street—an unusual feature in the GDR and Kella, where most of the houses were "unfinished" owing to the difficulty in obtaining plaster materials and, especially, white paint. The family owned two automobiles, and as one woman told me, "They were able to take trips abroad that we could only dream of." These trips, like other luxuries, were made possible not only by Gregor's money but also by the connections necessary in order to spend it.

Another, though more mean-spirited, village nickname also derived from an American television show. One of the best-connected people in Kella, "Alexis," or Maria Botling, was named after the manipulative, greedy, and promiscuous Joan Collins character in *Dynasty* because of her wealth and, according to malicious village gossip, her lifestyle. As one woman explained, "You could say that back then [in GDR times] that Maria stood at the top in the village. First of all, she earned lots of money. Second, as the head bookkeeper for the factory, she traveled extensively and was able to build up connections that way. When she saw something she wanted, she could get it. She was especially able to get things abroad, like porcelain or tiles from Czechoslovakia." Maria's immaculate home was full of the most modern furnishings and decorations; her cupboards overflowed with porcelain and crystal pieces collected during years of travel and bargaining. Another woman recalled: "She went all over the place and was able to get things that no one else could. Like that super furniture—no one else could get that." More than any other villager, her home and possessions reflected her wealth in connections and ability to trade for and with others—which, according to many villagers, she did.

Maria's obsession with material goods may have its origins in an impoverished childhood and difficult young adulthood. Her father was killed in World War II when Maria was a small child, and her mother, like other war widows, received no compensation from the socialist state. The family had never belonged to the local elite; their house, built in the early 1920s, was situated on the periphery of the village. As soon as she was old enough, Maria went to work long hours in the fields to earn extra income for her mother and younger sister. After she was married and working as an accountant, she lost two of her three children in infancy to a rare degenerative illness. Fifteen years later, Maria was widowed when

her husband died suddenly of a stroke at the age of forty-three. I often had the sense that her material possessions were the only sense of stability and comfort she was able to obtain in her turbulent life.

Two years before the Wall fell, Maria made the ultimate social and economic connection: she married a wealthy westerner and moved to West Germany. Her husband, a cantankerous spice salesman who rarely keeps his opinions about "lazy Osis" to himself, has been derisively, but with typical local humor, nicknamed "The Pepper Prince" (*der Pfefferprinz*). The couple owns a large home in Eschwege, complete with a sauna, a tanning booth, and a three-car garage. His Porsche turned heads whenever the couple visited Kella, and her more modest Audi was instantly recognized by all. The first time I visited Maria in her Eschwege home, she gave me a tour of the house and then, as if to explain, or even apologize for, her new affluence, remarked, "You know, I served my time in Kella."

Just down the street from Maria's old house in Kella live Hans and Barbara Becker. Hans is one of the few villagers to be graced with two nicknames (although neither is from an American television show): one alludes to an old, unusual family name in his heritage, while the other, "The Heavy One" (*der Schwere*), affectionately alludes to his burly physical build. The Beckers' story illustrates the interplay and convergence of symbolic, social, and economic capital in the social field of the village. Neither Hans nor Barbara stems from one of Kella's elite families. Their capital is largely symbolic: as members of the church board of directors (Hans) and the parish council (Barbara), they are generally regarded as some of the most pious and "good" people in the village. Despite a daily schedule that begins at 5 A.M. and usually ends around midnight, Barbara attends church daily and is one of the priest's most devoted assistants. She is always available to tend the sick and elderly, and her exquisite pastries are a feature of nearly every communion or wedding celebration in Kella. She is commonly viewed—and, to some extent, views herself—as a self-sacrificing nurturer. Ever since her elderly mother fell ill with an unusually aggressive form of senility, for example, Barbara has tended to her lovingly and patiently despite the scratches and frequent verbal abuse she receives from her. She is regarded, with good reason, as one of the most generous and thoughtful members of the

community. One day when the electricity was cut off on our street, Barbara appeared at noon on our doorstep with a warm meal cooked over a gas stove in her garage.

Hans is similarly involved in community and congregational activities: he has been a leader in numerous church-related renovation projects, is a member of the carnival club's planning committee, and may often be found enjoying a beer with other village men (although he does not belong to the crowd that regularly frequents the village pub). They are revered not only for their individual activities and personalities but also because they represent an ideal of a village couple in which domestic and social duties are divided along traditional gender lines. Because of this status, their rebellious children have often been granted more leeway in village gossip than are children from less reputable families.

During the socialist period, this form of symbolic capital came to be reflected in other forms of capital as well. Because of their popularity and honorable reputation, Hans was readily able to assemble a private brigade of village men trained as masons to do moonlighting work on homes in the area. This moonlighting produced not only substantial supplemental income but also established important connections throughout the region. Employing his brigade and materials acquired through connections, Hans was able to maintain one of the whitest, most modern house facades in Kella—an important marker of wealth and good character (hard work) within the village as well as a feature highly valued and rewarded by the state.²⁵ In fact, Hans was the recipient of a GDR state award for having the most beautiful house.

Barbara's activities were also rewarded with the repayment of debts incurred through her material and spiritual gifts.²⁶ While it would be wrong and invidious for the villagers—or, indeed, for me—to suggest that her actions were motivated by the expectation of reciprocity or that she utilized her symbolic resources for economic gain, a certain amount of remuneration was the practical consequence of her accumulated symbolic capital. For the Beckers' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, for example, they were lavished with an exorbitant amount of gifts, reportedly far more than the usual amount for such an occasion. While they could never be counted among the village elite—their clothing and home decor

were quite modest—their symbolic capital of reputation, along with the other forms of capital it generated, nevertheless placed them in the upper echelons of the village social field.

My final story involves Edgar Koch, a master craftsman and self-employed mason. Like other independent craftsmen, Edgar was allotted building materials by the state. During the socialist period, his services as a mason and his access to scarce resources and numerous connections throughout the region could have placed him, like the other self-employed craftsmen, among the village elite. But when villagers recite the names of elite families, his is never among them. People often stress his friendly and generous character ("He'd give you the shirt off his back") and recall how he was willing to lend villagers materials and equipment; at the same time, however, they commonly note that he never did anything with his various forms of capital.

Edgar's case illustrates the importance of display and conspicuous consumption in the organization and structuring of village inequalities. His house, among the shabbiest in the village, was given a white stucco finish only when his son, Joachim, long ashamed of his family's dilapidated home, completed the job himself after the *Wende*. "Since my father was a master mason, we should have had one of the nicest homes in the village," he once told me, "but he was too busy with other things." A few months after refinishing the exterior of the house, Joachim felt he was being treated differently, as if his own social standing in the village had improved. To illustrate, he told me about a recent interaction with a former classmate's parents: "I saw Annette's parents the other day. They are much nicer to me now. They had a nice, big, timbered house, whereas we lived in a disintegrating hut. Somehow I had the feeling [back then] that I wasn't good enough for her. Now I have done something and also have a nice house, and it's almost as if they're saying, 'Now you could marry our daughter!'" Although neither Joachim's nor his father's social or economic capital had been altered through the remodeling of their house, their symbolic capital—and particularly Joachim's—had increased. Joachim's gesture will probably not significantly alter the family's standing within the village hierarchy, but it may have affected his own. By refinishing the house, Joachim displayed virtues long appreciated in village

life: initiative, effort, hard work, responsiveness to his neighbors' values, and a certain degree of social malleability (unlike his father). In Kella, as elsewhere, the social value attributed to these traits transcends different regimes and are especially appreciated by potential in-laws, as Joachim's own example revealed.

Joachim's actions and the resulting display carried a different meaning, however, from what it would have under socialism because the remodeling project was undertaken after the *Wende*, when building materials had become readily available and less expensive. Instead of symbolizing access to scarce resources and connections, therefore, the Kochs' new house facade became one of dozens of home renovations completed by villagers as part of an urgent *Nachholungsbedarf* after the *Wende*. We now turn to these emergent strategies and categories of distinction.

SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND REORGANIZATION IN A MARKET ECONOMY OF STRUCTURAL UNEMPLOYMENT

The second economy, along with many of its elaborate networks that had been cultivated and maintained under forty years of socialism, largely disappeared, almost overnight, with the fall of the Wall. This entailed the erosion of not only many social contacts and the concomitant sense of community these networks had engendered but also the social capital of connections that had been so important under socialism.

Former elites like the independent craftsmen are now scrambling for business, much to the delight of many villagers who used to be at their mercy under socialism, and many have had to give up their small businesses for wage labor in the West. Tragically, the failure of one local business appears to have been a factor in a recent (1997) suicide of a man in his mid-forties. Postsocialism in Kella has been a transitional period somewhat reminiscent of the expropriation and collectivization of the 1950s, when the foundations of the village elite were essentially pulled

out from under them. The influx of a market economy has brought with it a return to economic forms of capital as a primary means of social distinction, as well as new practices and meanings of consumption.

My intent in this final section is not to provide a definitive account or argument about the transformation of village social organization and hierarchies under a capitalist market economy, for that would be premature. Instead, I suggest how this transition has produced new categories and strategies of social distinction, and I explore how these emergent forms are being negotiated, assimilated, and contested in everyday life.

During my fieldwork I witnessed how the reappropriation of products according to a cultural order shaped by an economy of shortages gave way to new cultural meanings of these same commodities in a market economy. I noticed, for example, that western soaps and shampoos left the domestic display shelf as they were transformed into items for everyday use. I observed how representations of formerly scarce and coveted western products—Chiquita Banana stickers on the front of television sets, Tschibo coffee stickers on automobiles, Aral bumper stickers on the inside of a cupboard—lost their initial meaning as novel display objects and were gradually peeled off. Now available to all, these everyday western products, as well as representations of them, ceased to be status markers and thus were no longer displayed.

This is not to say that consumption ceased to be definitive and constitutive of difference. Indeed, as income disparities widen within the village, consumption remains an important marker of status. However, rather than signifying indirect access to consumption through access to connections and/or the ability to trade for others—including the objects themselves as capital for trade—consumption in a market economy signifies a return to the economic capital of income, other monetary resources, and direct consumption. It is the resources and their availability that have changed—and, concomitantly, the meanings and practices of consumption.

One of the major resources that has changed, of course, is the acquisitive power—indeed social meanings—of money. "Being able to afford" something has become a more frequently used phrase and category of distinction. A new automobile, heating system, furniture, kitchen appli-

ances, clothing, or home renovations now represent disposable income rather than access to scarce resources or connections. After a promotional gathering sponsored by a dubious West German health-products firm in which several villagers purchased the extravagantly priced products (500 marks for a twenty-one-day supply of nutritional supplements), one woman explained to me, "That's the way it is now in the village. One person buys it, and people think 'if they can afford it then we can afford it, too.'"

Another woman related a similar story: "I was shopping in Heiligenstadt the other day and overheard a woman say to her daughter: 'No, we can't get that. We can't afford that.' You never would have heard that before [in GDR times]." The transition to a market economy in which "money rules," as many say, has brought with it new frustrations. A former janitor turned salesman explained to me: "Earlier [in the GDR] we lived simply. It wasn't always nice, we didn't have much, but it was enough. . . . Now we can have everything but nobody has the money, and that's driving people crazy."

Employment, particularly in the West where wages are higher (although in 1992 still 20 to 30 percent lower than those of West German coworkers), thus became a new category of differentiation in a society where full employment used to be the norm. Much time at social gatherings was spent sorting out who in the village had found work, and where.²⁷ The importance of employment was reflected in frequent responses to greetings, as one woman explained: "You can tell how important work is when people ask you how you are. If you say 'good,' then they respond, 'then you must have work.'"

Time became an important marker as well. As Borneman has pointed out, German re-unification entailed a "reordering of spatial and temporal categories" on both sides of the former border (1993: 41). In the context of what Borneman has identified as an experience of accelerated time in the former GDR after the fall of the Wall (1991, 1993), "having time" in Kella revealed one's lack of employment—which is one of the reasons people were careful not to be seen taking a midday stroll or relaxing in the garden on a warm spring afternoon. There were instances when people were outright defensive about "having time," as the following

story related to me by an unemployed young woman illustrates: "I was down at Konsum this morning and ran into a woman I used to work with who is also unemployed now. When it came time to pay, I said, 'Go ahead, we both have time.' And she snapped back: 'Maybe you enjoy being unemployed, but I don't!'" Paid employment was thus valued for both its monetary rewards and its social and personal merits, reflecting the importance of a worker identity that had been inculcated during forty years of socialist rule.²⁸ Income disparities and the resulting inequalities, however, became the real outcome of differences in employment status.

New categories of distinction and lines of division emerged through the negotiation of these growing discrepancies. "Sure, there used to be differences before," one man told me, "but now the differences are getting bigger. It's not the same anymore when some people earn so much more than others." In a comment that echoed similar sentiments voiced by other villagers, another man said, "When one of us has work and the other doesn't, we can't sit together at the same table anymore. It just isn't fun now to be together, to sit next to somebody who's unemployed."

This notion of "being able to sit together" is part of an increasing nostalgia and romanticizing of community and "togetherness" under socialism. Characteristic of what Michael Herzfeld has called "structural nostalgia" (1997: 109), one of the most frequently voiced laments throughout my fieldwork involved the loss of community. "The togetherness, it's not what it used to be. I miss that," one man told me. Or as Hans Becker explained, "We used to all sit in the same shit. But now when one of us earns nineteen marks and the other only eight marks an hour, there are problems."

The loss of community is attributed to many changes since the fall of the Wall, especially the increasing income differences and resulting envy. "Envy has gotten really bad," one young woman commented. "It's all my parents talk about." Another woman explained, "Envy is really bad now. All the couples in our clique had about the same: they earned the same, they had the same furniture, etc. Now I feel as if people resent us because we're doing so well." And in a similar comment, a man from the same circle of friends told me after one couple from the group bought a new automobile: "I never thought it would happen to our clique. I've watched

it happen to others. Nobody gets together any more. But I didn't think it would happen to us. But look, it has." The disappearance of the numerous networks and connections formed under socialism has also contributed to a sense of a decline in community.

Not only are income differences and employment status perceived as destructive forces; products themselves are viewed this way as well. Such products especially include items highly visible to the rest of the community (and among the first western purchases of East Germans): automobiles, clothing, and exterior home renovations. They also include less public things like appliances, electronics, and furniture, visible only to those who enter the private space of the home but known to others through local gossip. "We have to learn now to draw our own boundaries," one woman commented to a group of friends. "These products are driving us apart." Ironically, therefore, some of the very products that helped sustain elaborate networks of friends and contacts under socialism are seen to be "driving us apart" in the new market economy.

As easterners struggled to acquire a certain cultural fluency in western consumption, a notion I shall discuss at length in the next chapter, another category of distinction, already familiar in the West, began to emerge: the culturally and market-constructed associations between brand names or stores and their particular positioning in class or status hierarchies. When the Wall fell, all things western seemed equally good because of the symbolic value of western goods under socialism. Anything purchased in the West had to be better because it was not from the East. People would return from a first visit to West Germany with inexpensive cassette players or gold-plated bracelets, for example, only to have them break or tarnish weeks later. Discount stores like Aldi or Lidl were so packed with East Germans that in border regions, their very names became synonymous with Osis. Since all products had been uniformly priced by the state under socialist rule, people puzzled over why butter cost more at Edeka than at Aldi and why the imitation Birkenstock sandals were half the price of the brand name.

Such topics dominated conversation, particularly during the first two years after the Wende. Women would talk for hours at a dinner party about the quality and prices of everything from coffee to mattresses.

Children could recite the price of a loaf of bread from three different bakeries. These discussions and collective negotiations of new cultural practices of consumption became part of a bonding ritual that replaced the "them" of the state with the foreignness of a market economy, a notion that "we" have to figure out how "they" work in order not to be taken advantage of. Yet this ritual could also ultimately be divisive: in discussing the cost and quality of certain products, one may also reveal—even boast—that one can afford them. "I've learned that it's worth it to spend the extra money on good shoes. I recently had to spend 100 marks on a pair of shoes for Kerstin [her daughter]," one woman told her group of friends.

As people began to acquire a cultural fluency in consumption ("learning where to shop," as one upwardly mobile young woman put it), they also began to uncover the cultural meanings of certain consumption practices. Several villagers with good jobs in the West abandoned Aldi for the more prestigious grocery stores frequented primarily by western Germans. Others began to pay careful attention to brand names of electronics, appliances, and clothes.

More than a year into my fieldwork, I witnessed an exchange between two women, Marianne and Ilse, over their children's clothing that brought this to my attention. Marianne had taken the children shopping and bought them each a pair of footless tights as "leggings." When Ilse's daughter, Marika, happily showed them to her mother, Ilse was upset, not only because she had told Marika to wait until her birthday for a pair but also because they had been purchased at Woolworth and, she inferred, were a cheap imitation of "real leggings." After Ilse had left, Marianne, who had bought herself a pair as well, commented as both a reassurance to herself and as a question to me, a westerner assumed to be practiced in the art of consumption: "It doesn't always have to be the best—does it?" A few weeks later, Ilse bought her daughter a pair of more expensive leggings from a more prestigious department store, and Marianne's daughter lamented to her mother, "Now Marika has a pair of *real* leggings." A year ago, I thought to myself, Ilse would have been thrilled with the leggings from Woolworth; when I first arrived in Kella, she frequently shopped there. The incident reflected how much her

thinking and practice in relation to consumption and differentiation had changed.

Taste, an important manner in which consumption expresses distinction (Bourdieu 1984), thus began to enter into the construction, experience, and expression of difference in Kella. This field of play is largely new here: under socialism, when commodities and clothing were either uniform or scarce, people took whatever they could find. Most villagers' taste in clothing, for example, was determined by the hand-me-downs sent by western relatives. "I used to wear that dress every day," one woman recalled, pointing to an old photograph of herself, "just because it was from the West. Now, of course, I know they just sent us the things they didn't want any more." While people creatively used their limited options to shape different styles and expressions of distinction under socialism, the range of possibilities—and the meanings of those possibilities—have changed.

CONCLUSION

While it is too early to ascertain whether or how a new group of village elites will assert itself, new and emergent categories of differentiation—most associated with a consumer market economy—are becoming visible. The return to landed property as a means of differentiation has not been a factor, at least not yet.²⁹ Like other areas of social life, particularly in this moment of historical transition, social organization and differentiation are in a state of intense flux. It will likely take many more years for village hierarchies to sort themselves out in a market economy.

Nevertheless, some conclusions may be drawn about the changing nature of the village as a social field. Although an individual's position within this field remains highly relational, both to those in other fields (like religion or gender) and to others within the same field, many bases for that position have been transformed as the values of different forms of capital have changed. Under socialism, the interactions (or lack of them) between the carpenter, Thomas Baumann, and the now deceased

villager who was described by Michael as having been "nothing" due to his lack of connections—as well as other villagers' consciousness of such relationships—were part of a process through which objective structures and social distances were internalized and reproduced in everyday practices. Such practices under socialism also included gift giving, bartering, and bribes—practices whose meanings in an economy of shortages have been lost in a market economy of abundance.

Today both the discussion between Marianne and Ilse about Woolworth leggings in Ilse's affluent home and the different behavior generated by this interaction entail practices that are reflective and constitutive of social distinctions—even if temporary ones. While the shift from the social capital of connections under socialism to the acquisitive power of economic capital and the symbolic capital of taste in a market economy may eventually result in the formation of new village hierarchies and status distinctions, the dynamic processes through which these distinctions are internalized, negotiated, reproduced, and transformed in everyday practices transcend the political and economic system of which they are a part. Although different in context and content, both socialist and capitalist societies share not only certain similarities in the structures of these processes but also central elements of their form: consumption as production. We shall return to this theme of productive consumption in the next chapter.