Creating a Consumable Past: How Memory Making Shapes Marketization

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Consumer researchers tend to equate successful marketization—the transition from a socialist to a capitalist economy—with the consensual acquiescence to an idealized definition of the socialist past. For this reason, little research has examined how memories about socialism influence marketization over time. To redress this gap, we bring prior consumer research on commercial mythmaking and popular memory to bear on an in-depth analysis of the marketization of the former German Democratic Republic. We find that, owing to a progressive sequence of conflicts between commercialized memories of socialism promoted by marketing agents and countermemories advocating socialism as a political alternative, definitions of the past, and by extension, capitalism's hegemony are subject to ongoing contestation and change. Our theoretical framework of hegemonic memory making explains relationships among consumption, memory making, and market systems that have not been recognized by prior research on consumption and nostalgia.

Keywords: popular memory, marketization, nostalgia, myth, hegemony, German reunification, Ostalgie

> This mustard [points at the East German mustard brand "Bautz'ner Senf" in the fridge] must be on the table. When we have guests over, especially when Wessis [West Germans] are in the house, and, of course, I serve food, I insist that it is the Bautz'ner, not any of the West brands. It's always on the table in those situations, right in the middle. [. . .] What I'm trying to say is, look guys, this is us, you know. In our household, we actually value community and solidarity, taste it. That greatly matters to me.

Anna (54, anonymized) has come a long way. In 1991, she was among the hundreds of thousands of workers who took to the streets of Dresden, Leipzig, and Berlin to protest the massive unemployment created by the large-scale privatization of East German industry. Fifteen years later, like millions of consumers in other developing and marketizing economies such as China, Russia, Czech Republic, Poland, India, and Turkey, Anna expresses her socialist values no longer as a worker, through the lens of political action, but as a consumer of nostalgic products and brands—a detergent that "strongly evokes a sense of a utopian past" (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003), a weekend trip that elicits "a happy socialist childhood and youth" (Jeziński and Wojtkowski 2016), a mustard that expresses "how things were better back then" (Holbrook 1995).

How does such marketization—the transition from a centrally planned economy to a capitalist one—take hold?

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Marketization conventionally stems from a politicization of consumption through the appropriation of socialist symbols and myths (Askegaard 2006; Dong and Tian 2009; Kravets 2012; Roberts 2014; Zhao and Belk 2008). From this perspective, the hegemonic status of capitalism is asserted, and a system entirely premised upon entrepreneurial competition and free-market pricing is naturalized, through the production of an idealized socialist past that highlights particular aspects of capitalism that consumers like Anna can condemn (e.g., the lack of community and solidarity) while tacitly encouraging their compliance with its broader demands (e.g., consumption). In this article, we theorize the influence of popular memories of a defunct socialist state on marketization to make the opposite case: marketization requires the frequent depoliticization of socialism-inspired dissent through the production of popular memories that are tailored to the specific preferences and limitations of the capitalist present.

To theorize this dynamic, we draw on prior research about commercial mythmaking and popular memory (Holt 2004). When memory making is a social process (Halbwachs 1992; Lipsitz 1990) and "a mythologized representation of popular memory that serves the competitive and ideological agenda of one commercial producer can function as a contradictory, and identity devaluing, countermemory for another" (Thompson and Tian 2008, 597), marketization may not be understood in terms of the production of an idealized definition of the socialist past but rather in terms of the silencing of many others. It may be through an evolving reconstruction of the past—often requiring the displacement of fairly recently established socialist memories—that competing interpretations of the socialist past are quelled, and a competitive market order is established. From this perspective, Anna's narrative may not be symptomatic of capitalism's hegemonic status. Rather, it may illustrate a particular configuration of historical influences, ideological goals, and mythic references during a 25-year lasting hegemonic memory-making battle.

Several consumer researchers have outlined the need for understanding how memory making influences marketization over time. In her analysis of vodka brands in post-Soviet Russia, for instance, Kravets (2012) identifies "three points in the post-Soviet period in which branding patterns changed, echoing changes in politics, the market, and social values." In a comparative analysis of two marketizing economies, Romania and Turkey, Ger, Belk, and Lascu (1993) show that "the development of consumer desires and the parallel emulation of the West. . .may be occurring in phases," each characterized by different "confusions," "dissatisfactions," and "feelings of frustration" about the new realities of capitalism. In the case of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), these voices have not automatically followed Anna's approach in treating the socialist past as an attractive resource to be consumed through products and brands. Rather, they have frequently mobilized it as a resource for legitimizing political change.

To explore hegemonic memory making in detail, we analyzed the so-called "Ostalgie" marketplace (Berdahl 1999; Boyer 2001) that emerged after German reunification in 1990 and commemorates East German socialism through a broad array of nostalgic products, brands, memorabilia, and consumption experiences (Brown et al. 2003). The GDR was a former Eastern Bloc state during the Cold War period. From 1949 until 1990, it administered the region of Germany that was occupied by Soviet forces at the end of World War II. In 1990, following the German reunification, East Germans became marginalized members of a new system in which West German social institutions dominated all domains of life in the former GDR (Boyer 2006; Kitchen 2012; Veenis 1999). Ostalgie, a portmanteau of the German words "Nostalgie" (nostalgia) and "Ost" (east) refers to "nostalgia for aspects of life in East Germany" and is also used to extend to nostalgia for socialism in China and former Eastern Bloc countries such as Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland.

In the next section, we establish the conceptual foundations for our study by developing a formulation of hegemonic memory making. We apply previous scholarship on nostalgic consumption and commercial mythmaking to the marketplace mythology of the socialist past to make a number of conceptual propositions about the transformation of socialism-inspired critiques of social conditions in capitalist societies into a thriving market for nostalgic consumer identity resources. After that, we offer findings from an in-depth analysis of the German Ostalgie market to illustrate our theoretical propositions in empirical context. In the concluding section, we synthesize the findings from these two analysis modes and offer a discussion of the implications of hegemonic memory making for future research on the relationships between consumption and the past (Peñaloza 2001), the relationships between commercial mythmaking and popular memory (Thompson and Tian 2008), memory work (Marcoux 2017), and retrobranding (Brown et al. 2003).

HEGEMONIC MEMORY MAKING

When commercial mythmaking is an act of naturalizing relations between dominance and subordination (Barthes 1956/1972; Holt 2004; Thompson and Tian 2008), mythic idealizations of the socialist past found in China, member countries of the former Soviet bloc, and other developing nations currently undergoing marketization processes naturalize the dominant historical understanding about capitalism's rightful victory over socialism. Marketization is an act of retailoring socialist economies to key principles of market-based competition such as labor efficiency, entrepreneurial citizenship, possessive individualism, and

financial rationality. However, these requirements fundamentally collide with important socialist principles such as social security, full employment, and collective organization. The rollout of sociopolitical initiatives to foster marketization and the curbing of socialist privileges will invariably provoke dissent that threatens the creation of a system premised entirely upon market-based competition.

The marketplace mythology of the socialist past postulates the resolution of these marketization contradictions by imbuing the production and consumption of nostalgic memories of socialism with heightened economic and moral significance (Berdahl 1999). More specifically, socialism-inspired political meanings that could potentially slow or even revert the process of marketization through, for example, the expansion of collective labor rights, are systematically rejected as backward, unproductive, divisive, and revisionist. In sharp contrast, the creation and consumption of romanticized reconstructions of the socialist past, propagated through attractive products and brands that can be used to assuage tensions experienced during the marketization process, is understood as affirmative, forward-thinking, and conciliatory.

To better understand this mythology, we must briefly review the depoliticizing properties of nostalgic formulations more broadly (Bonnet 2010). Underlying the marketplace mythology of the socialist past are three nostalgic frames, each enabling the erasure of problematizing meanings of the past by privileging the nostalgic sentiments in public memory (Marcoux 2017) and by calling attention to particular aspects of capitalism that can be condemned (and resisted) while tacitly encouraging compliance with its broader demands (Bonnet 2010). Moralistic nostalgia reduces political dissent to simple moralistic contrasts between the virtue and purity of the past versus the immorality and decadence of the present (Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010; Maclaran and Brown 2005; Thompson and Tian 2008). Pastoral nostalgia reduces political dissent to simple contrasts between an idyllic and pure past versus an impure and artificial present (Brown, Hirschman, and Maclaran 2000; Canniford and Shankar 2013; Kozinets 2007; Press and Arnould 2011). And carnivalesque nostalgia reduces political dissent to simple contrasts between a celebratory past versus an unhappy present (Holbrook 1993; Kozinets 2002; Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012).

Nostalgic frames, however, underdetermine how a given relationship between past and present is understood and enacted. A nostalgic frame can only cast normative gray areas into clear and unambiguous contrasts as moral/immoral, pure/impure, or happy/sad. It can never offer any ideological guidance into what goals (e.g., competition, central planning) will be placed into these categories and what specific marketization tensions are resolved. In order for any image of the socialist past to effectively support marketization, it must also draw on more specific narrative structures that can offer solutions to salient contradictions between specific ideological goals. We discern and develop four such mythic idealizations that have crystallized in Western popular culture dealing with a socialist past more broadly: Heroes of Labor, Enchanted East, Comrades of Care, and Pastoral Patriots. Each myth promises the resolution of a contradiction of marketization through the cultivation of a nostalgic memory of the socialist past.

First, rooted in the moralistic nostalgia frame (Luedicke et al. 2010), the Heroes of Labor myth addresses the contradiction between the socialist goal of guaranteed labor and the capitalist goal of labor efficiency by pitting an honest and real socialist worker past against a cold and profit-obsessed capitalist present. From this perspective, people living in socialism were not organized in brigades of lazy, risk-averse, and incompetent dupes who enjoyed a sheltered work life protected by the planned economy. Rather they were productive, creative, inventive, responsible, and proud heroes of labor who generated real economic value and overcame even the harshest of economic and technical challenges. Reviving the essence of this socialist worker mindset not through formal policy, but through the consumption of socialist products and brands, is consequently held to generate important therapeutic identity benefits and assuage the trauma produced by the capitalist demand for labor efficiency.

Second, the Enchanted East myth addresses the enduring contradiction between the socialist goal of job and social security and the capitalist goal of flexible citizenship by celebrating a bygone socialist dolce vita—a powerful nostalgic-emotional contrast between the happy, fulfilling, and liberated socialist past and the unyielding, hyper-individualistic, and career-obsessed capitalist present (Berdahl 1999). Rooted in the carnivalesque nostalgia frame (Bakhtin 1984), this mythic formulation postulates that life in socialism was not the sad and depressing affair that Western mindsets typically imagine. Rather, it was the exact opposite of contemporary capitalism's celebration of materialism and the tireless struggle to climb up the socioeconomic ladder—being, not having—or a progressive, enchanted, uninhibited, joyful, and love-filled journey ripe with friendship and love. Consequently, reviving the essence of this enchanted mindset through the consumption of socialist products and brands can have therapeutic identity benefits and can help consumers navigate the requested flexibility.

Third, mythic articulations of the socialist past in the Comrades of Care genre address the contradiction between the socialist goal of social collectivism and the capitalist goal of possessive individualism. Also rooted in the moralistic nostalgia frame, Comrades of Care narratives promote a distinction between the warm, caring, and community-oriented socialist past and the alienating and hyper-individualistic capitalist present (Tönnies 1887/2003). From this mythic perspective, socialist systems were not cold and dystopian societies characterized by constant

party patronization, surveillance, and betrayal but shining exemplars of unlimited community solidarity, hospitality, charity, and social altruism. The key to regaining this affirmative socialist feeling is not political action, but its cultivation through the consumption of products and brands when capitalist demands for greater individuality hit home.

Lastly, the Pastoral Patriots myth addresses the conflict between the socialist goal of humanistic progress and the capitalist goal of financial rationality by pitting an organic, predictable, and human-centric socialist past against an artificial, unpredictable, and profit-centric capitalist present. Inspired by a pastoral nostalgia frame (Campbell 1987; Thompson 2004), the capitalist present sustains a globally spanning and profoundly inscrutable web of faceless, profit-seeking corporations and financial transactions, to the detriment of the planet and its people. In sharp contrast, the socialist past encouraged a holistic and organic existence. It was characterized by pristine nature experiences, the cultivation of strong regional bonds, and the pursuit of sustainably designed material outcomes. Not through the reinstatement of socialist policy, but rather through the reclaiming of this socialist mentality via the consumption of products and brands, can consumers be insulated from financial market shocks.

To summarize, we theorize the influence of hegemonic memory making on the marketization of a former socialist society. We suggest that there are four broader mythic idealizations of the socialist past available in Western popular culture that render the creation of romanticized reconstructions of the socialist past as a dual moral and economic deed, and that commercial mythmakers in a marketizing society can draw upon to address more specific historical tensions (see figure 1). We propose that hegemonic memory making is set in motion whenever a new political initiative to expand competitive market principles in marketizing societies brings about a conflicting set of demands and ideological meanings that justify greater fidelity to long-standing socialist values and principles. During these times of political conflict, mythmakers are motivated to translate oppositional meanings into a set of nostalgic products, brands, and consumer experiences that redirect demands for radical

FIGURE 1

AN OVERVIEW OF WESTERN IDEALIZATIONS OF THE SOCIALIST PAST

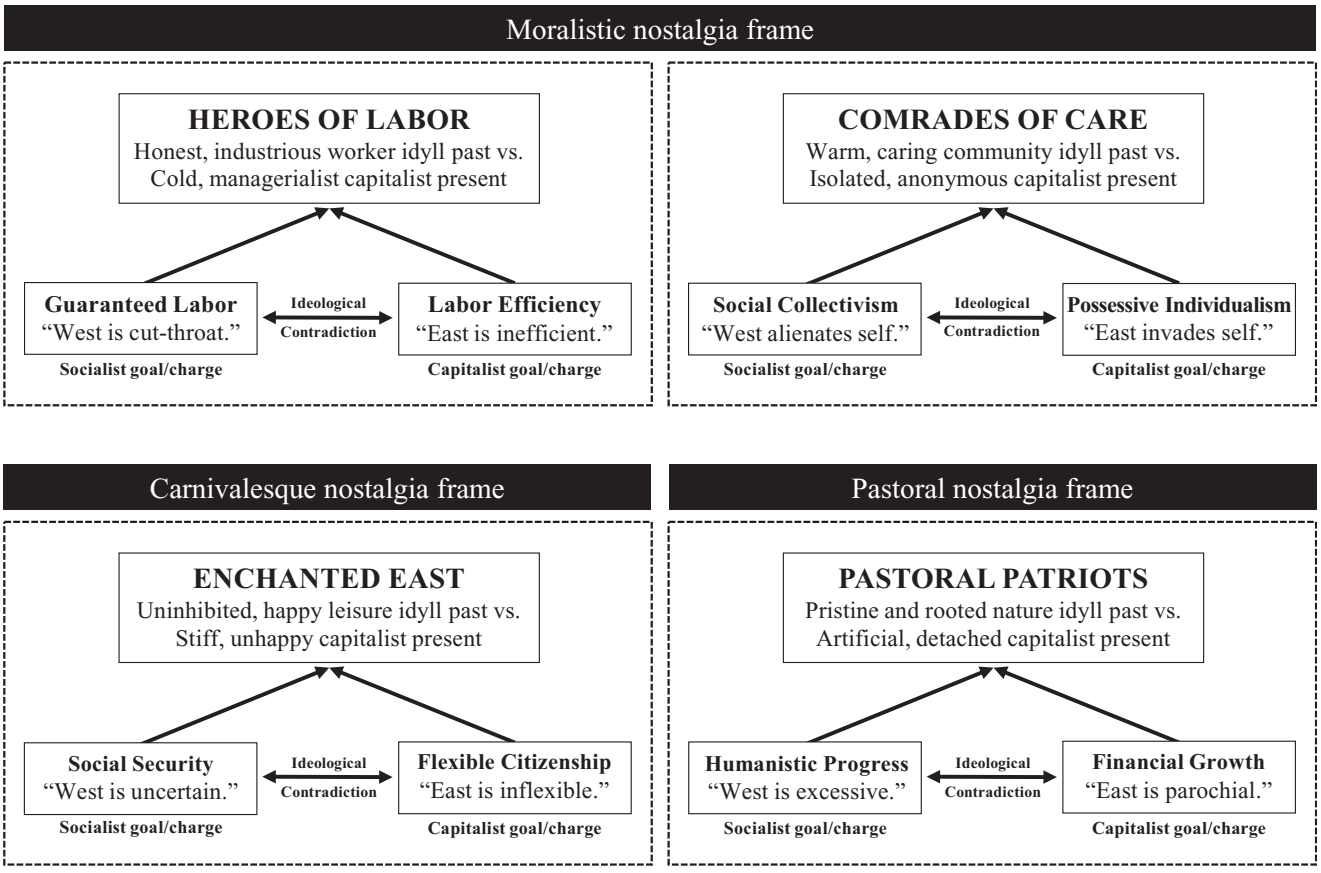


TABLE 1

TYPES OF DATA SOURCES

Source	Type	Purpose of usage
Historical and archival material	• History books • School books • Newspaper articles • TV documentaries and debates • Politician speeches • Statistical summaries • Government reports • Government websites	• Understand institutional disruptions and popular memory narratives
Pop cultural material	• Films and movies • Books • TV shows and edutainment • Magazines • Newspaper articles • Advertisements • Press statements • Retail flyers • Music records	• Trace the actors involved in hegemonic memory making and the creation of various idealized socialist pasts
Interviews (in-depth, semistructured)	• 25 consumer interviews (ranging between 2 and 4 hours) supplemented by photographs, observations, and researcher reflection notes	• Understand identity narratives and countermemories about socialism • Trace the enacting of Ostalgie mythologies through consumption
Netnography (nonparticipant)	• Six years of observing online interactions in East German brands' fan pages, online communities, blogs, and reader comments in news media forums	• Trace the enacting of Ostalgie mythologies through consumption

political change into nostalgic-emotional consumer identity projects while, at the same time, legitimizing and reinforcing the current historical understanding of capitalism's rightful victory over socialism. To explore these propositions in greater empirical detail, we will next analyze the marketization of the former GDR.

MARKETIZATION ANALYSIS

German reunification has been characterized as a "unilateral process of assimilation" (Boyer 2001) during which the GDR, "an entire state with its institutions, cultural values, and individual hierarchies was swept away, leaving its former citizens with the task to locate themselves in an unfamiliar society, complete with its own rules, values, and hierarchies" (Blum 2000, 230), making this a fruitful context for researching memories about socialism and their influence on marketization over time. Accordingly, we adopted a style of process theorization in the *Journal of Consumer Research* that Giesler and Thompson (2016) have recently characterized as "institutional disruption." Hence, we treated consumer identity narratives as precipitated by a new institutional order, created by multiple social and market actors and set off by a preceding historical discontinuity (here, German unification and the rollout of institutional marketization initiatives leading to the curtailing of socialist privileges).

Table 1 offers an overview of our empirical materials. We collected a total of 34 gigabytes of historical and mass cultural materials including newspapers, statistical summaries, history books, school textbooks, music records, magazines, movies, and TV documentaries to elucidate the various involved actors in the popular memory-making process under investigation. Our primary empirical material consists of historical materials, consumer and commercial mythmaker interviews (Brown, McDonagh, and Shultz 2013; Thompson and Tian 2008), and netnographic data (Kozinets 2010) amounting to more than 2,800 pages of transcribed narrative materials. Our present-day consumer interviews were conducted at various locations in East Germany, Toronto, and Gothenburg and in a few cases over the phone, by video call, and via email. Interview quotes with consumers and commercial mythmakers that are dated to earlier points in time were extracted from television documentaries and newspaper articles.

The researcher team, which consists of two researchers born and raised in West Germany and one born and raised in East Germany, engaged in several rounds of coding, as well as inter-researcher comparisons and discussions, while iterating and triangulating between data sources, extant

theorizing, and emerging conceptualizations. Unexpected findings led us to stretch the boundaries of our original definitions, and our own personal backgrounds played a significant role in identifying biases and ideological preferences in the interpretive process. Data collection ended in May 2017, when additional data was unlikely to change our interpretations resulting from the hermeneutic sense-making process we employed (Thompson 1997).

Our findings reveal that, between 1990 and today, postreunified Germany moved through four phases of perpetual structural instability. In each phase, marketing agents drew on a specific Western idealization of the socialist past to establish a romanticized memory of life in the GDR that could efface politically threatening countermemories about socialism provoked by a particular marketization initiative: Treuhand Privatization (1991–2000), Reconstruction East (1999–2004), Operation Unrechtsstaat (2003–2009), and European Stabilization (2008–today). Each romanticized memory that commercial mythmakers created about the GDR actively promoted the enactment of socialist sensibilities and self-defining historical experiences through products and brands while, at the same time, systematically disqualifying socialism as a political alternative. Next, we elaborate on each phase of this hegemonic memory-making process in greater empirical detail by drawing on commercial mythmaking activities, historical inferences, netnography, and interview quotes.

Treuhand Privatization and the Heroes of Labor Myth (1991–2000)

Hegemonic memory making requires the shifting of a dissenting voice from the political level to the level of nostalgic brands. Such a move was evident around 1994, when initial enthusiasm among East Germans for reunification had ebbed, and almost-forgotten products and brands of socialism reappeared on East German supermarket shelves. A romanticized image of the GDR as an idyllic worker paradise took hold, stimulating a powerful GDR revival through consumption. The socialist Trabant automobile became a collector's item; East German homemakers resumed buying the socialist laundry detergent Spee; East German teenagers began to ignore Coca-Cola and instead sought out the former GDR's copycat Vita Cola.

To understand this brand-mediated GDR revival, we must recapitulate events immediately after reunification. Starting in 1990, the Treuhandanstalt (a trust agency to denationalize GDR enterprises) had begun privatizing 8,500 East German companies with over four million employees, selling them, in many cases, for next to nothing to Western investors. This "gold rush" period (Laabs 2012) led to deindustrialization and mass unemployment across East Germany (Kitchen 2012). At the same time, West German museums were creating an image of ineffectiveness of socialist labor by contrasting its inferior products with West German export blockbusters and iconic consumer brands. In the course of this systematic devaluation of socialist labor, worker protests erupted all over the East, an oppositional solidarity and consciousness against Western hegemony formed as East German citizens began to invert West Germany's disparaging Ossi ("Eastern redneck") label as a badge of honor to signal moral superiority over the capitalist West. As German psychotherapist Hans Joachim Maaz summarized the sentiment of the time: "People here saved for half a lifetime for a spluttering Trabant. Then along comes the smooth Mercedes society and makes our whole existence, our dreams and our identity, laughable" (McElvoy 1992, 219).

In the face of this increasingly defiant East German attitude, commercial mythmakers drew on the Heroes of Labor myth to refashion the critical debate about resisting shameless DDR Abwicklung ("GDR restructuring") from the political level to the level of nostalgic consumption. From this standpoint, while demanding the full-fledged reinstatement of GDR worker privileges such as total job security and a valorization of the worker as chief value generator would have likely been regarded as a backward, naïve, and unproductive move, romanticized reconstructions of socialist labor, as conveyed through attractively reenvisioned and renarrated socialist products and brands, could serve as effective identity salves that could help former GDR citizens express their symbolic resistance and resolve their perceived tensions as consumers.

One such catalyst brand that played a prominent role during this first period of hegemonic memory making was the automobile brand Trabant. Previously mocked in West German television shows, newspapers, and museum exhibits as a symbol of inefficient socialism, it now starred, decidedly trivialized and depolicitized, as the cute and reliable ride of the working man, in the West German–written and–produced movie *Go Trabi Go*. Consider, in this context, an interview given by the film's director Peter Timm in 1991 (http://bit.ly/2s2vSuX): "I'm hearing a lot these days that the GDR was unproductive, didn't have any good entrepreneurs. So what we wanted to show here is that they actually had them, you know, good teachers, carpenters, doctors, and engineers. They just didn't call them entrepreneurs. They called them workers." Importantly, for Timm, changing conditions isn't a matter of political resistance, but of expressing one's worker values through oppositional brand loyalty. And so his movie's protagonist, the East German teacher Udo Struutz, takes his wife Rita and daughter Jacqueline on a road trip to Italy. During the trip, the family successfully overcomes numerous obstacles, not least owing to their inventiveness and socialist worker–style resilience, and that of their vehicle, the family's Trabant (called "Schorsch").

Refashioning the East German worker's struggle as a depoliticized and brand-based road movie adventure, *Go*

Trabi Go became the most successful German movie of 1991 and enjoys cult status to this day. While Peter Timm and his production team did much to envision and establish this brand-based contrast between the proud, honest, and resilient GDR worker idyll and the cold, managerialist, and capitalist FRG, historians and historical witnesses subsequently ensured its transformation from historical fiction to historical fact. For instance, our analysis reveals that the period between 1994 and 2000 saw a significant increase in the number of historical documentaries and Ostalgie-themed television shows tailored to the exigencies of the promoted Heroes of Labor myth. Interestingly, in these formats, East German workers were not featured to proudly recall the products of their labor but to renarrate the GDR past from the viewpoint of consumers "at work," through highly emotional anecdotes and narratives centering on a repertoire of socialist food, technology, and household brands.

A similar focus on consumption was also visible in the labor-themed card game entitled *Kost the Ost* ("Taste the East"), created in 1996 by university students Fabian Tweder and Tobias Stregel. The game, in which players are asked to answer trivia questions about life under socialist rule, was designed around 46 GDR food brands. Other games introduced around the same time asked players to earn "worker medals" in exchange for collecting or recognizing the proper East German brands. This gamification helped educate players that the greatest hero of labor is not who is most vocal about socialist labor principles but who has the greatest knowledge of socialist brands. A very similar logic is present in the refashioning of the "Ampelmännchen" traffic sign from a symbol of the socialist worker state to a commercially thriving cult brand in the mid-1990s. Consider how, in an interview conducted in 2008, entrepreneur Markus Heckhausen recalls the act of creating this concrete marketplace infrastructure circa 1995:

> Many East Germans experienced their first real disappointments sometime in the mid-1990s, after the initial euphoria for reunification had ebbed. People in the East had lost a part of their identities, and this had to do, among other things, with the disappearance of GDR brands from the public sphere. At this point in time, we introduced the Ampelmännchen product. The first hundred lamps, I built myself. After that, someone talked me up who said he could handle distribution on a national scale. And that was the right way. Through the media and a friend, I then got in touch with the originator of the design, Karl Peglau. He was excited about the idea. We became friends and together we rewrote the Ampelmännchen story. [. . .] Later, we decided to not only work on the product but also the distribution. That was a huge step but it led to the first shop in 2001. Later, this led to the development of the entire Ampelmännchen brand universe.

Heckhausen's quote, taken from a newspaper article (http://bit.ly/2pHeg2c) celebrating both his business acumen as well as his cultural leadership in helping create a reunified Germany, sheds light on the development of nostalgic-emotional GDR brand infrastructure circa 1995, including a potent iconic brand with its own distribution and retail infrastructure. Readily brushing over the fact that East Germans' "disappointment" may also have roots in "other things" such as the loss of employment and the loss of social recognition, he presents his entrepreneurial project of establishing an "Ampelmännchen brand universe" as a selfless, patriotic act of providing a therapeutic market opportunity to help East Germans overcome their identity malaise, thereby not only preventing an important symbol of socialism from near-certain historical erasure but also helping overcome East-West ideological divides. Heckhausen would have probably not been recognized for promoting labor rights, for this would have been viewed as a move to widen rather than heal this divide. How the Heroes of Labor myth resolved any contradictions between the capitalist goal of profit and the principles of socialist labor is also evident in the story of Stefan, who justified the creation of one of the first online stores for socialist brands thusly:

> We were a small country and certainly imperfect in many ways. But many of the values from that era—things we used to celebrate in the East like solidarity, fairness, [and] honesty, that were alive in our small republic—are needed in today's performance society more than ever before. My goal is to cultivate respect and admiration for workers by bringing these products and brands back to life and to create a vision of the East that is strong and encouraging for people to say, "This is where I come from and I can proudly identify with this because this is how I was brought up and this is it."

A representative survey conducted in 1993 illustrated a wide ideological gap between East and West Germans immediately after the initial enthusiasm for reunification had ebbed. Three out of five citizens in the new Eastern provinces were even asking for East Germany to be detached from West Germany and for the wall to be rebuilt (Berger, Jung, and Roth 1993). By 1998, however, the ideological climate had changed, and many East Germans cultivated heroic worker identities through the marketplace. Consider, in this context, how Sandro's approach to his own unemployment had shifted from organized political resistance to collecting and exchanging labor-related GDR memorabilia (TV documentary, 1998):

> This is the original "Hero of Labor" medal, given by Erich [Honecker] to the best of the best. I was in line for one of these. Chemical engineer, same factory, thirty-six years. That's me. [. . .] We fought hard to keep our jobs. Then the Treuhand decided that we were unproductive so they shut us down. [. . .] No one in the collector space wants to make a

> political statement. We all know that it was a bad system. But we want to keep the memory of everyday life alive. [. . .] I have three of these at the moment, two for sale in their original boxes. They are as good as new. So each goes for about 200 DM.

Through the hegemonic memory making undertaken between 1991 and 2000—by filmmakers such as Peter Timm, game developers such as Fabian Tweder and Tobias Stregel, entrepreneurs and brand architects such as Ampelmännchen promoter Markus Heckhausen, online Ostalgie store owners such as Stefan, and many other commercial mythmakers—the emerging oppositional self-identification of East Germans as "Ossis" was swiftly transposed from the level of political action onto that of socialist brand consumption. Whereas shortly after reunification many East Germans like Sandro, who were deeply frustrated with their devaluation as workers through the Treuhand privatization process, had attempted to address their situation by "fighting to keep their jobs," in the meantime such actions had been rendered as undesirable and passé as socialism itself. In Sandro's own words, socialism represented a "bad system." Instead, these East Germans had come to accept that the natural way of resisting capitalism was to craft heroic worker identities from an array of consumption resources.

Reconstruction East and the Enchanted East Myth (1999–2005)

Around 1999, East German products and brands began propagating a different romanticized past. The moralistic hero-of-labor idealizations of the early Ostalgie market faded and gave rise to a new set of narratives, this time striking a mythic contrast between playful, uninhibited, happy, and carnivalesque East German socialism and the repressed, unhappy, and uneventful West German capitalist present (Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012). A new hegemonic definition of the past took hold, rendering the GDR as a society of progressive fun seekers, in which people could freely express their emotions, engage in unbounded romantic adventures, and celebrate life, love, and their bodies. Trips to the East's forgotten nude beaches were fashionable again and socialism-themed travel experiences were offered. Formerly a symbol of socialist worker pride, the Trabant now starred as a joke prop for lavish Ostalgie parties, conveying and supporting the idea that GDR socialism had been nothing but a giant spectacle.

To understand the events that precipitated this mythic shift, it is important to recall that a new German chancellor and government had been elected in 1998. Gerhard Schröder had expanded Helmut Kohl's original promise of a strong reunified Germany in exchange for more efficient labor toward third-wave neoliberal ends, claiming that Reconstruction East (Wiederaufbau Ost) would require greater self-responsibility from all Germans, especially East Germans (Giesler and Veresiu 2014). These drastic changes had provoked new protests all across East Germany. Once again, the term "Ossi" was a badge of honor, this time to resist the dismantling of social security, and to critically invert the new mainstream contrast between the ideal German citizen, branded by Schröder as the tirelessly entrepreneurial Ich AG ("I Inc.") and its implicit counterpart, the allegedly entitled and lazy East German.

As these articulations threatened to undermine Schröder's neoliberal vision of reunified Germany, commercial mythmakers once again saw the need (and opportunity) to appropriate the emergent socialist countermemory about a more socially secure GDR, thereby reducing ideological discord to a nonviolent, consumable "carnival against power" (Bakhtin 1984). From this mythic standpoint, while bemoaning the erosion of long-held socialist welfare privileges such as social and economic citizen protection and the right to leisure would be entirely unacceptable and reactionary, sunny and optimistic consumerist memories about socialist citizenship and leisure culture, as conveyed through fun-themed spectacles, events, experiences, and brands, could help East Germans express their symbolic resistance and resolve their perceived tensions as consumers.

Among the early mass cultural voices to promulgate this depoliticized vision about the Enchanted East was the movie *Sonnenallee*, which became a blockbuster success in Germany and especially among East Germans in 1999. The plot of the film, a series of anecdotes tied together by a riveting pop music soundtrack, follows the character of Micha and his friends during a decisive time in their lives, the period between school and army conscription or university. As the movie's director Leander Haussmann recalls, "We wanted to make a movie that transforms people's everyday stories into a spectacle" (Cooke 2003). From this perspective, socialist citizenship was no longer characterized by a particular institutional framework of rights but rather by a sunny and optimistic consumer mindset where everyone had a good time—an idyllic, carnivalesque hypercommunity (Kozinets 2002) ripe with powerful, emotive experiences; iconic products; never-ending parties; romance; adventure; and the seemingly endless consumption of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. This rendering not only turned East Germans' alleged naivety into an advantage, portraying them as happier and more uninhibited than West Germans, but it also reduced all resistance against the dismantling of social security to an act of hedonic consumption.

While Sonnenallee's musical-esque recollection of socialist citizenship seemed highly exaggerated, soon historians and historical content producers began to establish its underlying claim—namely, that the East was an enchanted place—as historical truth. In all of the historical exhibitions and TV documentaries that we analyzed between 1999 and 2005, this romanticized rendering was

authenticated and verified through the same nostalgic focus on everyday consumption culture. Critically comparing one's own memories about the GDR's welfare state framework with one's experiences in capitalism was systematically discouraged as an act of reinforcing outdated ideology. Instead, historians encouraged citizens to link individual memories in the form of highly emotional and romantic stories about consumption rituals such as youth camp, or coming-of-age rituals such as the first party, the first date, or the first family vacation, to the consumption of particular socialist household, food, or technology brands.

As historians, museum curators, journalists, and other mythmakers galvanized Germany around the Enchanted East, socialist arguments against the neoliberal citizenship model of contemporary capitalism gradually evolved into a capitalism-compatible market of products and brands. Consider, in this context, how the N'Ostalgie Museum, founded in 1999, conveyed the romantic image of the Enchanted East by establishing an important ideological distinction between a "reductionist" way of GDR commemoration that delivers explanations about the workings of the socialist state and an "inviting" way that asks East Germans to actively recall their own individual past entirely through socialist products and brands (http://bit.ly/2sZjX0Q):

> Because the GDR can't be reduced to statistics, names, or the wall, it is particularly the everyday objects that make this collection so fascinating. In addition to lots of plastic, our collection comprises radios, kitchen helpers, roaring twin- and four-stroke engines, and rare toys. Rediscover props from famous movies or get impressed by citizens' inventive spirit. Of course "AKA Electric" products are at home here as well as the "Little Bee" carpet cleaning machine. [. . .] In particular, the charm of our museum consists in the fact that we did not add explanatory signs. Rather, we invite people to use these consumption objects to remember their own experiences and memories.

These and other efforts of historical mythmakers to retailor the GDR past to the exigencies of the Enchanted East mythology, and to reframe all socialist citizenship as a matter of nostalgic brand consumption, not only devalued arguments about binding citizenship rights as a threat to Schröder's neoliberal agenda, but also stimulated the creation of concrete marketplace solutions and infrastructure by rendering the provision and distribution of GDR-themed fun brands and consumption experiences through which Enchanted East memory could be expressed and enacted as a dual moral and economic reunification deed. To illustrate this aspect of hegemonic memory making, consider next how two East German entrepreneurs worked to promote East German dolce vita starting in the late-1990s and beyond. Mike (56, anonymized), a historical wellness tourism entrepreneur, presented himself as a guardian of socialist values who allowed East German consumers to experience GDR socialism during his week-long East camp retreats. Ralf Heckel, in turn, who was among the first to organize Ostalgie parties, recalls some of the motifs behind his activities in a self-published essay (http://bit.ly/2rb9pd1):

> Our camp functioned as a time capsule of sorts. Guest check-in was with costumed border officers; costumed Volkspolizei officers were present to enforce people's adherence to socialist citizen standards. [. . .] We had a party official who gave a speech on the latest economic progress. At the time, there was a huge need for this aspect of GDR culture. [. . .] We were not trying to turn back the clock. And the people who came to camp weren't living in the past either. Rather, it goes back to East Germans' preference for fun and happiness, a strong joy of life, rain or shine. That's a value that was uniquely GDR. And we did what we could to celebrate and remember it.
>
> On these evenings, we didn't think much about politics, but rather ignored politics and had fun. Our only weapon was humor. Perhaps we wanted to show that our history as GDR citizens consisted of more than just barb wire and kill orders at the border between two nuclear powers. [. . .] These Ostalgie parties allowed us to develop a certain sensibility, human understanding, fairness and getting rid of stereotypes. [. . .] I wanted to do something for my country and to counteract mere greed. I was aware that this would poke a hole into the reunification contract and I wanted to include as many East products in this trend as possible. Establishing East products as a public trend was my dream. This trend meant that people would ask for them, retailers would become interested in them, demand would grow and East German companies and their employees would have a chance to survive. And in many cases, but not always, it worked.

Note how the seemingly contradictory goals of developing "a certain sensibility, human understanding, fairness and getting rid of stereotypes" and serving "a huge [market] need" exist comfortably through a mythic GDR past that renders GDR citizenship not as a set of collective rights but as a set of hedonic consumption choices. On the negative side of this rendering is the disutility of being political, which is seen as a hopeless attempt of "living in the past" and "turning back the clock." It is not surprising, then, that consumers like Roberto (45, anonymized), who followed Schröder's imperative toward greater self-responsibility and moved to the West to find work, would see a supermarket counter as a natural stage for showcasing East German superiority without, at the same time, "missing the political realities of socialism":

> Trust me, I'm the last person to miss the political realities of socialism. [. . .] The only problem is that it's not always easy to get my beloved GDR brands. When we had to move here [from East Germany to West Germany] in 2003, I

> couldn't find them on the shelves. So I walked to the checkout and went down my list of things. But the lady had never heard of any of them. And so I joked that it's ironic that I'm waiting in line for these socialist products in a capitalist supermarket. But nobody got the joke. Instead one arrogant Wessi woman said, "Forty years of socialism and they still don't know any better." And so I said, "No, almost fifteen years of reunification and you still don't understand a good joke." All the Wessis were all looking irritated except for this one woman who was laughing really hard. Then I knew she was also from the East. She totally got it.

Around 1999, calls for a return to bygone socialist citizenship rights had emerged as a political counterpoint to the neoliberal policies rolled out by the Schröder government. Thanks to filmmakers such as Leander Haussmann, tourism entrepreneurs such as Mike, event planners such as Ralf Heckel, the N'Ostalgie Museum's team of historical curators, and many other commercial mythmakers, however, East Germans had come to accept that the most acceptable path of resistance was not to fight for the reinstatement of socialist policies but to celebrate socialist citizenship through their choices as consumers, choices that proved to be compatible with Schröder's entrepreneurial Ich AG ("I Inc.").

Operation Unrechtsstaat and the Comrades of Care Myth (2003–2009)

Around 2003, narratives of the GDR as a society of funseekers ran out of steam and gave way to a new romanticized image of the GDR, this time as an idyllic, warm, and caring community—a social paradise in which people had intimate social bonds and shared a strong sense of companionship, social cohesion, and we-spirit. With this new mythology taking hold, East Germans began pronouncing a vision of East German camaraderie and care through consumption. They sent care packages filled with delights from East Germany to friends and family in the West, formed brand communities to socialize around East German brands and products, and revalorized these as symbols of solidarity.

Shifts in hegemonic memory are precipitated by historical disruptions. This one came with the publication of the so-called Rosenholz files in 2003. The Rosenholz files are a secret collection of 280,000 microfilm files with detailed information on the operation of the Ministry for State Security, also known as Stasi (BStU 2007). Procured by the CIA during the turbulent days of the GDR's collapse and now returned to the German government for publication, the files exposed new information on the Stasi's vast network of GDR citizens who served as informal Stasi informants to infiltrate nearly all facets of public and private life in the GDR. The sheer number of hitherto unknown citizen spies triggered a new debate on the portrayal of the GDR as an "Unrechtsstaat" (a rogue state or a state not founded on the rule of law; Cooke 2005). This debate framed the socialist past purely in terms of "power structures and mechanisms of repression" (Großbölting 2008, 111) and portrayed the GDR as a society of betrayal in which no one could be trusted.

Proponents of social collectivism, however, found the publication of the Rosenholz files extremely unethical, arguing that there is something fundamentally wrong with a system that, more than a decade after the reunification, still finds it necessary to single out individuals, discredit their past, and ruin their future. In a public letter to the head of the German parliament, the last socialist premier of the GDR, Hans Modrow, bemoaned that West German historians should study these highly sensitive files for research instead of instrumentalizing them for a political "witch hunt" (http://bit.ly/2vmCKl0). Other leftist politicians and intellectuals joined Modrow, arguing that publishing the Rosenholz files was less about inspiring historical study and more about exercising "politically motivated justice" and destabilizing solidarity among East Germans (http://bit.ly/2wtC2CB).

Commercial mythmakers addressed this growing political tension and began refashioning the critical Stasi debate from the political level to that of consumption by cultivating consumable nostalgic memories that spotlight camaraderie and care. Thus, the East German political resentment nurtured a hegemonic memory-making process that promoted a new consciousness of the bygone GDR as a morally superior alternative, a social paradise undergirded by social bonds and togetherness. These romanticized reconstructions paved the way for naturalizing the capitalist status quo by offering consumable identity salves that allowed East Germans to resolve identity stigma and express both their symbolic resistance to delegitimizing portrayals of an East German society of spies as well as their critique to capitalism's individualism through consumption.

Among the first catalysts in this period of hegemonic memory making was the 2003 movie *Good Bye, Lenin!*, one of the most successful films in German history. The movie tells the story of a young man, Alex, and his mother negotiating reunification together. The plot's twist is that Alex's mother, a textbook socialist, has just woken up from a coma and missed the GDR's collapse. To protect his frail mother from the harsh realities of capitalism, Alex brings the GDR back to life around her by mobilizing the neighborhood community and by scavenging socialist brands from garbage heaps and abandoned apartments. As the West German writers of the movie, Bernd Lichtenberg and Wolfgang Becker, explained, the film is an attempt to help East Germans address their "inferiority complex" (Lichtenberg in Töteberg 2003, 148–49) by showing how cultivating a romantic GDR past through brand consumption won't raise any suspicions of "wanting the system back" (http://bbc.in/2rlyQcF; Becker 2004). Through this

nostalgic framing, *Good Bye, Lenin!* not only blurs the line between neighborly care and spying, but also readily shifts socialist camaraderie and care to the level of brand consumption. Consider the following quote from an interview with movie director Wolfgang Becker (Thomson 2004):

> Some of the Western media gets it wrong and think, "Now they want the old Socialism back," which is stupid. It's not about politics, it's about people sharing similar memories. No West German or American has ever experienced anything like this, when your everyday culture suddenly stops overnight and is replaced by something else. After some time, you remember the old stuff, and there's a kind of nostalgia. It's like sitting on a starry night playing a sad song on your guitar and feeling pretty well because you're sad. You think back on the life you lived under socialist circumstances. [. . .] Everyone was saying, in some way, "I like the way I was brought up—not in a political way, but everything I experienced, like friendship. I could really rely on people. I had deep relationships." They have a positive memory towards that. People in the West expect people [from the Eastern Bloc] only to complain how terrible it was and how everyone had to suffer. But it wasn't like that. It wasn't a society where there was a Stasi guy behind each newspaper, or you were living in a dark prison.

Becker's quote demonstrates how the rendering of East Germans into dependable comrades ("I could really rely on people. I had deep relationships") transformed East Germans' complex historical narrative into a romanticized reconstruction of the socialist past that could be put to use for consumer identity value. By depriving the focal historical formulation of its inherent political significance ("It's not about politics, it's about people sharing similar memories"), Becker shifted the attention from the collective level ("It wasn't a society where there was a Stasi guy behind each newspaper") to the individual level of nostalgic identity consumption ("starry night. . .think back [on life] under socialist circumstances").

Soon Becker's vision of a society of camaraderie and care stimulated a wave of TV shows and documentaries and other cultural voices to substantiate this image. For instance, then–aspiring chancellor Angela Merkel (2004) explained in an interview how the FDJ, the GDR's youth organization, fostered collective activities and group happenings; journalist Peter-Stefan Greiner (2004) explained how "social bonds between people were not prescribed by the regime, but created by the people themselves"; East German Olympic figure skating icon Katarina Witt (FAZ 2004) recalled her deeply felt connection to the GDR workers who made it possible for her to win gold medals; and Katrin Saß, who played Alex's mother in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, argued that "there was a different type of cohesion among people in the GDR" (BZ 2009).

One way to reclaim this cohesion through consumption was the Ostpaket (East care package). The Ostpaket is a clever inversion of the iconic Westpaket, which was a care package filled with Western brands. Many East German families relied on the Westpaket received from their relatives to help make ends meet and prevail over the permanent shortage of consumption goods during GDR times. West German entrepreneur Hasso Mansfeld sketched the Ostpaket as a campaign to aid East German industry to overcome Western domination in the mid-1990s. Yet it wasn't until the mid-2000s that the Ostpaket became a commercial success, hitting the nerve of East German consumers trying to generate identity value amidst the ongoing Stasi discussions. At Christmas 2007, East Germans from the federal state of Sachsen-Anhalt alone sent more than half a million East care packages to the West (Stumm 2007). Consider how Mansfeld recalls his entrepreneurial project (http://bit.ly/2rKgHSl):

> The multicolored cornucopia of capitalist product blessings from the West at that time [immediately following the reunification] spoiled the market for East products: While the large Western trade and consumer goods companies were rapidly expanding to the East, the opposite seemed impossible. Especially the small-business food industry in the East was a hopeless case. We wanted to change that. "Send delights from Sachsen-Anhalt in a Christmas package. We make Germany happy" was the final slogan for radio and outdoor ads, appealing to the inhabitants of the former GDR states to send plenty of presents to their relatives living in the West. The retailers in the East played along enthusiastically and offered already prepackaged East packages ready to be sent directly from their stores. [. . .] Then it took off! Because we used postal services, we used the most social of all networks, namely personal friendships and relations with relatives. [. . .] The 3Sat TV show *Culture Time* summarized it as "East packages for the West—and everybody joins in." And so it was indeed.

The care package was such a potent act of pronouncing the Comrades of Care mythology, because it embodied, as Mansfeld notes, an explicit social link and allowed consumers to collectively enact the caring comrade to "make Germany happy"—which undermined portrayals of the malicious and corrupt East German and helped overcome ideological divides. Consider next how this new romanticized image systematically redirected a yearning for the GDR toward a unique East German consciousness of camaraderie and care that could be articulated through consumption by East German consumers like Judith (62, anonymized):

> We have taken care of each other and we valued community. When the going got tough, we *all* helped and closed ranks. [. . .] And I find that comes across in these [East] products. It comes across quite well how one stands in for both each other and for a bigger thing. How the people from fit [brand] did it back then—they were doing a great job—and Spreewald pickles; I want to continue to support that

> cause and that is why we, my husband and I, we agree on not letting anything else into the house. That is community and cohesion in the bottle and glass. [. . .] We also think the Ostpaket thing is a good idea; it really reflects what we have been standing for—we did not have much but we shared, we took care of each other when times were tough. We send one to our daughter every year, once for Christmas. [. . .] We proudly share stuff from the East and do not need to hide.

Building on the hegemonic memory-making efforts by commercial mythmakers like Lichtenberg and Becker, countless historians, marketers like Mansfeld, and other entrepreneurs who stitched the Comrades of Care myth to East German brands and products, East Germans began enunciating the caring comrade mythology through consumption ("that comes across in these products"). Rather than fighting for the reinstatement of social collectivism through the political process, they revalorized brands—like fit or Spreewald pickles—as tokens of a communal utopia ("community in a bottle"), and consumed such resources as nostalgia-framed identity salves ("what we have been standing for") to regain pride ("proudly share"). Once again, hegemonic memory-making practices naturalized the capitalist present by inscribing East Germans' criticism of conditions in the capitalist present into a consumable nostalgia-framed Comrades of Care mythology.

European Stabilization and the Pastoral Patriots Myth (2008–Today)

The last shift in popular memory we identified during our data collection period occurred around 2008. Comrades of Care stories faded and made room for new stories profiling the GDR as a pastoral idyll. This new set of meanings idealized the pure, rural, and traditional facets of the socialist past by spotlighting nature, rusticity, tranquility, tangible values, regionalism, and a simple, down-to-earth life. East Germans developed a new consciousness of "Heimat" as a place for romantic hikes and camping trips; local food and traditional East German dishes and recipes were trending; East German brands and products became regional authorities; and East Germans began to revalorize their own brands and products as honest and no-frills alternatives to Western brands.

To understand this mythic shift, recall the turmoil of the global financial crisis that reached Germany circa 2008 through heightened job insecurity, devaluation of private investments and retirement savings, and a large-scale European stabilization project aiming to prevent banks and EU member states from bankruptcy. This institutional disruption exposed not only the discrepancies between the real economy and the financial sector but also the complex global interrelations in capitalism. Many East Germans felt betrayed by capitalism once again, after already being hit by mass unemployment and seeing much of their savings halved by the monetary union in 1990. From this perspective, the crisis fully exposed one's vulnerability in capitalism as a complex, artificial, intangible, opaque, and greedy menace and nurtured the wish to return to a simpler, more tangible, and down-to-earth life.

News media began to question whether that "capitalism has failed" (Hackhausen 2009) and revisited Marx's theses on production (Augstein 2010) while a new consciousness of East Germany as an intellectual breeding ground for socialist ideas to end the crisis took hold. In this rendering, a better model to avoid many of the ills of capitalism had existed before, and that model had been the socialist GDR. These developments created a powerful political contrast between a stable and humanistically oriented socialism and an unstable and unsustainable capitalism.

As left-wing intellectuals and politicians tirelessly promoted this dangerous distinction, commercial mythmakers once again began to shift the rising dissent from the political level to that of a consumable nostalgia-framed mythology, this time revolving around a specific variation of the Pastoral Patriots myth. This mythology traces back to the pervasive shortage of goods as one of the most prominent features of GDR consumer culture (Hogwood 2000; Landsman 2005). With retail shelves empty, GDR citizens were forced to live a simpler lifestyle and were oriented more toward local products than globally sourced goods. From this perspective, and in contrast to their Western brothers and sisters, people in the GDR had always lived a more down-to-earth life, one that was characterized by frugality and the pursuit of harmony with nature through sustainable choices rather than the pursuit of world domination through risky (financial) choices. By refashioning the pastoral idyll of the socialist past and transforming it into nostalgic identity salves, East German objections to capitalism would no longer be a topic of political action but instead could be articulated through consumption.

A central force in this act of hegemonic memory making was *SUPERillu*, a weekly magazine owned by the West German media company Hubert Burda Media. With its slogan "to us, East is more than a cardinal direction," *SUPERillu* is East Germany's most read magazine and attracts about 2.9 million readers. In an interview conducted in 2013, former editor-in-chief Robert Schneider explained the development of the magazine since its inception in the GDR in 1990 (Bieler 2013). Consider how Schneider explicitly spotted how the globalized and fast-spinning world created the need for a return to the regional, as well as certainty and pride, which he broadly views as "Heimat":

> We have become more modern—without losing anything of our competence on East Germany. We mostly report about the East Germany of today and tomorrow—without forgetting the yesterday. The regional thought is one of the highest goods in times of globalization and digitization and is also

> recognized by our readers. *SUPERillu* is much more mature today and offers more breadth of themes. It has become a modern magazine on Heimat and family. [. . .] Instead of a glorifying Ostalgie, we cultivate a sensitive look back to the past, which can sometimes be beautiful, yet sometimes be aching. [. . .] To me, the word [Heimat] stands for the certainty of having a home; it transports pride and a certain grounding in a world that seems to be getting faster and faster. I try to convey these feelings in the magazine. Personally, I think of the pear tree at home in Wachau near Leipzig, near my parents' house.

The important ideological distinction Schneider makes between a "glorifying Ostalgie," which is to be understood here as an unproductive and irresponsible yearning for the GDR past, and the depoliticized "sensitive look back" lies at the core of the brand-mediated revival of the GDR by the Pastoral Patriots mythology. By joining Heimat with region, certainty, down-to-earthness, and nature ("the pear tree," which makes reference to Theodor Fontane's 1889 patriotic celebration of the East German region Havelland), Schneider rendered Heimat a consumable resource through which pessimistic sentiments of capitalism could be channeled, and pride be expressed. Thus, Schneider shifted the focus from an abstract societal level ("in times of globalization") to that of individual level of nostalgic identity consumption ("Personally, I think of the pear tree at home"). In stories and reports about the beautiful East German Heimat, *SUPERillu* romanticized a new consciousness of past pastoral virtues as therapy for the discomforting present—without redeeming the GDR as a political system.

As this hegemonic GDR memory took hold, historians, celebrities, and other cultural voices not only verified its underlying romantic image, but also explicitly legitimized a return to pastoral Heimat as a therapy for discontent with the present condition. For instance, Michelin star chef Frank Rosin explains his experience of eating the East German version of the dish Jägerschnitzel for the first time in 2009 (in East Germany, Jägerschnitzel, or hunter's schnitzel, is a fried slice of Jagdwurst sausage with noodles and tomato sauce; in West Germany, it refers to a schnitzel of veal or pork with a mushroom sauce). Consider how Rosin, in an interview with *SUPERillu* (2017), talks about a "wonderful symbiosis" between East German traditional cuisine and the present societal climate:

> I would like to say that [Jägerschnitzel] is even more unhealthy than currywurst, but when I tried it, I took a second portion. This is awesome! You just have to prepare it the right way. It needs to be crisp, it needs a good tomato sauce with a little oompf. Delicious! [. . .] I like it down to earth. I often cook using the recipes of my grandmother. I believe that the world we live in is dominated by hatred and bustle. Even personal contact is missing. Everything is done via email, Facebook, or the iPhone. And that is precisely why people increasingly say about food: I would like to eat food that tastes like mother used to make at home! Because this way I eat a little bit of "Heimat." Also, the small farmers' markets are doing well these days. Let's buy beet in Teltow or asparagus in Beelitz [East German regions]. Just to unwind and come down. That is why I also think that the cuisine, which has a tradition in the East, combined with Eastern European cuisine, is a wonderful symbiosis of old customs and our present age.

To Rosin, a romanticized return to the local, simple, down-to-earth, traditional, and rustic cuisine as well as native and pure produce has the power to mend the present lifeworld malady through the consumption of Heimat. Realizing the potential of this framing, marketing agents, retailers, restaurants, and hotels quickly began promoting GDR-themed products, brands, and experiences that would advocate a regional, simple, and sustainable romantic flair. This inward-oriented logic traces back to the axiom expressed in Goethe's popular 1827 poem "Erinnerung," which emphasizes that the good things often lie right in front of us. When marketers and entrepreneurs discovered the ordinary and traditional facets of the socialist past as a powerful therapeutic narrative, it hit a nerve with those East German consumers who were dissatisfied with present conditions.

Consider, in this context, the Original Schulküche ("original school kitchen") product range introduced in 2012. Original Schulküche sells canned food intended to resemble popular GDR dishes served in schools back then, like Tote Oma ("Dead Grandma"), Soljanka, or the "GDR school kitchen tomato sauce." The latter, for example, is marketed as "traditional East German product," a regional craft product created through "gentle cooking" by hand using "classical recipes" and "without the use of artificial flavors and additives" (http://bit.ly/2rgRYId). The head chef explicitly positions the "housewife style" production in over 100-year-old pots against rationalized capitalist production "when you consider a sauce that is being cooked in large quantities, by large corporations, this is something quite different" (http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x31zwmm). By 2016, as marketers increasingly catered to a pastoralist mythology, the majority of East German brands stood for pastoral values rather than the GDR as such (Thüringer Allgemeine 2016).

The hegemonic memory-making efforts of media journalist Robert Schneider, culinary expert Frank Rosin, and countless other celebrities, marketing agents, and entrepreneurs transformed a climate of political dissent into a climate of "local patriotism" (http://bit.ly/2txQZ5g) that rechanneled demands for greater acquiescence to socialism as a political system toward a desire for products and brands that conveyed romanticized pastoral virtues allegedly characteristic of life in the socialist past. Instead of articulating demands for political change toward a more reliable socialist system, as had still been the case around

2008, East Germans now articulated their dissent as consumers, by spotlighting the purity, honesty, simplicity, and tradition of East German brands like the baking mix Kathi ("The special thing about Kathi is that the products are largely free of additives! They are honest, good, and always turn out well! I am an enthusiastic fan. [Western retailers] should offer Kathi as a less chemically contaminated alternative!"); chocolate spread brand Nudossi ("What makes Nudossi special is its high hazelnut content—more specifically, a whole 36%. It tastes exactly as I remembered. By the way, it received the highest rating by eco-test magazine"), or skin-care brand Florena ("Tradition proves of value. It is a classical product and has a creamy, fresh smell, flowery but discrete. It is not very shiny and modern, but leaves no margin of doubt when it comes to everything else"). As these netnographic quotes demonstrate, with East German brands refashioned as tokens of a pastoral past, East Germans could reclaim those pastoral facets and express dissent with capitalism through the marketplace, as Hilde (56, anonymized) aptly summarizes:

> I like [East German products] simply because they are not globalized junk. They are made by people who live here. They are from here for here. [. . .] To me, this is very refreshing, down to earth, in times like these. This is real value [. . .] produced right here, not some diffuse "investment product," but a product from the region that is clean and also morally superior; I would say that, yes. It is more like "a product as a product," not a product as a means of stealing your money. You know what you get and that without bells and whistles, like back then [. . .]; but better, because now, we can get these products whenever we want to.

DISCUSSION

By bringing previous consumer research scholarship about commercial mythmaking and popular memory to bear on a longitudinal investigation of the East German Ostalgie market, we demonstrate the influence of hegemonic memory making on the marketization of a former socialist society. We develop our formulation of hegemonic memory making on two interrelated analytical levels. We begin by explicating how enduring contradictions between opposing capitalist and socialist ideologies are inscribed into a marketplace mythology of the socialist past that structures marketization processes by rendering the production and consumption of nostalgic brands with dual moral and economic significance. After that, in our longitudinal analysis of the East German Ostalgie market, we illustrate the influence of a progressive sequence of cultural conflicts between commercialized memories of socialism promoted by marketing agents and countermemories that endorse socialism as a political alternative to East Germany's transition from a centralized economy to a capitalist one.

We summarize our findings in our process model of hegemonic memory making (see figure 2). The model, which illustrates the transformation of political dissent into nostalgic memory, characterizes marketization as an ongoing commercial mythmaking process (Thompson and Tian 2008). Recapitulating the findings from our theoretical discussion of hegemonic memory, the four semiotic boxes in each corner of the model represent the broader narrative genres available for interpreting the socialist past and the political capitalism-socialism contradictions that they address: Heroes of Labor, Enchanted East, Comrades of Care, and Pastoral Patriots. The elements on the gray background summarize the findings from our marketization analysis and illustrate how socialism-inspired demands for political change in Germany between 1991 and today were transformed into four depoliticized memories, which, in turn, naturalize and reinforce capitalism's hegemony.

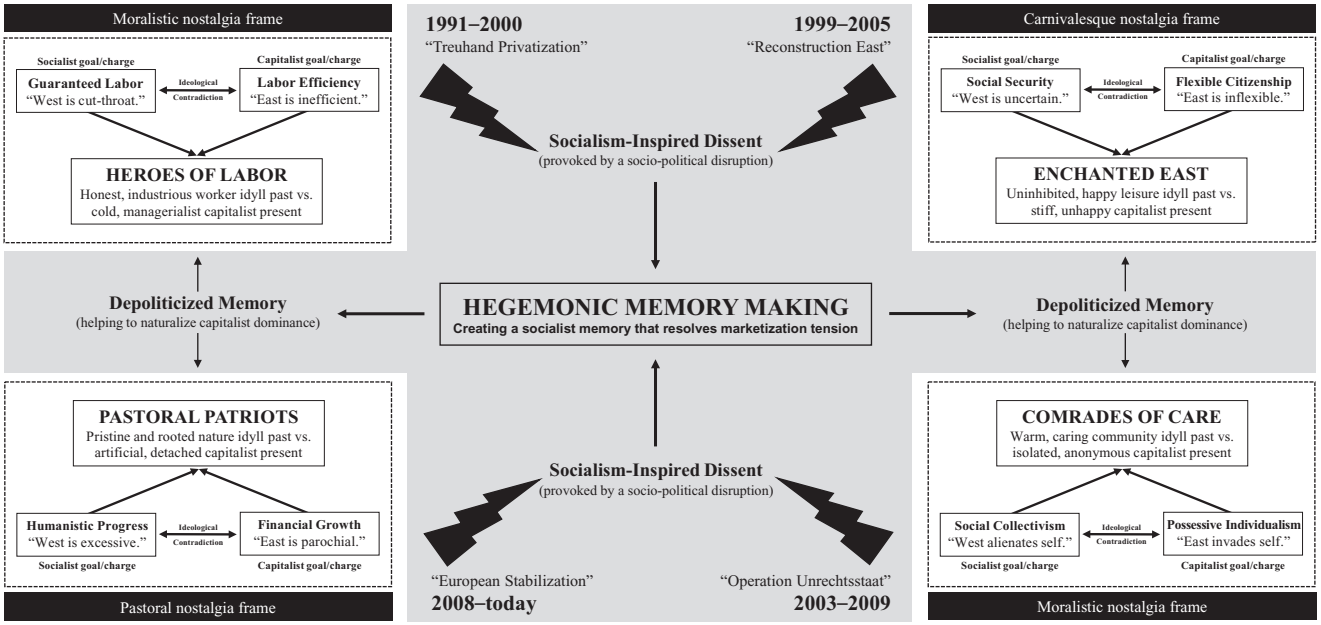
These findings yield novel theoretical insights for the study of marketization. Previous consumer researchers link successful marketization with the consensual acquiescence to an idealized definition of the socialist past, produced through the politicization of consumption (Dong and Tian 2008; Kravets 2012; Roberts 2014; Zhao and Belk 2008). In this formulation, marketing agents have a more powerful voice in the marketization process and, thereby, are able to frame socialist memory, and related socioeconomic and political discourses, in meanings that favor their interests (Peñaloza 2000; Lipsitz 1988). Accordingly, in this view meaning flows vertically from marketplace intermediaries representing hegemonic interests such as advertisers, product designers, and brand managers to consumers who ritualistically incorporate these meanings into their lives.

Our formulation enriches this standard critical theory argument. There is no doubt that the idealized representations of the East German past created by marketers of the German Ostalgie market since 1990 have helped establish a hegemonic order. Yet previous scholars can never take for granted that hegemonic representations of the East German past were almost invariably confronted by countermemories that interpreted historical events as understood from the viewpoint of subordinated populations. When, as we have shown, marketizing societies are de facto sites of struggle as different groups seek to constantly propagate their preferred collective constructions of history and cultural identity (Thompson and Tian 2008), politicization and depoliticization are two sides of a reality in which hegemonic memory is dialectically intertwined with myth market competition. Hence, the shift from a planned to a capitalist economy is far more horizontally dynamic and contested than previous scholarship has suggested.

Second, the prospect, in turn, that marketization is structured by a nexus of horizontal relationships affords new

FIGURE 2

THE ROLE OF HEGEMONIC MEMORY MAKING IN THE MARKETIZATION OF A FORMER SOCIALIST SOCIETY



insights into what naturalizes hegemonizing conduct. The concept of hegemony necessarily invokes the idea of a ruling class whose interests are served by the proliferation of dominant ideological meanings. While contemporary uses of Gramsci's original formulation have presented more diffused relations of power—recognizing, for example, that the dominant class are themselves fragmented and represent different intragroup interests (Giesler and Veresiu 2014)—our analysis does beg the question of what relationships commercial mythmakers involved in hegemonic memory making have to the hegemonic order. Here, our study has noteworthy parallels to Thompson and Tian's (2008) investigation of the representational strategies and ideological rationales that New South mythmakers have used to shape popular memories about the American South in relation to their competitive goals. However, it also reveals different self-understandings that have gone unrecognized by Thompson and Tian (2008).

On the one hand, like Thompson and Tian's (2008) mythmakers, the mythmakers in our analysis were also driven by the desire to create successful entrepreneurial businesses and to shed a redeeming light on the East German socialist past. In addition, however, we also observed in all four historical phases of marketization that commercial mythmakers in the Ostalgie market presented themselves as patriots who are deeply committed to serving a pan-German project of national strengthening and unification, morally called upon—as former chancellor Willy Brandt put it in 1989—to "bring together what belongs together."

Thompson and Tian's (2008) mythmakers had a more regional focus as they sought to legitimate and validate Southern culture in the face of stigmatizing meanings that had taken hold in the broader national consciousness. In contrast, our findings reveal that mythmakers can also be focused on shaping and homogenizing that broader national consciousness more directly, effectively using cultural marketing techniques to legitimize and validate national-patriotic agendas. The prospect, in turn, that commercial mythmaking can be framed and understood as an act of patriotism has important implications for theorizing the relationship between markets and the political economy more broadly. Prior theorizations of commercial mythmaking have argued that the "commercial marketplace now functions as a virtual plebiscite for negotiating the ideological parameters of popular memory and the socio-political significance of racial, class-based, and gendered countermemories" (Thompson and Tian 2008, 611). This postmodern interpretation of myth market competition as a democratic process is in line with theorizations that have presented neoliberal capitalism as a remedy against liberal capitalism's tendency to promote nationalism (Fourcade and Healey 2007; Polanyi 1944/2001). What we observe, however, is that, in the contemporary era, commercial mythmaking practices can work in lockstep with homogenizing goals, such as the recent call of Donald Trump's

campaign to "Make America Great Again." Consequently, we urge future researchers to unpack the role of commercial mythmaking in the resurgence of nationalism.

Third, our theorization of hegemonic memory making also has implications for research on consumers' memory work. For example, recent consumer research has adopted a material culture lens (Miller 1997) to demonstrate that consumers can cultivate memory practices that allow them to compartmentalize traumatic past experiences and regain control over the past (Marcoux 2017). From Marcoux's (2017, 963) theoretical standpoint, when consumers "put photographs, pictures, and other souvenirs 'away' in a drawer, in a closet, or in a box in the basement, they were trying to control a largely involuntary remembering process through a memory practice that allowed them to deliberately limit their access to objects that could trigger it." This approach assumes that memories are a constant that is inscribed in a network of commercial objects, which have a stabilizing effect on consumers' identity and memory practices.

By contrast, our analysis showcases the fluidity and dynamics of memories: like history itself, they are malleable material. In our view, the performances of memory practices described by Marcoux (2017) are structured by an ideological material memory landscape that consumers can draw from at a given point in time. From this perspective, forgetting operates in the manner described by Marcoux only if, and as long as, a given commercial object denotes a specific remembering process. In the context of German reunification, however, GDR brands triggered very different remembering processes during the Treuhand Privatization phase between 1991 and 2000 than during the Reconstruction East phase between 1999 and 2005. Consequently, as mythmakers retailor the material memory landscape to different historical conditions, establishing entirely new connections between commercial objects and the past, the relationship between memory and materiality that previously enabled forgetting is destabilized. Thus, when hegemonic memory-making practices frequently reshape the past in ways that legitimize present conditions, future research on material memory should approach remembering and forgetting dynamically over time as an outcome that is temporarily attained, not a state ensured through a stable constellation between memory and materiality.

This facet of our model also harbors important implications for consumer research theorizing nostalgia and the revival of brand meaning. In the consumer research literature, Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry's (2003) analysis of retrobranding offers a counterpoint to our analysis of hegemonic memory making. Drawing from the work of literary critic Walter Benjamin (1973), these authors demonstrate that retro products and brands offer the same morality, iconicity, utopia, and community as the original—mythic archetypes that bind them to their own past and to their communities. At the core of every retro brand is "the central retro brand paradox between old and new, then and now, past and future," an aspect conceptualized as "antimony" that comes to fruition when marketing agents revive the essential moral story about the brand that resides in the collective unconscious (allegory), reanimate a powerful sense of authenticity (the original brand's "mojo" or "aura"), and rediscover meanings of solidarity and a sense of belonging to a community—a quality they refer to as idealized community or "arcadia." In summary, for Brown et al. (2003), retrobranding is an act of meaning revival.

Like Brown et al., we accept the structuralist proposition that socialist values exist across cultures. However, the ideas that revived socialist brands existed as important icons during a specific developmental stage for a particular generation or cohort, that they are capable of evoking relevant associations for East German consumers, and that they are capable of mobilizing a utopian vision cannot be treated as analytical baselines. Rather, we must regard these contentions as outcomes of hegemonic memory-making activities over a prolonged period of time. Brown and colleagues can never take for granted that the meanings of East German brands during socialism were largely positive. On the contrary, the same consumers who are now celebrating East German brands detested them with passion back then. Thus, in our research context commercial mythmakers revived the brands, not their original meanings. Rather, for the purpose of naturalizing contemporary relations of power, they were made to represent several different depoliticized histories and mentalities that had only very little correspondence with the actual histories of these brands and the realities of German socialism between 1949 and 1990.

We urge future consumer researchers not to subsume all questions about the past to mythology and to instead approach "retro" and "nostalgic" as an outcome of hegemonic memory-making activities rather than an analytical category. Examining commodified pasts in their specific historical, political, and ideological context (Hartmann and Brunk 2015) allows consumer researchers to critically explore which field of forces and social relations and commemorative routines these mythic formulations naturalize, and which alternative repertoires of political actions and dissent they systematically obstruct. This entails exploring how ideological preferences are encoded into marketplace mythologies of the romantic past, analyzing which properties are assigned to that past and which to the present, and understanding what imposition of power and its constituent relations of domination and subjugation these mythologies serve to rationalize and justify (Foucault 1977).

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first and third authors jointly collected the initial online netnographic and pop cultural as well as historical and

archival data between 2011 and 2015. The first author conducted the initial in-person interviews between 2013 and 2015 at various locations in East Germany. Between 2016 and 2017 additional online as well as interview data was collected by the second and third authors. The entire data set was analyzed jointly by all three authors.

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