

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The subject of this book is the transformation of farming after the demise of communism in eastern Germany and the manner in which individuals, both eastern Germans and western Germans who migrated there after 1989, conceive of this process and of their roles and identities within it. As such, this book is about contradictions. It is about a farm manager of a highly rationalized, modern cooperative who still has strong beliefs in the basic correctness of the communist path. It is about managers in agricultural cooperatives who preside over the reduction of the workforce to a fraction of 1990 membership in keeping with capitalist notions of efficiency, but who are also firmly committed to preserving as many workplaces following an ideology that harkens back to socialist times. It is about a newly created eastern German millionaire individual farmer who seemed to live in poverty. And it is about a western German farmer, a newcomer to the area, who is the beneficiary of generous subsidies from the federal government and from the *Land* (federal state), but whose farm is subject to potentially disastrous inundation, a problem that had not unduly affected the former German Federal Republic (GDR) collective because it constituted only a small part of the extensive territory farmed.

The *Wende* (literally, the turn or turning), the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the reunification of the two Germanies in 1990, was a major watershed in eastern Germany. Not only did it mean the demise of communism, an event shared with a number of other eastern European countries, but it meant the country's absorption into what had become a foreign nation. We shall follow Darnton's (1991:21–26; see

also Bornemann 1991) chronology of the events. The *Wende* was preceded by a tumultuous year that began with Hungary's decision to begin to dismantle its border with Austria in May 1989, whereupon eastern Germans began to flock to Hungary and seek asylum in the West German embassies in Prague and Warsaw. By October, 55,000 East Germans had fled to the West and an additional 17,000 traveled from Prague to West Germany in special trains. After a series of mass demonstrations in East German cities, Erich Honecker, the general secretary of the Communist Party, was replaced. But, after new demonstrations and massive emigration via Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Berlin Wall that divided the city of Berlin was opened on November 9 and travel to West Germany was permitted freely. A new government, under Hans Modrow, began to institute a series of reforms, including the elimination of the leading role of the Communist Party; the abolition of the dreaded *Stasi*, the secret police; and the initiation of privatization of state enterprises as well as the restructuring of collectives. These reforms were catalyzed by round tables of representatives of citizen's movements and political parties, who, for a while, attempted to create a "third way" between communism and Western democracies. These developments led to free parliamentary elections and the replacement of Modrow by de Mazière of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party in power in West Germany. These elections and the pressure of West German politicians, including negotiations between the West German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, and Gorbachev also led to the rapid push toward reunification. On July 1, 1990, monetary union took effect and on October 3 the five states of East Germany were incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany.

The clash between the two radically different systems resulted in major contradictions in the eastern German economy, in general, and in agriculture, in particular. Indeed, agriculture in the GDR was fully collectivized, with the exception of a handful of small farms. Members of farming collectives were permitted to cultivate small plots of land and raise a few animals, and they still held title to (but not control over) the land they had brought into the collective. In Poland, in contrast, a large part of farming remained in private hands throughout the communist period and in certain other countries in the Soviet bloc, particularly toward the end of communism, there were all sorts of arrangements between the collectives and individual farmers giving them more autonomy (see chapter 4). The economic system introduced in eastern Germany after the *Wende* was in some ways even more capitalistic than the version prevailing in western Germany. It thus comes as no surprise that forms with inconsistent characteristics would initially emerge.

It is our contention, however, that a model of change that presents the process as the transformation of one pure or coherent form into another with transitional intermediate forms, or even a model that depicts change as resulting in a more permanent amalgamation of two coherent antecedent forms, is too simplistic. Socioeconomic systems can rarely if ever be represented by unitary models without doing violence to their actual dynamics. Thus, both GDR socialism and western German capitalism entailed many often conflicting currents resulting from the persistence of a variety of cultural traditions, the outcomes of class conflict, the need to remedy the inadequacies of each system by allowing workable solutions even if they were antithetical to the central tenets of the hegemonic system, the pressures of national and international politics, and global economic linkages.

An analysis of the transformation of agriculture in eastern Germany must, then, address the conflicting trends during different historical periods that, in turn, form the basis of central or of countervailing trends in subsequent periods. In the area studied, the central region of the state, or *Land*, of Sachsen-Anhalt, modern forms of agriculture were influenced by the area's high fertility but low rainfall. The precommunist preponderance of large-scale farming dominated by estates in the hands of nobility has also left its mark and long-lost patterns of ownership are again becoming relevant. The communist past is manifested less in echoes of the then dominant form of production, the centralized, state-owned enterprise (*volkseigener Betrieb*), which never became prevalent in agriculture, but rather in the continued influence of a compromise form, the collective. But modern forms of agriculture are not only inspired by these long-lasting historical forms, but by the specific history of collectivism in the GDR. The fact that the large precommunist estates were first divided into small individual plots and given to farmers in the region and to refugees from the east, that these individual holdings were then grouped into cooperatives with various degrees of joint production, and that these cooperatives were in turn grouped into progressively larger entities have all influenced postcommunist farming in eastern Germany. Finally, the survival of individual production on half hectare plots assigned to each farm worker household, although integrated into the communist redistributive economy, also has had its impact on present-day agriculture.

The present situation is one of experimentation with both old and new forms within the confines of wider agricultural policies that are themselves in flux. Thus, in the mid-1990s, and, to a lesser extent, even in 1999, the rules of privatization developed by the German authorities continued to be ambiguous: they vacillated between attempts to destroy

forms dominant during communism, including those, like cooperatives, which have a much longer history in Germany, and policies (first developed during the transitional period of the Modrow regime, early in 1990) to authorize any form of enterprise that respected the basic underpinnings of capitalism. The result has been the emergence of three major actors: producer cooperatives, erstwhile members of agricultural collectives who established their own farms, and western individuals and corporations who gained a foothold in the east.

As we shall see, the history of the cooperatives is characterized by a progressive curtailing of the autonomy of individual farmers during the four decades of communist rule followed by new modes of centralized control. The first cooperatives, instituted in the 1950s, were based on the nineteenth-century model of Raiffeisen.¹ They were characterized by voluntary association into various forms of cooperatives with differing degrees of pooling of land and livestock. Subsequently the voluntary nature of this association was curtailed, first by employing economic incentives and disincentives and ultimately through various forms of intimidation. While land titles remained in the hand of individuals, land ownership no longer provided any financial benefits. Nevertheless, remuneration continued to depend, to a degree, on the productivity of the enterprise. Former managers of collectives thus stress that, unlike their counterparts in state enterprises, they enjoyed a degree of agency: the possibility of influencing the living conditions of collectivities smaller than the nation as a whole. Hence they saw their roles as, to a degree, counter-hegemonic. After the *Wende*, producer cooperatives were seen by the west as not fully compatible with capitalism. Many western experts argued that decision-making in producer cooperatives was inherently cumbersome and that the wish to maintain employment, that could be expected to be a major aim of the membership, ran counter to the long-term survival chances of a cooperative. Indeed, managers took upon themselves major economic sacrifices in the form of lower remuneration (albeit with lower personal financial risk) than if they had struck out on their own or had adopted other corporate forms. At the same time, the managers' freedom of action continued to be restricted by state intervention. This time it took the form of decisions regarding debts accrued in GDR times; the obligation to abide by proposals that had to be submitted to the state authorities in order to be able to continue renting land from the state; rules about preferential access to state land; and quotas and subsidies conceded by the federal states, the German government, and the European Union (EU).

A major aim of the German government after the *Wende* was the reinstatement of individual farming following the western German model

in the east. Farm families who had joined collectives either voluntarily or by force were particularly encouraged to reestablish farms and were placed first in line in renting state land. Farms that did not exceed a certain level of capitalization also received subsidies in the form of outright grants and low-interest loans.

Finally, western farmers who established farms in the east shared some of these benefits. These farmers included former owners of farms exceeding 100 hectares and therefore expropriated in their entirety during the Soviet land reform of 1949. While not regaining title to the land they lost, they nevertheless received preferential treatment in leasing land that remained in (or had reverted back to) the hands of the state. At the same time, westerners without ties to the region established themselves there. Some contented themselves with renting land and coming over with equipment loaded on flatbed trucks for planting and harvesting, leaving other tasks to local caretakers. Others made permanent moves. Where else could they rent hundreds of hectares of land at advantageous rates made possible through loans secured through ties with bankers and their own or their parents' farming operations back home?

The conflicting trends in the region's past are manifested in the concrete decisions of the present-day actors who, on the one hand compete with one another and apply different models in their farming methods, and, on the other, emulate one another in their attempt to find solutions that are both appropriate to the climatic and landholding structure in the region and adapted to the exigencies of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union and global competition. As we shall see, especially during the early transition period after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but to a degree even ten years later, the various actors were differently positioned vis-à-vis global actors in the world market, with the westerners at a clear advantage in terms of knowledge and connections with such actors. Their experimentation has resulted in a multiplicity of forms, some of which may well become dominant in the future while others may disappear or become subject to even further transformation. It has also led to divergent management styles, grounded in past experiences but modified to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new eastern German situation.

To comprehend these complexities, then, requires models that take into account the competition among forms of agriculture and of their resultant variability as they contradict, collide, mutually reinforce or accommodate, or fuse into unexpected new forms. At the same time, such models must take into account the various ways in which regularities of interpersonal behavior are expressed or contradicted by official pronouncements and regulations and in the everyday words of the

actors themselves. An analysis of the nature of the relationship between behavior and symbolization is particularly important in situations of conflict and of rapid change, where it can reveal tensions and resistance against hegemonic forces as well as attempts by individuals to reformulate new social situations in terms of older patterns of action.

In order to tease out the strands of German farmers' identities in terms of informants' self-perceptions—the so-called emic approach—while at the same time grounding these perceptions in changing patterns of behavior influenced by local, regional, and supraregional forces, we shall resort to a theoretical framework that combines more behavior-oriented analyses such as those based on Arensberg's concept of "culture as emergent" (Arensberg 1972, 1981), social network analysis, and political economic approaches with more interpretive approaches. We borrow from Arensberg the notion that in order to specify the nature of continuity and change in specific historical sequences, particularly as they are manifested in small-scale events, we must describe patterns of social behavior in terms of minimal sequences of interaction.² He demonstrated that such sequences could emerge *de novo* as adaptations to new situations, or existing patterns could be applied to new ends. Emerging patterns of social behavior could also be superimposed on existing ones, thereby modifying them into new and more complex patterns.

Since Arensberg gave few specific indications of how one pattern could be transformed into another, he paid little attention to individual agency; and he regarded the ideational and communicative aspects of culture, in the form of symbols and explicit norms, as largely derivative or supportive of basic patterns of interaction. Therefore, his model requires some reformulation. Network models such as that developed by Gulliver (1971) enable us to understand individual contributions and show how interactional sequences that cut across geographic and cultural boundaries influence social systems. In addition, we must include in our model a means of showing how regularities in interpersonal behavior are cognized, and the ways in which emic models influence interaction.

For such a model to do justice to the complexity of actual social situations, it must explicitly recognize the indeterminacies in both regularities of interpersonal behavior and their symbolic expression. One way in which these indeterminacies in self- and mutual definition in the context of groups with unequal power have been addressed is in the hegemony-resistance model. In particular, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have highlighted the contingent nature of hegemonies and the multiplicity of struggles (see also Buechler & Buechler 1999a). Their approach stresses the articulatory nature of hegemonies with each attempted articulation

transforming both the articulated elements and the hegemony itself. Employing a similar approach, the Comaroffs (1991) show the differences and conflicts between the hegemonizing nonconformist church and the various political actors in South Africa. In this book we largely adopt their approach but give more emphasis to the economic dimensions of struggles for hegemony and hence for identity. Specifically, we shall investigate the impact on the farmers' identities of the uneasy truce between cooperative forms of agriculture and state enterprises under communism and the new configuration of forms that are both more compatible with but also partly antithetical to capitalism.

The new configurations involve a different integration of farms in the wider community and new relationships to other businesses. In the GDR, collectives fulfilled a wide range of economic roles. Inefficiencies in the allocation of resources including services forced firms, both collectives and state enterprises, to attempt to secure a high degree of self-sufficiency through the horizontal integration of economic activities. They undertook their own repairs, including the manufacturing of spare parts, they had their own construction brigades, built and maintained roads, and provided services for the membership ranging from kindergarten and dining facilities to building homes for members and maintaining vacation resorts. Following an analogous model of local self-sufficiency in the absence of adequate allocation of resources from the center, collectives were also cajoled into paying for or building facilities ranging from dance halls to hospitals for the local communities and even district capitals. After the *Wende*, both forms of horizontal integration were sharply curtailed or eliminated altogether with a commensurate loss of employment. The recent history of farming, then, involves a desegregation of economic activities and a greater degree of separation of farms from the wider community. At the same time, given the intense competition for land, farmers and cooperatives now need to woo the owners of parcels of land with invitations to celebrations and New Year's greetings that are designed to make these persons feel more part of the farming community and thus assure the continuation of precious leases. These new managerial strategies impact their definitions of self vis-à-vis other farmers and community members.

The models employed in the analysis of identity have not uniformly acknowledged the flexibility, indeterminacy, and contingent nature of hegemonies. In some studies, for example, *resistance* is depicted as based on flexible, often contradictory conceptualizations while established *hegemonies* continue to be viewed in unitary terms.³

A more appropriate model for the analysis of the interaction between part-societies with unequal power is emerging out of research

that focuses on the blurring of boundaries between cultures⁴ and reflexive analyses of anthropologists in fieldwork situations. We must go beyond the reinterpretation of the hegemonic by subaltern groups to the rethinking of the nature of the boundaries between the hegemonic and the anti-hegemonic and the questioning of the unitary nature of the hegemonic itself. For example, the Comaroffs' work (e.g., 1986, 1991) problematizes the nature of the interface between hegemonic and subaltern groups.⁵ This blurring of boundaries is also apparent in the recent reflexive literature of anthropologists in fieldwork situations. Lavie (*The Hajj* et al., 1994), Narayan (1993), Visweswaran (1994), and Buechler and Buechler (1999a, 2000) all show how the identities of individuals (in these cases anthropologists and their informants), even when they come from very different backgrounds, are also intertwined in various, often unexpected ways. The interrelationship between different types of farmers in Sachsen-Anhalt can be analyzed in similar terms for, depending on the context, these farmers identify with or differentiate themselves from one another and regard themselves as being part of or resisting dominant power structures. Hegemonic power structures themselves are also not unitary. Their inconsistent, equivocal nature permits them to avoid direct clashes with competing systems, but also may facilitate their eventual transformation into or replacement by different hegemonic forms. This lack of uniformity is implicit in many of Gramsci's (1971) original formulations of the concept of hegemony. In anthropology, Nash (1987, 1989) bases her analysis of the role of General Electric in Pittsford on the malleable nature of corporate hegemony.

We shall argue that identities are constructed in the process of confronting the new realities of everyday experience, filtered, and expressed by means of available, but often quite inadequate, cultural categories whose meanings are adapted to new ends. The social identities of our respondents are framed by origin, generation, education, and social class, and by the relationships with other actors. They express themselves in work and life plans and in familial and collective ideologies. The identities are constructed in reaction to a new legal framework, politics and economic interests, and the vagaries of climatic and ecological conditions. All our respondents are trying to build a modern agriculture that is socially responsible, but their definition of responsibility depends on their ideological positions and historical backgrounds. The cultural constructions employed by them are not necessarily consistent, for they retain unresolved contradictions of which the actors are only partially aware.⁶

Recent anthropological scholarship on the transformation of both communist and precommunist socioeconomic structures in eastern Europe has often been sensitive to the contradictory or ambivalent

nature of both the original structures and the structures that emerged after the fall of communism. Thus Creed (1998) shows how, during communism, a system ostensibly geared toward industrial production in state- and collective-owned factories and collective farming flexibly accommodated private agricultural production. Thereby, he demonstrates that models based on a categorical opposition between communism and capitalism fail to provide an understanding of the complex adaptations that occurred after 1989. Similarly, Nagengast (1991) has argued that, paradoxically, small- and medium-scale private agriculture flourished in Poland in the last years of communism, but has languished since then. Vasary (1987) and Szelényi (1988) both write about the uneasy coexistence of two economic systems, one socialist-bureaucratic, the other private/entrepreneurial, in Hungary in the 1980s. And, with reference to the same country, Lampland (1995:1) argues that “the process of commodifying labor has been fully realized under socialism in conditions thought to be inimical to capitalist development in general, and to commodification in particular,” and, more specifically, “was achieved by the policies and practices of Hungarian socialism” (5). Finally, speaking about the development of social identities in a rural community on the border of the former GDR, after 1989, Berdahl (1999:1, 9) argues that “articulations, ambiguities, and contradictions of identity are especially visible in moments of social upheaval” and that rather than simply accepting the hegemony of the west, “through a dynamic and subtle interplay of imitation and resistance, the inhabitants of this borderland are seeking and asserting new forms of identity.”

For the purposes of our model we shall define power relationships underlying hegemony broadly.⁷ Rather than adopt a model of power relationships as a monolithic pyramid, the analysis of identities must take into account the multiple, often-conflicting power relationships in a given geographical area. Such an accounting is crucial even in the analysis of seemingly unitary systems such as communist bureaucracies that were material in shaping the past, and to a degree, the present identities of many of the farmers in our study. Creed (1998), for example, has shown how daily practice “domesticated” the communist power structure in Bulgaria, both threatening bureaucratic control but also enabling the state to function by overcoming inherent rigidities. A model of power relationships must also take into account diffuse systems of power, such as those manifested in the global social networks of western capitalist producers and the denser but more spatially circumscribed ones of eastern German farmers.

In addition to contributing to the conversations regarding hegemony and identity, this book will also deal with questions regarding history and

memory. The construction of old and new identities both reveals and hides events and thus provides both the informant and the anthropologist with new perceptions of the passage of time and the meaning of history. Our eastern informants distinguished the time after the *Wende*, the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification from *unsere Zeit*, “our time,” or even *bei uns*, “with us,” of the GDR, as though they had somehow been displaced not only temporally, but also spatially into a new world. *Unsere Zeit* was conceptualized as an immutable block that contrasted with the period after the *Wende* that seemed timeless in its duration because of the rapidity with which change was taking place. The packing not only of events but also of changes of interpretation into a few years made these years appear as endless. In fact, it was often difficult for our informants to remember events and their impressions of events that had occurred only two years earlier, and when they did, they remembered them as though they had occurred in a distant past, a past only slightly less distant from the present than *unsere Zeit*. Time is manipulated in other ways as well. Both the more distant (that is, precommunist) and the more immediate past are reinterpreted to rationalize present actions and future plans. The new forms of agriculture as institutions emerge out of divergent conceptualizations of points of origin. Rationales for particular policies regarding the formation of farms are based simultaneously on promising survivals of older forms in the shadow of the hegemonic model during particular eras: feudalism, early capitalism, the Soviet occupation, and the GDR or memories of forms that were regarded as having been arbitrarily destroyed by governmental decisions during subsequent hegemonies, culminating in the attempts of both the allied powers and the Kohl government to devise a legal baseline for access to property within a capitalistic framework.

The western German migrants minimized the importance of the forty years of separation and tied their experiences to a common pre-World War II history. They also viewed the time in the east as one of adventure akin to the common German practice of the *Lehr- und Wanderjahre* (time of study and travel) of the apprentice/student. But our informants also had an evolutionary view of time. Thus, GDR agricultural collectivism was seen as having passed through a series of stages with roots in nineteenth-century Raiffeisen cooperatives and developments during the communist period from the tentative and voluntary grouping of small individual holdings that emerged after the land reform of 1949 that expropriated large landed estates, to less than voluntary association and to larger cooperatives that ultimately also became specialized in crop or livestock production. The official version of this developmental vision was a futuristic one according to which a purer

form of capitalism would be developed in the east, one that did away with all vestiges of the communist past and at the same time broke with much of the cultural traditions of the old *Bundesländer*.

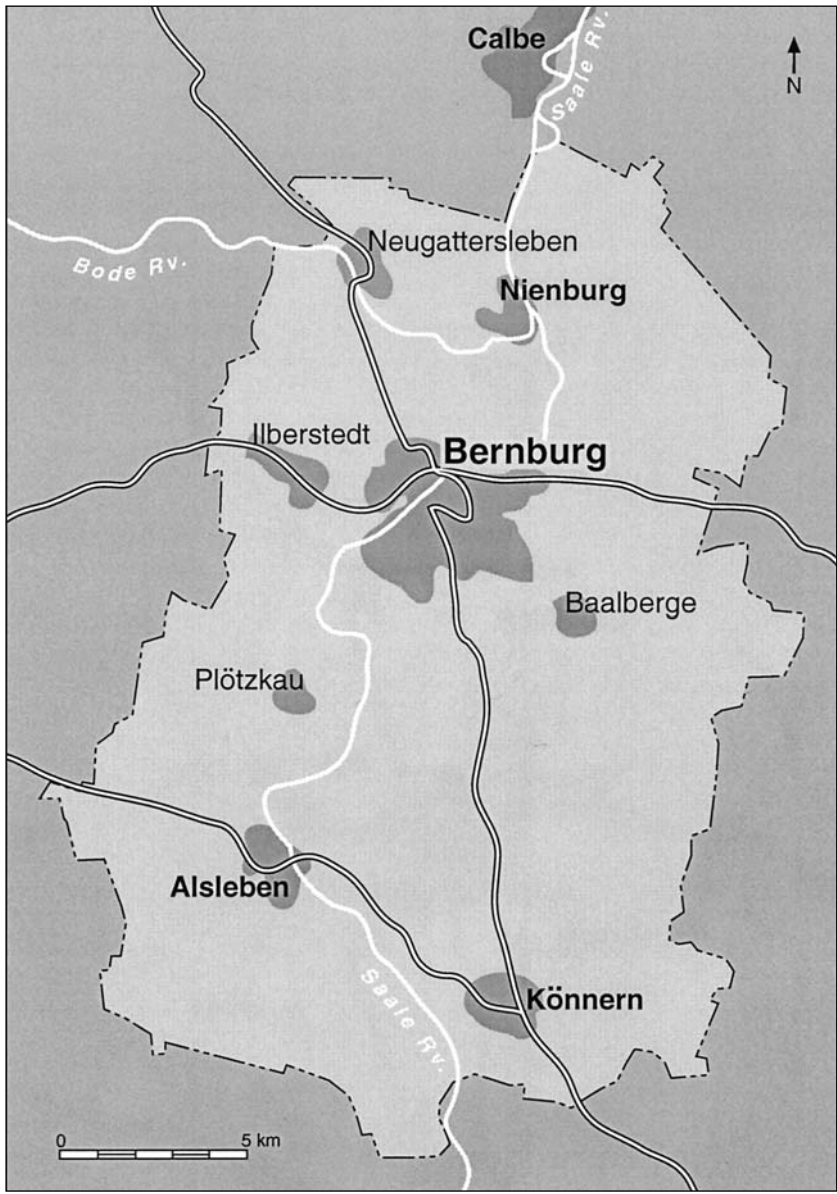
The Setting

The region where the farms we studied are located lies two hours southwest of Berlin, midway between the cities of Magdeburg and Halle. It is centered on the medium-sized industrial city (40,000 inhabitants) of Bernburg, where two of our independent farmer informants were based in 1994. The others ran their operations from smaller cities and villages within a radius of some 15 kilometers. Nienburg, a locality of 5,000 inhabitants, is typical of small cities in the region. Small as it is, the old city boasts an impressive Romanesque church, a hotel, and a small central square surrounded by stores that have shed their GDR looks of decrepitude. During the Christmas season, it even had a Christmas fair, a feat other localities of this size have tried to emulate unsuccessfully. But the town has been badly hit by the persistent unemployment in the region. According to our informant, an independent farmer, its 27% unemployment rate is the highest in the *Land* (state) of Sachsen-Anhalt. The loss of jobs through the rationalization of such gigantic industries as the soda and cement factories in Bernburg has recently been compounded by the closing of the western-run paper bag factory and the downturn in the construction industry. As for the construction company that went bankrupt, it opened again under another name, but not before leaving a trail of unpaid bills in its wake.

Like many communities in eastern Germany, Nienburg attempted to attract enterprises by establishing an industrial and commercial zone on a nearby 18-hectare open field, but to no avail. The western chain stores that were the most likely candidates had already overextended themselves in the region. As a result of such developments, the population of Nienburg dropped by 9% between 1996 and 1999. In spite of the unemployment and the fact that many did move away from the city, only 40% of the workers of the paper mill that closed took advantage of the company's offer to move to another plant 90 kilometers away. Of those who did, most commute from Nienburg, returning home for the weekend. Our informants told us that eastern Germans did not like to go away from home and avoided a move whenever possible. For example, a manager of a large factory in a medium-sized city told us how traumatic it had been to move from Leipzig, a mere hour and a half away by car or train, and how deracinated he had felt at first in the new surroundings. Another



MAP 1.1. The Federal State of Sachsen-Anhalt and the *Kreis* of Bernburg.



MAP 1.2. Kreis Bernburg.



FIGURE 1.1. The Castle of Bernburg.

informant told us jokingly that he felt homesick for Bernburg the moment he drove out of the city. The fact that easterners frequently had to take jobs in the west for a fraction of what their western counterparts were paid only enhanced their reluctance to move. As for the villages around Bernburg, localities with a few hundred inhabitants or even less, many seemed oriented toward larger places. Perhaps because the houses tended to be privately owned in these villages, they appeared to be in better shape than those in the larger localities at the time of the *Wende*. In addition, the communities themselves and individuals have been able to take advantage of state funds to renew roads, public buildings, and private housing. However, even such basic amenities as a grocery store were often lacking, and inhabitants have had to seek services in larger localities, children were bussed to school to nearby Bernburg or to smaller towns, and church congregations were pooled among neighboring settlements.

The farmers' homes, or in the case of the cooperative managers, their offices, were usually located on the outskirts of these settlements, but some lay deep within them. We could not believe our ears when we visited one of our informants who lived a few blocks from the apartment we rented in Bernburg when he said that he was raising horses and pigs in the middle of a city block. While he had moved a few kilometers away by the end of 1999, the barn of another family was still only two blocks away from the center of a smaller city. While most of the individual farmers live next to their barns, a few commute several kilometers to their farms. The cooperatives usually have many of their facilities concentrated in one location, but also have barns and storage facilities dispersed over the landscape, some located within village or hamlet boundaries, others built in open fields. Among the reasons for the dispersal is the fact that present-day cooperatives were often formed out of reshuffled units that were once autonomous and these, in turn, were composed of smaller collectives that were united into larger ones.

The landscape around Bernburg is open and flat or gently rolling with a few low hills here and there, dotted with clusters of trees and fed by streams. The soils are among the richest in the country, but the region lies in the rain shadow of the Harz Mountains, substantially reducing rainfall and therefore making the area exceptionally dry by German standards. While the quantities of crops harvested are affected, the conditions are ideal for growing high-quality wheat. Some of the fields also lie in the floodplains of the storied Saale River and its tributaries, subjecting them to periodic flooding. They are particularly suited for growing hops and vegetables. Even parts of the city of Bernburg are regularly flooded, so the traffic must be detoured over a special flood bridge.



FIGURE 1.2. A village near Bernburg.

Methodology

The basis for this book is a corpus of interviews with some thirty farm owner-managers, farm directors, tractor dealers, agricultural equipment manufacturers, and millers which was part of a larger study of 150 artisans, producers, independent professionals, and retailers. The larger sample will serve to consolidate those aspects of changing identities and underlying transformations that the farmers share with other private entrepreneurs. The initial research took place between September 1993 and May 1994. In November–December 1999, we returned to Bernburg and undertook follow-up interviews with more than half of the farm owner-managers and cooperative managers and one of the millers. Finally, in June and July 2001, we updated our interviews with informants from the other categories of entrepreneurs and professionals in our wider study, including the second miller and the agricultural machinery dealer whose cases are presented in chapter 9.

We chose the region of Bernburg in the *Land* (state) of Sachsen-Anhalt because of the requirements of the wider study. The city of Bernburg fulfilled our criteria of representative size, the presence and mix of industry, commerce, and service, and the rate of unemployment. We also wished to avoid the influence of special circumstances, such as the direct influence of Berlin or a place that was within easy commuting distance of localities in the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Also, Bernburg is located in an area that has been the subject of some studies of an extensive nature but has not been studied intensively with anthropological methods. We only realized after we initiated fieldwork how central agriculture was to the regional economy and the city due to the long tradition of large-scale mixed agriculture. Although our original research plans had focused primarily on urban occupations in the belief that a regional study would be impossible to carry out in the allotted time frame, we soon found that rural and urban were so strongly intertwined in the area that the exclusion of one or the other would have been arbitrary. The fact that we were able to cover all but a few of the farming operations in the *Kreis* (administrative unit) of Bernburg and were even able to add a few beyond its jurisdiction convinced us of the feasibility of expanding our initial focus. This decision was also influenced by the fact that initial interviews revealed that agriculture was one of the few areas of the eastern German economy where major aspects of GDR economic institutions persisted and, in fact, remained dominant. We decided to write a book on this topic first, because it presented a unique opportunity to compare three major different forms of privatized enterprises within the same sector of the economy. Last but not least, the

choice was based on the extraordinary willingness of every one of our informants to spend long hours educating us about the complexities of eastern German agriculture, both past and present. We happened to begin our interviews with farmers in December, the beginning of a slack period in agriculture, so we did not feel that we were imposing an overly heavy burden on their time.

When we paid our first visit to eastern Germany in the summer of 1991 to investigate the feasibility of the proposed research, we feared that the experiences of their communist past would make eastern Germans reluctant to talk to strangers. We found the opposite to be the case. People appeared to relish their newly found freedom from secret police surveillance. Talking to newcomers may even have constituted a welcome opportunity to sort out the dizzying changes they were experiencing. Our subsequent fieldwork confirmed this first impression for the most part. The magnitude and the rapidity of the transformation in their lives and their awareness of the uniqueness of the period in which they are living may have contributed to their openness to an opportunity to sort out their ideas in front of strangers with a sympathetic ear.

Our research was facilitated by our fluency in German and the fact that neither researcher is of western German origin, which easterners could have seen as introducing a potential bias. Judith-Maria's parents were born in Sachsen-Anhalt and her great-grandfather was a large farmer in the region. Hans is Swiss. At the same time, the westerners assumed we would understand the difficult position a westerner would experience in a former communist country. Our status as foreigners working in a distant country also lent some prestige to our endeavor, especially after we had been interviewed by the local press.

In our previous research we have found that a female-male team, interviewing together or separately as the situation warrants, greatly facilitates breaking down gender barriers in fieldwork situations and reduces the gender biases on the part of the researchers themselves. A female-male team approach was particularly useful in eastern Germany, since divisions based on gender are quite pronounced. In addition to being a team—since age and professional status are particularly emphasized in Germany—our late middle age and professional status as professors lent credibility to our research and entrée to both younger and older, well-educated farmers. On the other hand, it seemed to matter to our eastern informants that we did not arrive at their doors in a fancy car but in a smallish ten-year-old one and did not put on airs.

Our research in eastern Germany was also facilitated by our own previous research on agriculture, economic change, and industrialization in Spain and Bolivia, which provided us with data for potential com-

parisons as well as observational and analytical tools. Work in Bolivia and in Spain on various economic issues facilitated an understanding of the various ways in which the economic decisions of individuals are influenced by the various network and institutional contexts in which they operate. Our work led to an appreciation of differences in two widely divergent economies, but also to the range of options *within* each economy and to the similarity of some of these options in the two countries, albeit inserted in divergent ways in the political economies of their respective countries. A holistic approach led us to avoid the adoption of trendy categories that could lead to facile analogizing.

The research followed the anthropological precept of providing a comprehensive portrait of the lives of the farmers. During our first field trip alone, the extraordinary openness of our informants, managers of cooperatives, eastern German, western German, and Dutch individual farmers alike and their willingness to spend as many as six hours in one stretch answering our questions in great detail resulted in a corpus of close to a thousand single-spaced typed pages of transcribed interviews on subjects ranging from the evolution, organizational structure, and operation of collectives during communism; to the transformation of the collectives after unification; adaptation of western farmers to life and agricultural conditions in the east; the problems of modern farming regulated by European Union norms and influenced by crop subsidies and international trade agreements, and modified by the access to western technology and other agricultural inputs; and the dominance of commerce by the west. Our interviews were complemented by observations and by a systematic reading of two journals dealing with agricultural issues in eastern Germany and the local newspaper. We were also able to avail ourselves of an ongoing study of agricultural enterprises in the region based on self-reporting of a sample of farms, historical analyses of GDR collectivization and the organization of agriculture, and the growing social scientific literature on agriculture after reunification.

In this book, we have decided to give as much of a voice to our informants as possible through the inclusion of long quotes from taped interviews. We thereby personalize the histories of firms and the meaning of economic and political transformation. This narrative strategy was dictated by our desire to capture the poignancy of the historical moment, which is quite unique with respect to the magnitude and rapidity of the change, and to record the multiplicity of ways in which these events and the more distant past were cognized by our informants. The usual distance between observer and observed was in this case considerably narrowed through our common Germanic European background, level of education, and, in many instances, social class position. Also,

our work with a relatively small number of farmers lends itself to a more individualized treatment of their voices. These voices do not, however, stand alone, for they are embedded in the understanding we gained by interviewing a wide array of other entrepreneurs.

Our aim, then, is to give the sense, to the extent this is possible, of a multiauthored text in which we see ourselves as facilitators in the telling of a common story by a number of individuals who have experienced and interpreted the events in parallel, disparate, and/or contradictory ways and who, in a very real way, are contributing to the construction of the future of agriculture in Germany. In order to minimize the privileging of the “author,” we have decided to abstain from the usual practice of presenting quotes from informants in a different font or indented text. Each chapter attempts to forefront the voices of a particular category of farmers. Within each chapter we also highlight the differences among subcategories and individuals. This is not to say that we have not taken certain liberties with the interviews by translating, editing, and organizing them. We hope that our juxtapositions of quotes and our generalizations will be seen by our informants as emerging organically from what they have told us and, at the same time, that the rich material presented will enable the reader to develop alternative interpretations to our own.

The book is organized in two parts, the first dealing with the pre-communist and communist antecedents of modern agriculture in eastern Germany and the second with the transformations after the watershed year of 1989 when Erich Honegger was removed from office and the Berlin Wall was demolished. Prefiguring the subsequent discussion, the two parts are preceded by a synopsis of the work histories bridging the two periods of three farmers representing the three major types of farmers presently heading farms in eastern Germany: the managers of cooperatives that emerged out of the GDR collectives, the eastern German independent farmers, and the western German farmers who moved to the east after 1989. In chapter 3, we discuss the situation in agriculture before communism and its transformation during the Soviet occupation between 1945 and 1949 and the subsequent changes in the German Democratic Republic. We argue that many of the traditional patterns as well as the innovations made during the communist period, even a few that were later largely superseded by other transformations, were incorporated into the forms that emerged after 1989. Chapter 4 analyzes the workings of agriculture in the GDR in the late 1970s and 1980s when the system had reached a considerable degree of stability. We argue that rather than constituting a unitary structure, the system entailed contradictory trends that enabled it to overcome some of its major deficiencies but also facilitated its subsequent demise. In chapters 5 to 8—which are

preceded by an introduction to the transformations in agriculture that took place after 1989 with the fall of the communist regime and the subsequent reunification of the two Germanies—we take up the theme pre-figured in chapter 2 and discuss the three types of farmers that constitute the main focus of the book.

Chapter 5 discusses the transformation of collectives into cooperatives with legal structures that correspond to western German models, a form chosen by most of the collectives that were not dissolved altogether, among various other corporate options because of its resemblance to collectives. We argue that beside the difficulties in compensating former members for the resources in the form of cash and animals and the practically rent-free use of their land, the need to dismiss a large part of the workforce, and the need to persuade current and former members to leave their land in the cooperative, the cooperatives have faced hostile government agencies that discriminate against them in various ways. In chapter 6 we discuss the changes and continuities in the functioning of these new cooperatives. Chapter 7 examines the eastern German farmers who have established private farms after 1989, farmers who themselves often had a background as cadres in GDR agriculture. Chapter 8 discusses the rationales for various kinds of western German farmers, both those with and those without family backgrounds in farming in the east, as well as for Dutch farmers to seek new opportunities in eastern Germany. In chapter 9, the discussion of farmers is complemented by a description of other actors associated with farming. They include tractor dealers and millers of both eastern and western German origin. The examples show that, although less pronounced, activities other than agriculture also entail some continuities with the past, but they also highlight the special position in agriculture both before and after the *Wende*. Finally, in chapter 10, we revisit and further develop some of the themes addressed in the book, particularly the specific views the different types of farmers have of one another, and speculate about the permanence of both the divisions and the congruencies among the various actors in eastern German agriculture.