

COFFEE, EAST GERMANS  
AND THE COLD WAR WORLD, 1945-1990

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By ANDREW KLOIBER, M.A., B.A. (Hon.)

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AUTHOR: Andrew Kloiber, M.A., B.A. (Hon.) (McMaster University)

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### **Lay Abstract**

This investigation contributes to studies of post 1945-Europe and the Cold War by examining the culture, economics and politics surrounding the consumption of a single commodity in East Germany, coffee, from 1945-1989. Coffee was associated with many cultural virtues and traditions which became tied to the GDR's official image of Socialism. When the regime's ability to supply this good was jeopardized in 1975-77, the government sought out new sources of coffee in the developing, so-called 'Third World.' East Germany entered into long-term trade and development projects with countries like Angola, Ethiopia, Laos and Vietnam, to secure sufficient beans to supply its own population. These trade deals connected East Germany to a much broader, globalizing economy, and led to some lasting effects on the world coffee trade.

## Abstract

Placing coffee at the centre of its analysis, my dissertation reveals the intersections between consumption, culture, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR)'s involvement in the developing world. State planners took steps to promote coffee as a good consumed not only for its value as a stimulant but also for enjoyment. Enjoying a warm cup of coffee represented East Germans' participation in socialist society, and in a global coffee culture. Moreover, by adopting and weaving the older ideals and traditions associated with coffee into its messages of a bright socialist future based on modernity, progress and culture, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) used coffee as part of its long-term goals of reforming society along socialist lines.

When a major frost destroyed two thirds of Brazil's coffee trees in July 1975, causing world prices to quadruple by 1977, GDR planners faced a genuine 'Coffee Crisis' that challenged the state's political well-being. The regime replaced the most affordable brand '*Kosta*' with '*Kaffee-Mix*,' a blend of 51 per cent coffee and 49 per cent surrogate. Vehement public rejection of the replacement necessitated the hasty conclusion of new trade deals to solve the supply problem, deals which brought the GDR into contact with the developing world in ways it had not anticipated.

My project considers four case studies – the GDR's coffee deals with Angola, Ethiopia, Laos and Vietnam, and I argue that these coffee deals reveal as much about the GDR's engagements with the global south as they do about its own self-image as a modern state in a divided, yet globalizing world. The GDR consciously approached these relationships as an industrially developed nation needing to 'guide' these newly independent states toward (a socialist) modernisation. Furthermore, these trade agreements reveal the balance between pragmatism and ideology which characterized the GDR's pursuit of coffee; ideology often

informed state representatives and framed the negotiations, but pragmatic concerns generally found primacy throughout the process.

The GDR invested heavily in these developing countries' coffee industries, sending technical equipment, along with agricultural and technical experts to help these countries meet East Germans' import needs. In Angola and Ethiopia, the GDR provided weapons for coffee, while contracts with Laos and Vietnam led to lengthy development projects to 'modernize' each country's coffee industry. This investment in turn helped change the balance of the world coffee trade; the most striking example of this process was the explosion of the Vietnamese coffee industry through the 1980s, which ultimately made Vietnam the world's second largest producer of coffee next to Brazil. The need for coffee in the GDR, then, sparked a specific expansion of its involvement in the Global South, a process that complicates scholars' positioning of the GDR within international relations. The example of coffee and the trade agreements it spurred suggests the need to move beyond questions about the degree to which the GDR could overcome its diplomatic isolation, or the extent of East German autonomy from the Soviets, toward questions about the nature of East Germany's own foreign policy agenda, how it saw itself in the world, and how it contributed to the processes of globalization.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ABI	Abteilung für Leicht-, Lebensmittel-und bezirksgeleitete Industrie des Zentralkomitee der SED
AHB	Aussenhandelsbetrieb – East German Foreign Export Company
AIV	Agricultural Industry Association, Jessen
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Berliner Zeitung</i>
C.A.R.E.	Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe
CMC	Ethiopian Coffee Marketing Corporation
CC	Central Committee of the Politburo of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
DM	Deutschmarks (West German currency)
FDGB	Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
FDJ	Free German Youth
FNLA	National Front for the Liberation of Angola
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
HO	Handelsorganisationen
IBC	Instituto Brasileiro do Café
ICA	The International Coffee Agreement
ICO	International Coffee Organization
IfM	Institut für Marktforschung
IM	Unofficial ‘colleague’ (Stasi informant)

KoKo	Bereich Kommerzielle Koordinierung
MAH	Ministry for Foreign Trade and Inter-German Trade
MBL	Ministerium der bezirksgeleitete Industrie und Lebensmittelindustrie
MfAA	East German Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MfS	Ministry for State Security, STASI
MHV	Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung
MPLA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MR	Council of Ministers
NÖS	New Economic System
NYCSE	New York Coffee and Sugar Exchange
SBZ	Soviet Zone of Occupation
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
SPK	State Planning Commission
SRV	Socialist Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
StaKo	Staatliches Kontor für pflanzliche Erzeugnisse der Lebensmittelindustrie
UESP	Unity of Economic and Social Policy
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
VEB	People's Own Enterprise
VDRL	People's Democratic Republic of Laos
VM	Valutamark
WSLF	Western Somali Liberation Front
ZIDA	Zentrum für Information und Dokumentation der Außenwirtschaft

**Declaration of Academic Achievement**

Andrew Kloiber is the sole author of this dissertation.

## Introduction

Since the end of the GDR, historians have grappled with how to interpret its legacy. For nearly two decades, research has concentrated on debates over the nature of the East German dictatorship, and how the state exercised its power. The years immediately following reunification in 1990 were marked by a resurrection of totalitarian theory, as scholars from a number of fields rushed to the recently opened archives of the East German Communist Party, the SED [*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*], and its state security services (*Staatssicherheit*, Stasi). Research through most of the 1990s concentrated on themes of state control, such as the regime's criminally repressive policies, institutions of its power like the Stasi and armed forces, Soviet domination of the GDR, and questions of what, if any, resistance was possible under these circumstances.<sup>1</sup> To some extent, such a focus was understandable, given the revelations of the extent of the state's mass surveillance of its population.<sup>2</sup> Prominent German historians were quick to label the GDR as an *Unrechtsstaat* (illegitimate state) without any popular support, ruling out of power and fear.<sup>3</sup>

Responses came relatively quickly to totalitarian interpretations, in particular by social historians who pointed to the "limits" to not only the model, but to the East German dictatorship itself.<sup>4</sup> These revisionists rejected the emphasis on repression and state rule, and focused instead

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<sup>1</sup> Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Goldmann Wilhelm GmbH, 1995). Ilko Sascha Kowalschuk, Armin Mitter, and Stefan Wolle, *Der Tag X - 17. Juni 1953* (Ch. Links Verlag 1996).

<sup>2</sup> There is a plethora of literature which discusses the opening of the MfS archives. See Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mike Dennis, *Stasi: Myth and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945-1990*. David Burnett (trans.) (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014). Especially prominent are personal accounts by individuals examining their own Stasi files. See Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: a personal history* (London: Atlantic, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Bertelsmann, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Kocka, "The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 47-69. Jürgen Kocka's notion of a 'modern dictatorship' was a more neutral term that could account for changes over the GDR's forty year existence, like greater social mobility, nominal gender equality, and decreases in social inequality.



on the everyday lives of East Germans to argue that strictly political interpretations of the GDR failed to account for the extent to which East Germans had exercised ‘agency’ within the system of SED rule.<sup>5</sup> These works borrowed largely from Alf Lütke’s concept of *Eigensinn*, a term whose precise definition has remained elusive, but generally refers to the willful behavior through which individuals and groups can express their own ‘self-awareness’ or ‘self-possession.’<sup>6</sup> By telling the history of the GDR ‘from below,’ these scholars sought to add nuance to the relationship between state and society. Thomas Lindenberger and Alf Lütke applied Max Weber’s notion of *Herrschaft* [domination, or state power] to argue the SED dictatorship maintained power through the consent of the people.<sup>7</sup> In this vein, Konrad Jarausch put forth the idea of the GDR as a “welfare dictatorship” that sought a balance between care and coercion, a term he argued simultaneously reflected the regime’s goals of egalitarian social reform, while acknowledging and critiquing the repressive policies of state socialism.<sup>8</sup> For Jarausch, the GDR was a paternalist state that sought to convert its population to socialist ideals, but rather than do so merely through intimidation and fear (coercion), the state offered a wide

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Ina Merkel and Felix Mühlberg, *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR-Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (Neue Gessellschaft für Bildende Kunst. Cologne: Böhlau, 1996); Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1999); Andreas Ludwig, ed. *Tempolinsen und P2: Alltagskultur der DDR* (Berlin: BenBra Verlag, 1996); Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen, eds. *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der SBZ/DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Alf Lütke, “Cash, Coffee Breaks, Horseplay: *Eigensinn* and Politics among Factory Workers in Germany circa 1900,” in *Confrontation, Class Consciousness, and the Labor Process: Studies in Proletarian Class Formation*, edited by Michael Hanagan, and Charles Stephenson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 66.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Lindenberger and Alf Lütke were especially important in popularizing the use of ‘*Herrschaft*’ as a conceptual model for GDR studies. See for example Lindenberger’s introduction to Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin: Böhlau Verlag GmbH, 1999); Alf Lütke, ed., *Herrschaft als Soziale Praxis: historische und sozial-anthropologische Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991); and recently, see Lindenberger, “SED-Herrschaft als soziale Praxis, Herrschaft und ‘Eigen-Sinn:’ Problemstellung und Begriffe” in Jens Gieseke, ed., *Staatssicherheit und Gesellschaft Staatssicherheit und Gesellschaft: Studien zum Herrschaftsalltag der DDR*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007), 23-47.

<sup>8</sup> Konrad Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” Jarausch, ed. *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, trans. Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 60. Jarausch’s interpretation is similar to that of Stephen Kotkin’s concept of viewing the Soviet Union as a unique form of civilization, a state eager to take a paternalist approach towards its people, but one also eager to meet the needs of its population to demonstrate and reinforce its legitimacy. See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

range of programs and agencies aimed at providing for the ‘welfare’ of its people [*Fürsorge*] both individually and collectively.

The shift to social history, which emphasized lived experience and the exercise of political power in everyday life, prompted new questions about the apparent stability of the GDR. Instead of focusing on why the regime ultimately failed, historians in the early 2000s were interested in explaining why the GDR lasted forty years, and turned to cultural history to explore what they saw as relative stability. In particular Mary Fulbrook, intrigued by East Germans who remembered living “a very normal life,” insisted that scholars must take these memories seriously, and examine lived experience.<sup>9</sup> Far from surviving through active coercion and repression of its people, she argued, the SED state “functioned [...] through some form of internalization of, or willingness to play by, the unwritten ‘rules of the game.’”<sup>10</sup> The concept proved rather controversial within the field, especially among conservative historians who accused its proponents of either downplaying – or worse, ignoring – the criminality of the SED-regime. Less polarized criticism came from historians who pointed out the implication of some “normal” standard against which the GDR can be compared, and the dangers in overplaying society “to the point where it seems amazing that 1989 did not happen much, much sooner.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). See especially her introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 4. This process, she, characterized a ‘participatory dictatorship’ that relied more on citizens’ acquiescence than any form of coercion. Fulbrook and a number of scholars (most of whom were her former students) came to apply the concept of ‘normalization’ to explore how East Germans “‘came to terms’ with life,” and “the extent to which certain norms, rules and expectations regarding patterns of behavior became internalized or routinized – and may have come to be seen as somehow ‘normal’ as they became more predictable over time.” See for example Andrew I. Port, “Introduction: The banalities of East German historiography,” in Andrew I. Port, Mary Fulbrook (eds.). *Becoming East German: socialist structures and sensibilities after Hitler*. (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 11. Earlier samples would include Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass Roots* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Mark Allinson, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany, 1945-1968* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); Jeannette Madarász-Lebenhagen, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971-1989* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Eli Rubin takes direct aim at what he calls the “Fulbrookians” in his introduction to *Synthetic Socialism: Plastic & Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 7. ‘Normalisation’ theorists retort that the term never made any claims about what constitutes a ‘normal’ society, but

The question of everyday life in socialism still holds a central position in ongoing discussions of East Germany, which has seen an explosion of work by cultural historians examining themes such as gender, fashion, tourism, material culture, the workplace, private life, music, film, nature, and more broadly, consumption.<sup>12</sup> Arguing against an easy separation between ideology and everyday life, these scholars pointed to the ways in which a number of influences: gender norms, existing notions of aesthetics, economic conditions, proximity to the Federal Republic, and more, coalesced into a set of values and practices that ‘made up’ a unique East German *society*. Socialism, and not the exercise of dictatorial power, they insisted, should

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was “intrinsically relational, comparative,” and has been misunderstood because it has been conflated with “everyday usages of the term.” See Mary Fulbrook, “The Concept of ‘Normalisation’ and the GDR in Comparative Perspective,” in Mary Fulbrook, ed. *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?* (New York: Berghahn, 2013). Rather, Andrew Port argues the concept provides a way of “examin[ing] the actual substance of a claim often made but rarely demonstrated with evidence: that East Germans chose- or learned – to ‘accommodate’ themselves to the regime.” Port, “Introduction: The banalities of East German historiography,” 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> The list continues to grow beyond the limits of a single footnote, but some prominent examples include: Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private life in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The soft power of mid-century design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Rainer Gries, „Produkte des Kapitalismus versus Waren des Sozialismus: Zur Geschichte des „Marketings“ in beiden deutschen Staaten,“ in *Marketing: Historische Aspekte der Wettbewerbs- und Absatzpolitik*, eds. Christian Kleinschmidt, Florian Triebel (Essen: Klartext, 2004), 185-206; Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the family, and communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Young-sun Hong, “Cigarette Butts and the Building of Socialism in East Germany,” *Central European History* 35, no. 3 (June 2002): 327-344; Anne Kaminsky, “‘True Advertising Means Promoting a Good Thing through a Good Form’: Advertising in the German Democratic Republic,” in *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany* eds. Pamela E. Swett, S. Jonathan Wiesen, Jonathan R. Zatin (eds.) (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Sandrine Kott, *Communism Day-to-Day: State Enterprises in East German Society*, trans. Lisa Godin-Roger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); Josie McLellan, *Love in the time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1999) and more recently, “Alternative Rationalitäten, fremdartige Träume, absurd Utopien. Werbung, Marktforschung und Konsum im Sozialismus.” *Zeitgeschichte* 31, no.1 (2004): 5-20; Scott Moranda, *The People’s Own Landscape: Nature, Tourism and Dictatorship in East Germany* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013); Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (eds.). *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Jay Rowell, *Le totalitarisme au concret : les politiques du logement en RDA* (Paris : Economica, 2006); Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics & Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and his *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum: Kaffeekonsum in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014); Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany, 1948-1971* (New York : Berg, 2005); Alice Weinreb, *Matters of Taste: The Politics of Food and Hunger in Divided Germany 1945-1971* (PhD Diss.) (Charleston, South Carolina: BiblioLabs, 2011).

be the focus of study: how did East Germans experience it? How did it shape their daily lives and vice versa? What did it offer them, what did it refuse them? Their work identified a measurable, often vibrant society and culture in East Germany, in stark contrast to Cold War assumptions of a stunted “culture of shortage.”<sup>13</sup> As this dissertation shows, coffee had its own role to play in cultivating that vibrant socialist society, because the beverage’s links to the traditions and social practices of the past made it familiar to Germans, and therefore translatable to the particular economic, social and political realities of the period following two world wars.

Emphasizing the ways in which East Germans lived in an authentic society does not ignore or discount the highly oppressive nature of the East German dictatorship. One particularly useful impetus has come from historians of the GDR based in France, who have proposed looking at the GDR through a lens of ‘*socio-histoire du politique*’ as opposed to “*histoire sociale*” or “*Sozialgeschichte*.”<sup>14</sup> *Socio-histoire* considers the influence of the state on society as key to understanding the GDR; *Sozialgeschichte* or *histoire sociale*, argue these French scholars, mistakenly views groups in a vacuum outside of state forces.<sup>15</sup> Every day, East Germans worked within the structured life of a brigade group, lived in close proximity to their workplace and one another. More than this, East Germans themselves perpetuated this system, for example every time a brigade group ‘closed ranks’ to protect one of its own, or vice versa, when they ostracised a member for repeatedly causing trouble. Living and working within a particular set of socialist systems, structures, and cultures, East Germans came to internalize socialism through everyday acts and popular culture, a process Sandrine Kott argues was so quotidian, most East Germans

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<sup>13</sup> Ina Merkel was the first to challenge the assumption that the GDR had no consumer culture; that because it was a planned economy and had frequent shortages that it was a “*Mangelgesellschaft*” (shortage society), and therefore was bereft of a genuine consumer culture (or indeed, genuine society). She argues this serves no purpose but to reinforce ideologically-based dichotomies and to “polarize” interpretations of the GDR. See *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Kott, *Communism Day-to-Day*, ix

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

barely noticed it at all.<sup>16</sup> Eli Rubin’s work on plastics and housing follows a similar vein, arguing that by buying plastic goods and living in newly designed socialist housing blocs, East Germans “were caught up in a web of Gramscian hegemony, a kind of Foucauldian microphysics of power, or *Herrschaft*.”<sup>17</sup> As people acculturated to the structures that framed their lives, common everyday practices, like drinking coffee with one’s neighbours, could simultaneously reinforce that structured society, *and* offer a subtle challenge to the state’s claims of authority. Coffee could not grow in the GDR, and so the people were utterly reliant on the regime’s willingness to invest in its supply – a choice the regime made in the hopes of demonstrating its commitment to providing a better life. Thus, the very act of drinking a cup of coffee signaled tacit acceptance of the regime’s authority, but at the same time, by supplying that coffee, the regime was also planting the seeds of future discontent. Encouraging East Germans to *enjoy* their coffee established a set of expectations regarding the quality and taste of the coffee East Germans drank, which meant East Germans’ acquiescence to the state relied on maintaining these taste expectations.

Although debates about the nature of the GDR lasted a long time, and occasionally became quite heated,<sup>18</sup> they nonetheless represented an important process of historicization, not unlike the historians’ debates of the 1980s regarding the legacy of National Socialism.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the debates regarding the nature of the GDR became so tense precisely because they tried to wrestle with some fundamental questions about power, as well as the legacy of dictatorship in

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<sup>16</sup> Norbert Elias, *La société des individus* (Paris: Fayard, 1987); Kott, *Communism Day-to-Day*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Rubin. *Synthetic Socialism*, 8.

<sup>18</sup> See for example an online forum discussion on h-German following Gary Bruce’s review of Andrew Port’s *Conflict and Stability*: (<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-german&month=0710&week=b&msg=facLQneMNsJCQHJtGd/bgg&user=&pw=>); accessed 20 Jan 2017.

<sup>19</sup> I wish to clarify here that by comparing these two sets of debates (one about the GDR, the other about Nazi Germany), I am *not* equating the historiographical trends of either German dictatorship, nor am I equating the GDR with Nazi Germany. I am merely pointing out that large and important debates took place regarding each of these periods of Germany’s past, and both sets of debates were crucial for setting a tone for their respective subfields.

German national memory and identity. In a way, arguing over the nature of the GDR characterized a second ‘*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*’ [mastering of the past], a process through which scholars and Germans alike needed to pass in order to better understand the GDR’s place in German history. While questions of power and the nature of the East German dictatorship remain significant today, they no longer occupy the central themes or interrogative approaches of a new generation of GDR historians. Themes of state power can and are weaved together with studies of material culture, questions of sexuality and family life, worker culture, memory, spatial history, recreation and travel, music, and consumption. My dissertation examines the patterns through which East Germans encountered coffee in their daily lives – the values, practices, and messages surrounding coffee – as but one part of a much larger history, one that acknowledges the ways in which culture, society, politics and economics ultimately coalesced into a particular self-image of East Germany’s place in the globalizing world.

A focus on everyday culture reveals a society in which a series of modern influences competed openly with traditional ones, producing what Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (among others) have called an “alternative” or “socialist” modernity.”<sup>20</sup> Pence and Betts criticized a historiographical trend of excluding the GDR from the classification of a ‘modern state,’ not only because of the lack of historiographical consensus regarding the concept, but because, they argue, the GDR actually fits the typical characteristics used to define ‘modernity,’ including among others, “breaks with tradition, industrialization, rationalization and scientific efficiency; and secularization.” Where Pence and Betts take issue specifically is with an over emphasis among scholars on some elements of ‘modernity,’ such as “the evolution of a public sphere, civil society, and the mobilization of mass publics, as well as increasing democratization according to

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<sup>20</sup> Pence and Betts, *Socialist Modern*. See also Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*.

Enlightenment-based values of citizenship.”<sup>21</sup> Similar discussions have also taken place in Soviet historiography, as a number of scholars have sought to examine the Soviet experience as but one possible response to the dilemmas arising from modernity.<sup>22</sup> According to proponents of alternative or ‘multiple modernities,’ many of the important aspects of what scholars have defined as ‘modern’ (taking a small sample: breaks with tradition, rapid industrialization, the mobilization of mass publics, and the development of the welfare state) can be applied to State Socialist as well as to Liberal Capitalist societies. As Soviet historian Michael David-Fox points out, these scholars echo the work of sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt, who suggested that “modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only, ‘authentic’ modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence.”<sup>23</sup>

Pence and Betts’ work offered a challenge to the way discussions about the merits of modernity as a conceptual framework or lens have often been reduced to blanket comparisons between East Germany (or more broadly, State Socialism in East Central Europe) and West Germany (or Liberal Capitalism in Western Europe and the Americas). In such comparisons, East and West Germany are further reduced to a story of Eastern ‘failure’ juxtaposed to Western

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<sup>21</sup> As Pence and Betts argue, typical characteristics used to define ‘modernity’ include “breaks with tradition, rise of capitalism and the nation-state, rapid urbanization, industrialization, and commercialization; rationalization and scientific efficiency; secularization, artistic innovation, and cultural radicalization; the development of the welfare state, the evolution of a public sphere, civil society, and the mobilization of mass publics, as well as increasing democratization according to Enlightenment-based values of citizenship.” See their introduction to *Socialist Modern*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Stephen Kotkin’s famous exploration of Stalinism as ‘civilization.’ In *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). See also Michael David Fox’s treatment of debates within Soviet historiography concerning the application of modernity as a conceptual framework: Michael David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities vs neo Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 54, H. 4 (2006): 535-555.

<sup>23</sup> S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” in: *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1-29, here 2-3, cited in Michael David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities,” 535-555. Examples of other ‘alternative modernities’ can be found in postcolonial studies, for instance see Partha Chatterjee’s criticism that “If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined communities from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity [instead of, for instance, imagining their *own* modernity].” See Partha Chatterjee. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5.

‘success’ – a triumphalist narrative that offers little in terms of better understanding how our historical subjects actually experienced living in state socialism.<sup>24</sup> Rather than “measuring specific achievements of modernization,” Betts and Pence suggest it “might be more fruitful if one worked to understand the role of this competition and race for progress and prosperity itself as a major constituent of what made German socialism modern.”<sup>25</sup> While their initial interjections were criticized for not actually defining or furthering historians’ understanding of the concept of ‘modernity’ itself, several scholars of East Germany have since explored this theme in more depth, looking at material culture and design, media dissemination, housing, and memory.<sup>26</sup>

Understanding what comprised everyday culture is not to focus on “hobbies, friendships, family [and] vacations” at the expense of the “controlling aspects of the regime,” but rather, cultural history provides a way to understand that ‘control’ did not always need to take overtly oppressive forms.<sup>27</sup> Cultural history has shown that “everything in East Germany, from toys to coffee, from sexuality to nature, was in some way altered and shaped by the ruling ideology of Socialism.”<sup>28</sup> The regime exercised its *Herrschaft* by providing experiences the people wanted, experiences imbued with new social values in terms of material aesthetics and attitudes towards consumer practices. Indeed, as Paul Betts has argued, it is precisely in light of the controlling

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<sup>24</sup> In her pioneering work on consumption culture in the GDR, Ina Merkel sought to challenge this very reductive line of scholarly reason, arguing that doing so diminishes or ignores consumer culture in other places, relegating them to being understandable only in comparison (read: contrast) to the West, and “can only be understood in imitative attempts to catch-up, not on their own terms.” Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Pence and Betts, *Socialist Modern*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*; Heather L. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014); Jon Berndt Olsen, *Tailoring Truth: Politicizing the Past and Negotiating Memory in East Germany, 1945-1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015); Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*, and his *Amnesiopolis*.

<sup>27</sup> Gary Bruce, “Participatory Repression? Reflections on Popular Involvement with the Stasi,” in *The Stasi at Home and Abroad: Domestic Order and Foreign Intelligence*, ed. Uwe Spiekermann. Bulletin of the German Historical Institute (Supplement 9). Washington, D.C. (2012): 47-58; here 47.

<sup>28</sup> Rubin. *Amnesiopolis*, 5.



aspects of the regime that cultural life becomes all the more important.<sup>29</sup> While providing coffee certainly formed an important part of the regime's political legitimacy, it is unlikely most East Germans made such political connections every time they sat down to a *Kaffeeklatsch* – more likely their conversations involved much more personal concerns: talk of family, changes at work, hobbies, etc. Examining family life, friendships and romance, for instance, highlights the extent to which East Germans could pursue meaningful relationships with one another – a noble goal in and of itself – as well as revealing that the state actually relaxed its attempts to control bodies and sexual relations over time, reacting to popular attitudes towards sex and love.<sup>30</sup> Studies of East German memory culture have highlighted the limits to official and public approaches to the historical legacy of National Socialism in East Germany, as well as to the complicated ways in which the GDR in fact produced its own memory culture infused by both politics and a practical desire to appeal to its population.<sup>31</sup> Material culture is also where questions of power were negotiated, as the state tied its legitimacy to fulfilling its promises of a bright socialist utopia, which justified public demand for continued improvements to supply and quality. But materiality also mattered because the objects of everyday life – like coffee – carried certain cultural traditions, patterns of sociability, and social norms which had existed before the GDR's formation. These older values blended with social, political and cultural realities in which East Germans found themselves after 1949 – and the messages surrounding coffee and its attendant cultural practices reveal a great deal about how East Germans experienced Socialism in

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<sup>29</sup> Betts. *Within Walls*, 5. While Betts was referring specifically to the study of private life in the GDR, his basic premise remains useful when applied more broadly.

<sup>30</sup> McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*. See also Herzog. *Sex After Fascism*.

<sup>31</sup> Eli Rubin argues that state housing projects in the 1970s and 1980s were in at least in part a large scale attempt to finally address the housing issues that the urban working class had been struggling with since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a fulfillment, in a sense, of socialism's promise to workers nearly one hundred years prior. See his introduction to *Amnesiopolis*. Meanwhile, Jon Berndt Olsen's work on the SED's attempts to establish and exert political control over memory culture in the GDR failed to provide them with the cultural monopoly they desired, and that memory culture was far more fluid and negotiated than the regime ever wanted. See Berndt Olsen, *Tailoring Truth*.

their daily lives. East Germans did not merely adapt to a set of ‘rules’, or ‘accommodate’ themselves to a regime: they internalized a set of socialist values, which blended with their own existing notions of aesthetics, personal taste, culinary customs, and expectations of a better life.

Pence and Betts’ concept of an alternative modernity reconnects the GDR to a broader history of Europe’s twentieth century, and while this dissertation follows this logic, it takes the position that, in considering how the material culture of the GDR could shape ‘new’ patterns of everyday life, it is fruitful to also acknowledge the extent to which older traditions remained in place. What were these ‘new’ ideas supposed to replace? Scholars have identified the limits to some of the GDR’s material culture – such as pointing out that East Germans refused to purchase plastic furniture, preferring instead more ornamental fashions, and that removing money from consumption did not change the system of exchange upon which consumption relied, and therefore failed to make consumption ‘socialist’ in the ways the regime intended.<sup>32</sup> These observations remind us that as a conceptual framework, modernity – whether a capitalist or a socialist alternative – is always an evolutionary process. Historical subjects experience this process over the span of generations, integrating these new concepts into their existing understanding of their place in time and space. A socialist modernity therefore cannot be understood as an entity that somehow existed as wholly separate from what came before, and from what was going on a few miles to the west. Perhaps continuities over time and across borders should be given more attention. Despite the SED’s frequent attempts to convince its population that it offered them a tabula rasa on which to build a new society fashioned through a socialist alternative to capitalist modernity, the party was never able to fully overcome the

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<sup>32</sup> Rubin. *Synthetic Socialism*; Jonathan Zatin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

influence of tradition and the memory of the past.<sup>33</sup> Historians have also pointed out the degree to which East Germans made choices that undermined the regime's intended goals: youth listened to rock and roll music in underground clubs; family celebrations of the *Jugendweihe*, a secular coming of age ceremony, became increasingly materialistic and apolitical over time; some East Germans continued to purchase ornate wooden furniture, or clothes made from natural textiles, rather than items made from synthetic materials.<sup>34</sup>

An inability to completely divorce its visions of a socialist future from the traditions of the past – indeed, precisely the regime's explicit use of those traditions in its marketing of that future – ensured that cultural matters, like the taste of one's morning cup of coffee, could not only cause the regime continued political trouble, but could also directly threaten the SED's political authority. Such a challenge is precisely what the regime faced in the spring of 1977, when world coffee prices forced a series of decisions on the regime which inevitably brought East Germans to Angola, Ethiopia, Laos and Vietnam. Thus, it was the combination of economic, political, and *cultural* factors which irrevocably tied the GDR to world markets and global trade. There is a surprising dearth of historical literature about the GDR's foreign activities. Most of the scholarship on this topic came out of research prior to the regime's collapse, and while such work is useful for understanding how conversations about the GDR have evolved over time, scholarly debate has focused on the degree to which the GDR enjoyed autonomy from the Soviets, or attempted to gain recognition from Western countries (and failed

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<sup>33</sup> For instance, building projects in Mahrzahn were simultaneously hailed as a 'blank canvas' upon which to build socialism *and* as the fulfillment of German socialism's promise to workers to solve a housing dilemma that had existed since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As well, during construction, crews unearthed artefacts of the Second (and in some cases, First) World War – in effect literally digging up the past. See Eli Rubin. *Amnesiopolis*.

<sup>34</sup> Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); see also Betts. *Within Walls*; Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*.

until West Germany signed the Basic Treaty in 1972).<sup>35</sup> Following reunification, scholars began placing greater emphasis on the GDR's agency and motives in its dealings with the Federal Republic, or its capacity to influence Soviet political decisions.<sup>36</sup> Though highly influential, these works concentrated on the early years of the GDR, and part of the goal of this dissertation is to expand this scope by showing the GDR's global engagements in the latter half of its existence.

Much of the existing literature regarding international relations during the Cold War – including that of the GDR – is still dominated by high level politics and geostrategy. The metanarrative of global bipolarity emphasized the global “contest of power” which, argued Oscar

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<sup>35</sup> See for example David Childs' 1977 article “East German Foreign Policy: The Search for Recognition and Stability,” *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 32, no.2 (June 1977):334-351. Stefan Berger and Norman LaPorte, *Friendly Enemies: Britain and the GDR, 1949-1990* (New York: Berghahn, 2010). Berger and LaPorte contend that East Germany's attempts to persuade Great Britain to ignore Hallstein and establish official relations with the GDR failed because Great Britain had no interest in abandoning the far more economically lucrative relationship with the Federal Republic for a considerably more dubious and uncertain relationship with the GDR. In this vein, the GDR could never hope to pursue a ‘successful’ foreign policy because it would never be able to achieve its aims. Far more fruitful, in my mind, is work exploring unofficial relations, such as cultural and educational exchanges, tourism, and trade. For instance, Michael Scholz argues East Germany may not have managed to convince the Scandinavian countries to ignore Hallstein and recognize the GDR's status, but through a decades-long cooperative effort to hold cultural festivals in the North Sea Coastal region, the GDR fostered meaningful relationships with Finland, Norway and Sweden, which lead to these countries being among the very first to recognize the GDR within weeks of the Basic Treaty. See Michael Scholz, „East Germany's North European Policy Prior to International Recognition of the German Democratic Republic,” *Contemporary European History* 15, no.4 (Nov.2006): 553-57. Likewise, Gerd Horten's evidence suggests the GDR's open and vehement stance against the Vietnam War – however motivated by anti-American sentiment it was – in fact helped strengthen the SED's political legitimacy both at home and on the world stage, leading to East German representatives sitting on peace commissions at the United Nations. See Gerd Horten, “Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR Government and the ‘Vietnam Bonus’ of the Early 1970s,” in *German Studies Review* 36, no.3 (2013): 557-578. Likewise, recently, scholars have begun to explore the meaning of the GDR's relationship with the global south, specifically examining questions related to race relations. See Quinn Slobodian, ed. *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World. Protest, Culture and Society* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), and Christina Schwenkel, “Rethinking Asian Mobilities: Socialist Migration and Post-Socialist Repatriation of Vietnamese Contract Workers in East Germany,” *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no.2 (2014): 235–258. Finally, some studies have examined the GDR's long-term projects to build and manage hospitals in East Asia: projects which met with varying degrees of success, but nonetheless fostered meaningful relationships that lasted at least until the collapse of the GDR in 1989. See Young-sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> On the GDR's relations to West Germany, see M.E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, and Ostpolitik, 1969-1973* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Hope Harrison also wrote a highly influential account of how the SED manipulated the tensions stemming from mass migration to “Drive” the Soviets into building the Berlin Wall. See Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Sanchez-Sibony, is limiting, and actually presents a false understanding of the relationship between the superpowers and ‘middle’ or marginalized actors.<sup>37</sup> Instead, he has challenged Cold War scholars to consider the conflict as occurring within the context of increasing globalization. He emphasized the need to examine the ways in which the Soviets were servicing a variety of interests and aims, and the degree to which *economics* drove these relationships. While Soviet policy was certainly influenced by concerns of American hegemony, he argues scholars are too quick to discount other aims like sustainable trade relationships, regional stability, or diplomatic recognition for its Satellite states, which also formed the basis for Soviet foreign relations. What the Soviets considered a success or failure in international diplomacy, he suggests, could often have less to do with superpower power balances (a bipolar interpretation) than they did with pursuing these more finite sets of ambitions in specific regions.<sup>38</sup> Hoenik Kwon also argues against a uniform characterization of the cold war, noting “the bipolarized human community of the twentieth century experienced political bifurcation in radically different ways across societies” that defy a single narrative.<sup>39</sup> In a similar vein, Young-Sun Hong’s comparative study of East and West German humanitarian projects shows that ‘local events’ were not merely a side stage for the proxy wars of the global cold war. Rather, many local events “signify something beyond [themselves],” and are “capable of mediating between the global logic of superpower

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<sup>37</sup> See the introduction to Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Sanchez-Sibony is not alone in this regard. Recent works have begun to ask similar questions. See for example Tobias Rupprecht’s study of cultural exchange between the Soviet Union and Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s, from the perspective of the Latin Americans. Tobias Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin. Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015). Elizabeth Bishop argues that Soviet intents and plans for development policies cannot be taken at face value, but must be understood by examining the ‘back channels’ of cultural exchange between the Soviets and its partners. See Elizabeth Bishop, “Assuan 1959: Sowjetische Entwicklungspolitik—die Perspektive der ‘Gender-History,’” in *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt: UdSSR, Staatssozialismus und Antikolonialismus im Kalten Krieg 1945–1991*, ed. Andreas Hilger (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2009). On economic relations between the Soviets and the developing world, see Sara Lorenzini, “Comecon and the South in the years of détente: a study on East-South economic relations,” *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D’histoire* 21, no.2 (2014): 183-199.

<sup>39</sup> Hoenik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 6.

rivalry and local conflicts, which are implicated in this rivalry, but which cannot be reduced to it.”<sup>40</sup> Her work calls for scholars to “situate the space of German history – and that of Eastern Europe more generally – on a much larger global canvas.”<sup>41</sup>

This dissertation supports these three positions, as East Germany’s search for coffee in the global South reflected its own limited aims of securing goods and establishing lasting bilateral partnerships. Competition with the West certainly lay at the heart of why East Germany worked so hard to provide coffee, and thus geopolitics was an important part of the reason for the GDR’s interaction with the global south. But East Germany’s competition in a cultural war with the West hardly constituted its sole ambition in international affairs. Its trade agreements with Angola, Ethiopia, Laos and Vietnam demonstrate the GDR’s capacity to cultivate bilateral agreements, and navigate difficult negotiations in the pursuit of its finite aims. Politics and international reputation certainly mattered in these arrangements; it was with domestic stability that the SED remained principally concerned.

### *Coffee in East German Culture, Politics and Society*

East German communists specifically went out of their way to weave tradition with what they called modernity, promoting coffee drinking as a deeply traditional activity, but one which could also be improved by a rationalized production method, and modern household appliances that would hasten the brewing process. Indeed, at times it was precisely coffee’s resonance as a long-standing tradition that made the beverage so useful: official discourse about the demands and pressures that modern urban living placed on citizens’ time reminded East Germans to still make time for their morning cup of coffee, whose stimulating effects better prepared one to face

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<sup>40</sup> Hong, *Cold War Germany*, 3

<sup>41</sup> Hong, *Cold War Germany*, 319

the day's challenges, and because the act of preparing and drinking a cup temporarily removed oneself from these external pressures.

Coffee thus reveals that tradition was not political anathema, but rather a useful tool for the regime to deploy. This dissertation does not directly seek to draw comparison between the GDR and the Federal Republic, nor between the GDR and previous incarnations of the German state, but the evidence presented here raises questions about the degree to which pre-existing cultural traditions remained important not only for Germans in their everyday lives, but for state officials seeking ways to authenticate their visions of a socialist utopia. The evidence suggests that to both East Germans and the government, questions of personal taste mattered, memories of the past mattered, and international reputation mattered. My dissertation explores this quotidian relationship between ideology and material culture in East Germany by focusing on a single consumer good: coffee, while demonstrating the important ways in which this commodity – and the cultural practices and values surrounding it – connected East Germany to the global economy in ways the regime could not escape. Although the dissertation is firmly a cultural history of East Germany, it explicitly ties culture to politics, economics, and diplomatic history to argue that the GDR's place in a global community cannot be understood without carefully integrating these varied historiographical approaches.

As a foodstuff of minimal nutritional value, linked in part to older notions of bourgeois civility, and perennially in short supply, coffee seems an odd commodity for the regime to have promoted. In Germany, coffee belongs to a category of foods known as *Genussmittel* – a term used to describe stimulants and luxuries or delicacies – and this designation allowed the beverage to function as both an object of everyday need (a stimulant to which East Germans were addicted) and as a luxury (a pleasurable beverage through which people could indulge in sensory

experiences). When coffee first spread across Europe during the 17<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>h</sup> Centuries, ‘real’ coffee – that is to say, bean coffee – “was the aristocrat of coffee” according to Wolfgang Schivelbusch, a drink consumed only in elite circles.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, as Brian Cowen has shown, coffee’s “infusion into the fabric of European consumer society” was not a sudden or rapid event. Coffee’s emergence was “less revolutionary,” argues Cowen, and “more evolutionary,” relying on people gradually adopting a taste for both the beverage and the changes in urban sociability taking place around them.<sup>43</sup> German coffee houses grew in number through the 18th century, but struggled against popular perceptions that such places were little more than “breeding places for immorality and light-heartedness.”<sup>44</sup>

The industrial revolution facilitated coffee’s emergence in the everyday lives of the working class, in particular as a drink that could increase sobriety and alertness in urban workforces.<sup>45</sup> In Germany after 1800, as larger populations migrated into cities, women – at least, women in the upper classes, with leisure time – started meeting in groups for coffee, and these casual meetings came to be known by the term *Kaffeeklatsch* (‘coffee gossip’) for the spirited discussions (and gossip) that circulated.<sup>46</sup> The *Kaffeeklatsch* provided women with a socially acceptable “arena for her new role as a free talker and free thinker” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the coffeehouse remained a space predominantly for men and working class women.<sup>47</sup>

Increased working hours in factories left less time to cook and prepare meals, explains Mark

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<sup>42</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants*. trans. David Jacobson (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 79. See also Günter Wiegelmann, „Das Eindringen des Kaffees in die Werktags- und Festmahlzeiten,“ in *Alltags- und Festspeisen in Mitteleuropa*, ed. Günter Wiegelmann und Barbara Krug-Richter (Münster and New York: Waxmann, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Brian Cowen, *The Social Life of Coffee: The emergence of the British coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Hans-Joachim Schulze, *Ey! Wie schmeckt der Coffee süße : Johann Sebastian Bachs Kaffee-Kantate in ihrer Zeit*. Ill. Frank Wahle (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1987), 8

<sup>45</sup> Britta Zietemann, “Germany”, in *Coffee: A Comprehensive Guide to the Bean, the Beverage, and the Industry*, ed. Robert W. Thurston, Jonathan Morris and Shawn Steiman (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 201.

<sup>46</sup> Joel Shapira, David Shapira, and Karl Shapira, *The Book of Coffee & Tea*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1982), 23.

<sup>47</sup> Shapira et al, *The Book of Coffee & Tea*, 23.



Pendergrast, and to quell “the gnawing pangs of hunger,” many workers turned to a cup of coffee, which also stimulated brain activity. Due to these large-scale demographic and social shifts, he argues, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “the drink of the aristocracy had become the necessary drug of the masses, and morning coffee replaced beer soup for breakfast.”<sup>48</sup> Yet workers typically relied on the far less expensive ersatz or *Malzkaffee* (a sweetened form of chicory substitute in Germany). Coffee brands with higher caffeine content, or those offering richer flavours, remained expensive, and a symbol of social status – or a very important occasion, like a holiday or family celebration.<sup>49</sup>

This symbolic distinction between ‘luxury’ and ‘need’ remained throughout the twentieth century, and became especially pronounced during the post-war period, when coffee became important for the SED’s attempt to reshape patterns of consumption and to recast the meanings of consumer exchange along socialist lines. Scholars have noted the SED’s authority relied in part on its ability to cultivate an authentic East German material culture based on citizens internalizing the regime’s meanings of “luxury” and “desire.”<sup>50</sup> The regime typically discouraged luxuries and delicacies for “serving wants” rather than “meeting needs,” which German communists feared led to the “irrational consumption” of certain goods for the sake of increasing one’s social status.<sup>51</sup> ‘Rational’ socialist consumers “would find pleasure in the beauty of utility” and limit their desires “voluntarily within ‘rational consumption norms.’”<sup>52</sup> In its ideological re-

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<sup>48</sup> Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 38.

<sup>49</sup> During the early 20th century, argues Schivelbusch, “the family that drank genuine ‘bean coffee’ assumed higher status than those who drank ersatz coffee” prior to the 1950s, see Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise*, 79.

<sup>50</sup> Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics & Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008; See also Sandrine Kott, *Communism Day-to-Day: State Enterprises in East German Society*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Ina Merkel, “Luxus im Sozialismus: Eine Widersinnige Fragestellung?” in Reinhold Reith und Torsten Meyer (hg.). „*Luxus und Konsum*“: *Eine historische Annäherung*, Münster: Waxmann, 2003, 221-36.

<sup>52</sup> David Crowley, Susan E. Reid, *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 22.

categorization of consumer goods, the regime distinguished between ‘real’ and ‘false’ needs. Socialist leaders identified the capitalist market as inherently exploitative, since it manipulated individuals’ understanding of their own needs, ‘false desires’ that gave birth to commodity fetishism.<sup>53</sup> During the GDR’s ‘consumer turn’ from 1958 onward, official parlance held that a consumer product’s value also stemmed from its capacity to reflect the politically acceptable ‘socialist’ aesthetic, which emphasized a product’s function, not its form.

Placing coffee at the centre of its analysis, my dissertation complicates existing historiographical trends by revealing the intersections between consumer culture and the GDR’s involvement in the developing world. Cultural history reveals a great deal about daily life in the GDR, and helps clarify the nature of the dictatorship within that context. I take a further step by arguing that culture – manifested by East Germans’ affinity for good tasting coffee – in fact drove social, political and economic policy in the GDR, and ultimately created the impetus for large scale trade and development projects in the global south. While scholars agree that the regime’s inability to maintain consumer supply challenged its political legitimacy, coffee’s importance lay in more than simply its availability.<sup>54</sup> State planners took steps to promote coffee as a good consumed not only for its value as a stimulant but also for enjoyment. Enjoying a warm cup of coffee represented one of the ways in which East Germans participated in a modern socialist society, and a global coffee economy. As Melissa Caldwell reminds us, scholars have identified many of the ways foods and foodways help shape social relationships, and can reinforce cultural values through their consumption.<sup>55</sup> By inserting coffee drinking practices into

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<sup>53</sup> Zatin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*; Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand: East Germany Between Productivism and Consumerism, 1948-1961* (Harvard University Press, 2005); Zatin, *The Currency of Socialism* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*.

<sup>55</sup> Melissa Caldwell, ed. *Food & Everyday Life in the Postsocialist World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 3

its messages of a bright socialist future based on modernity, progress and culture, the SED used coffee as part of its long-term goals of reforming society along socialist lines.

Coffee also adds to our understanding of the state's attempts to maintain power and authority by enacting tangible improvements to living conditions. During the 1950s, as the country faced increasing rates of migration, the regime increased its efforts to make socialism more appealing. With Party Chairman Walter Ulbricht's proclamation in July 1958 that the GDR would "overtake the West without catching up," the regime pledged to place greater emphasis on consumer goods production to better meet the material needs of the population. This 'consumer turn' especially sought to stem the tide of young, professional citizens leaving the country, which reached 3.5 million by the end of the decade.<sup>56</sup> Part of this turn involved the introduction of new, *East German* brands of coffee in 1959, a specific attempt to both bring coffee consumption under state control, and signal measurable material improvements.

Especially after the erection of the Berlin wall in August 1961 closed off options for escape, the regime increased its efforts to convince East Germans of the benefits of socialism. In the GDR, images and articles in state-run periodicals presented coffee drinking as an enjoyable, normal part of daily life, blending tradition and modern 'socialist values' to simultaneously draw on a 'usable past' to promote a bright socialist future. In doing so, these images fostered and encouraged East Germans' perceptions not only of what they should come to expect but of what was expected of them. Coffee was an object of desire, of comfort, and stimulation, and its attendant practices reinforced existing mores about society, tradition, and sociability. Moreover, coffee functioned as a vessel through which new meanings about social relationships could be proposed, and competing or conflicting meanings were assaulted. In the GDR, coffee was simultaneously ubiquitous and conspicuous: it was both a stimulant and a luxury, but was also

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<sup>56</sup> Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 42.

something used every day. While the regime warned against coffee's potentially negative effects on one's health, official media also promoted its consumption as an intrinsically "German" activity. Meanwhile, the beverage itself was never German; coffee tied the GDR to the world market and defied the regime's attempts to limit its reliance on the capitalist West.

Access to coffee was already a political matter in the immediate postwar years, when the regime sought to bring rampant hoarding and smuggling under control, in part by trying to supply the people with coffee so that they would not have to turn to the black market. Coffee drinking became part of an official discourse about a modern, socialist 'living culture.' State rhetoric about coffee perpetuated three key ideas: first, that coffee drinking was a fundamentally European activity, drawing on the rich history of associated consumption practices to find a usable past; second, that coffee drinking was not only compatible with, but in fact aided in the construction of a modern socialist utopia; and third, that coffee drinking was a pleasurable activity inherent to leisure and relaxation. Coffee ads, labels and trademarks contributed to the legitimation of socialist consumer practices by drawing on tradition to earn consumers' trust. Although the beans were never German, the state put a lot of effort into 'Germanizing' the cultural practices surrounding coffee, drawing on what Pence and Betts call a 'patriotic vernacular' of German culture and tradition.<sup>57</sup> Just as East Germans internalized socialism by partaking in worker-brigade culture, or when they donned synthetic textiles, they did so as well when they drank a cup of coffee which was produced by the state, in cups of East German porcelain, in cafes promoted as the hallmarks of modern urban life.

Although this dissertation compliments existing work suggesting East Germany and other societies in East Central Europe can be examined as 'alternative modernities,' it offers a qualification to the concept by identifying the uneasy relationship between the official model of

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<sup>57</sup> Pence and Betts, *Socialist Modern*, 14.

Socialism, and existing cultural practices born long before the tumultuous decades of war and economic depression in the first half of the twentieth century. While East Germans faced a constant struggle against frequent goods shortages and a lack of variety in available products (such as size variation in clothing), Germans' expectations not only for coffee, but for coffee of high quality and appealing taste, drove their perceptions of value in their daily consumer choices.

Perceptions of value proved politically volatile when the regime faced an acute shortage of coffee in the late 1970s. After July 1975, there was a worldwide hike in coffee prices following a Black Frost that killed over two thirds of Brazil's coffee trees. By June 1977 the prices for beans had quadrupled, creating a crisis for the GDR which lacked sufficient hard currency to meet its import needs. In response, the governing Socialist Unity Party (SED) decided on 28 June to remove the most affordable brand "*Kosta*" from store shelves, replacing it with '*Kaffee-Mix*,' a blend of 51 per cent coffee and 49 per cent surrogate – chicory, sugar beet, and rye. Public reaction to the changes was overwhelmingly negative, resulting in approximately fourteen thousand petition letters, a number of strikes, and above all, a general boycott: several districts reported that customers refused to purchase the new brand, to the extent that in Karl-Marx-Stadt, retailers faced a stockpile of over 11.6 t of *Kaffee-Mix* by 15 August.<sup>58</sup> Complaints ranged from questions of price, adequate public information regarding the changes, and above all, to the taste of the product. When East Germans rejected *Kaffee-Mix*, they instead purchased what little they could of the remaining (and more expensive) brands (*Rondo* and *Mona*), the recipes of which had also been slightly altered. This behaviour guaranteed the rapid depletion of coffee reserves, not only jeopardizing the state's plans to save hard currency, but effectively rendering the state's conservation measures a complete loss. If East Germans were only going to

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<sup>58</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY30- IV B 2-5-999, "Information über Meinungen und Äußerungen der Bevölkerung über *Kaffee-Mix*," Karl Marx Stadt, Aug 3 1977, 3.

purchase brands with high coffee content, the regime had no alternative but to find new sources of raw coffee without increasing hard currency expenditures. The regime hastily negotiated trade deals with newly independent, coffee-producing nations such as Angola, Ethiopia, Laos and Vietnam, specifically to find new suppliers of raw coffee.

In tracing the causes of the coffee crisis, and the GDR's efforts to respond in ways that did not undermine its legitimacy, the dissertation also traces the GDR's global entanglements. A perpetual lack of hard currency, an international coffee market that operated through specific structures such as the International Coffee Organization - specifically aimed at limiting non-member consumption rights - and a growing debt crisis by the late 1970s all hampered the GDR's ability to acquire, much less supply, coffee beans. The need for coffee beans brought the GDR into contact with the global south in ways it had not anticipated; from arms trading in Angola and Ethiopia, to long-term development projects in Laos and Vietnam. The example of coffee and the trade agreements it spurred suggests the need to move beyond questions about the degree to which the GDR could overcome its diplomatic isolation, or the extent of East German autonomy from the Soviets, toward questions about the nature of East Germany's own foreign policy agenda, how it saw itself in the world, and how it contributed to the processes of globalization. The dissertation examines the GDR's attempts to cultivate not only economic exchanges, but how planners, party officials, and trade officials saw in these economic partnerships the opportunity for *cultural diplomacy*. In part, these trade deals were extremely pragmatic: East German representatives worked hard to secure the highest volume of coffee given the GDR's capacity to export finished goods and materials. But these exchanges also involved deeply political, cultural and ideological discussions both among German officials and with their counterparts. The trade deals were founded on the basis of a fundamentally ideological

commitment to international socialism, specifically the desire to frame trade on the grounds of mutual respect and benefit between partners. Forming partnerships in the developing world served far more than an economic end; rather, these relationships formed an important part of the SED's attempts to improve the GDR's image on the global stage, as well as convince Germans of their vital role in an international community.

At the same time, the SED's public commitment to international solidarity with the socialist and non-aligned world at times limited German traders' ability to negotiate favourable terms, as coffee-producing trading partners used the GDR's own rhetoric in order to manipulate the GDR into agreeing to less than advantageous terms.<sup>59</sup> The GDR thus performed a delicate balancing act between securing the material needs of its population, improving its own international reputation, and its genuine commitment to international solidarity. By highlighting the Germans' attempts to prioritize the GDR's own interests, and the ways in which Germans' understanding of their role vis-à-vis the developing world was still influenced by notions of race, the dissertation explores the limits to the GDR's claims to be acting in 'solidarity' with the global south. In its dealings with coffee producing countries in the developing world, the GDR proved capable of allowing its own immediate concerns to supersede the requirements of solidarity when necessary, occasionally acting in ways not all that dissimilar from capitalist practices the SED so vehemently disavowed.

I offer a qualification to our understanding of international relations during the Cold War, by pushing discussions about East German foreign relations beyond issues of relative autonomy and thereby challenging binary interpretations of Cold War relations. Concentrating solely on political attempts to establish diplomatic relations and official status through regular channels

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<sup>59</sup> This was especially true in the case of Ethiopia, where Haile Mariam explicitly used this language when placing limits on the coffee East Germany could import after 1978. See chapter 3.

ignores the success East Germany found in other areas of foreign relations, including cultural and educational exchanges, trade agreements, and so on. The GDR's success or failure in foreign policy should not be determined by its ability to overcome Hallstein to gain recognition, but rather by the degree to which the GDR fostered meaningful long-term cultural and economic relationships with countries around the world. The coffee agreements allow us to examine the GDR's relations with countries outside of the strictures of COMECON and the West – and certainly, there were clear limits and constraints to these deals, not least the geopolitical considerations of Soviet interests in the affected areas – but the agreements were negotiated and implemented by the GDR itself.

While coffee can help reinsert the GDR into a global history of the twentieth century, scholars must take care neither to overstate German involvement nor, as Young-Sun Hong warns, “romantic[ise] East German rhetoric of anti-imperialist solidarity.”<sup>60</sup> A considerable amount of pragmatism and self-interest guided East Germany's foreign policy. East Germany's official policy with regard to trade with developing countries originated as a response to the rise of humanitarian aid projects of Western capitalist countries in the 1960s. Critical of the limits to these projects, the GDR accused the West of using humanitarian aid projects for their own benefit, targeting ‘useful’ industries rather than leading a genuine effort to improve the developing nation's economy. East Germany tried to present itself – both at home and abroad – as an alternative to the exploitative practices of which it accused Western capitalist forms of trade and humanitarian aid. Casting its coffee agreements as demonstrations of its solidarity with the Third World allowed the GDR to use these projects as ‘advertisements’ for socialism.<sup>61</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup> Hong, *Cold War Germany*, 320.

<sup>61</sup> Dr. Rolf Gutermuth, “Freier Welthandel setzt friedliche Koexistenz voraus,” *Neues Deutschland*, 22 March 1964, 7. Hans Joachim Döring also discusses the GDR's conceptualization of ‘Handel statt Hilfe’ in his *Es geht um unser Existenz: Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien* (Berlin: Ch



GDR conceptualized trade as a means to build up developing nations by stimulating their economies as broadly as possible, through “mutually beneficial” cooperation that aimed at making developing countries economically and socially self-sufficient.

East German trade, then, played an important political role in the larger context of the Cold War, as an active means by which to present the GDR as an alternative to Western capitalism. When it came to the coffee agreements themselves, though no less framed in the language and tone of mutual respect and mutual benefit, the Germans nonetheless prioritized their own interests. East Germany saw itself as the senior partner in its coffee transactions, and its officials often assumed a paternalistic attitude toward producing nations in the global south. East Germany’s coffee entanglements operated on the basis of a fundamentally Eurocentric assumption: that East Germany’s position as an advanced industrial nation gave the GDR not only the ability, but also the ideological, moral and political imperatives to guide ‘less developed’ nations toward development along socialist lines. I therefore argue that the GDR’s coffee projects also constituted part of a ‘civilizing mission’ in the eyes of its political and industry leaders.

### *Brewing a socialist society in East Germany*

Chapter one begins by examining the culture of shortages within the Soviet Occupation Zone and GDR, showing the lengths to which East Germans proved willing to go in order to obtain this highly desirable good. Predominantly available only on the black market, coffee created a host of problems for authorities in the Soviet Zone of occupation and – after 1949 – the

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links Verlag, 1999). Also, at the 1955 Bandung conference, a range of third world countries founded the “Third World Movement”, which sought to create a united front against the exploitation of colonial and neo-colonial forces, to level the terms of trade. See Hong, chapter 1; “Hat die Erde Brote für Alle?,” *Für Dich* 41, no.2 (October 1968): 26-27.

German Democratic Republic. State officials saw coffee shortages – and peoples’ reliance on the black market – as a challenge to their political authority and legitimacy. Finding a way to supply coffee to the population – even during a time when this task would prove difficult – was a way to demonstrate the new regime’s capacity to stabilize the economy and daily life. When food supply stabilized and rationing ended in 1958, the regime undertook an extensive re-construction of its coffee roasting industry, specifically to introduce and increase supply of ‘East’ German coffee. When the regime publicly committed to maintaining a constant supply of desired consumer goods under its 1971 policy of ‘Real Existing Socialism’, it further cemented the perceived links between coffee supply and the SED’s political stability.

In the second chapter, I trace in detail the effects of a severe Brazilian frost of 1975 on the price of coffee worldwide, and on the GDR’s ability to maintain a sufficient supply. To understand both East Germans’ vehement reaction and the regime’s response, historians need to look beyond issues of consumer shortages. I argue it was not merely a question of sufficient supply, but rather one of quality, that prompted the public’s outrage and jeopardized the regime’s claims to authority. There seems to be a tendency among historians, especially when drawing direct comparisons between the two German states, to privilege West German ‘success’ in contradistinction to East German ‘failure.’ In particular in terms of consumption history, consumption tends to be a tool with which to demonstrate the ways in which East Germany did not – and could never – live up to the material prosperity of the West, and moreover, that East Germans longed for Western material prosperity above all else. Thus, when the regime was unable to fulfill these material fantasies, it lost legitimacy, and the (already tenuous) support of its people. A recent study on coffee drinking in East and West Germany argued that in the Federal Republic, coffee became an object of mass consumption, but remained a luxury in the

GDR because of its poor quality and scarcity. As Monika Sigmund has pointed out, in the GDR, being able to secure coveted western coffee could convey a certain social status upon those East Germans capable of offering this ‘more desirable’ good to their guests.<sup>62</sup>

Ultimately, Sigmund’s argument is more about pointing out the asymmetries between East and West German coffee consumption. Her implication is that the GDR failed to make coffee a mass consumer good because it tried to adopt western modes of consumption, but could not provide the same model due to the limitations of both the planned economy and to trade. Yet she also argues “because the people in East and West Germany could relate to the same coffee traditions, it was hardly surprising that practices in consumption and in regard to luxury goods in the 1950s resembled one another in many ways, despite very different consumer levels.”<sup>63</sup> If cultural experiences vis-à-vis coffee drinking remained so similar in both East and West, how can one set of experiences represent success while another failure? Rather than suggest that the GDR’s experience with coffee was an abject failure by default, I insist that East Germans’ encounters with coffee should be interpreted on their own merits and terms. Drinking a cup of this beverage could simultaneously reconnect them with values and traditions stretching back centuries, while helping them adjust to the dramatic changes brought on by the modern demands of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and those experiences warrant examination. Finally, when complaining about *Kaffee-Mix*, East Germans were upset that it did not taste good *compared to the brand it replaced*, not compared to coffee found in other countries.

Chapter Three expands scholarly consideration of East Germany’s place in a globalizing world, exploring the GDR’s attempts to secure coffee from decolonized countries in the global south. I briefly discuss the history of East German foreign policy generally and with the

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<sup>62</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 300.

<sup>63</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 97.

developing world specifically so as to contextualize its later agreements, addressing the (limited) scholarly work on East German foreign relations. The GDR attempted to use the coffee deals to showcase its own achievements as a modern state, and thereby assume a leading role in guiding developing nations towards constructing a socialist modernity. My dissertation focuses on four case studies: In Angola and Ethiopia, the GDR provided weapons for coffee, while contracts with Laos and Vietnam lead to lengthy development projects to ‘modernize’ each country’s coffee industry. Coffee provided the parties on both sides of these agreements with a means to address their own specific concerns, assigning a degree of agency to both parties which is largely absent in current historiographical analysis of smaller nations during the Cold War. The GDR invested heavily in these developing countries’ coffee industries, sending technical equipment, along with agricultural and technical experts to help these countries meet East Germans’ import needs. The GDR’s lack of hard currency meant they approached these agreements with a considerable amount of pragmatism and self-interest, but also required compromise and collaboration with their partners.

By following the threads of coffee’s story over the entire course of the GDR’s existence, the dissertation helps demonstrate the changes over time to state policies regarding consumption and material culture, to cultural mindsets regarding time, space and social interaction, and to views about the GDR’s place in the world. At the same time, the long view also demonstrates that while East German society experienced a number of important shifts over its forty year existence, many cultural traditions remained in place, particularly with regard to gastronomy and the expectations associated with hospitality. Coffee shows that in the GDR, ideas regarding one’s respectability, though officially couched in terms of political attitude and mentality, to a large extent remained tied to interpersonal relationships, and expectations regarding social behaviour

that stretched back decades before the GDR's founding. The regime attempted to create a 'new' society, changing citizens' values such that an individual willingly gave up personal desire and ambition, instead prioritizing the good of the collective. Historians have shown that to some extent, in certain areas, these goals were successful.

Yet coffee highlights the regime's willingness to draw upon traditions when convenient to link their visions of socialist modernity with themes and practices that were familiar to Germans. Indeed, the official messages in advertising and policy regarding coffee aimed precisely at encouraging Germans to recognize that despite all the changes around them, the simple pleasures in life had not disappeared. East Germans could still enjoy a warm cup of coffee in the same ways to which they were accustomed, while state planners worked to ensure East German coffee possessed a consistent smell, taste and appearance – effectively reinforcing the public's association of particular labels with specific tastes, and encouraging their expectations regarding those aromas and flavours would remain consistent over time. In other words, continuities not only remained in place, but were in fact part of ideological, political, and cultural fabric of what made up East Germany society: coffee was political and coffee was personal. The state's inability to maintain that consistency over time – and indeed, its deliberate adulteration of that quality during the coffee crisis of 1977 – contributed to growing public concern about the viability of the socialist project. If the regime could not provide so basic an item as coffee, how could it claim to uphold, much less speak of improving, living standards for its people—which formed the primary basis upon which the success of socialism's viability rested?

Finally, by connecting the dynamic consumer culture with regard to coffee within the GDR to the GDR's participation in a global coffee economy, I qualify and complicate our

understanding of the importance of East German consumer culture not only for the regime's own political and social stability, or for East Germans' own self-consciousness, but also for the global Cold War and political economy. Coffee proved an important catalyst for the GDR's activities in the global south, but this engagement stemmed from more than merely the need to acquire a particular good: it was East Germans' own personal taste preferences, mixed with State Planners' misconceptions and misjudging of these taste preferences, that sparked this need in the first place. Although the trade deals themselves abruptly ended with the GDR's collapse, they nonetheless represent large scale development projects that, beyond bringing coffee into the GDR, contributed to East Germans' understandings of the GDR's place in the world, its international reputation, and East Germany's own self-image. Indeed, because some of these coffee development projects in fact led to broader economic and social change in the host countries that in fact expanded after 1990, coffee helps remind us of East Germany's role in shaping global economic developments, as well as highlighting its lingering legacy, particularly in those countries in which it invested so heavily.

## Chapter 1: Brewing Socialism: Coffee and material culture in East Germany, 1949-1975

### Introduction

A sense of dramatic flair infused East German journalist Jupp's description of his experience in "Espresso Hungaria," a small café on Berlin's Stalinallee, in fall 1961. "I can fully relate to the barista who succumbed to the graceful seduction of this dearly beloved drink," wrote Jupp of the coffee, "which also inspired the words in the customer book, 'I'd say the coffee here is the best in Berlin.'"<sup>64</sup> Jupp applied equally flowery language to his depiction of the mood at Espresso Hungaria, drawing the reader into an evening scene:

There you sit with me at a small table inside Espresso Hungaria. It's evening. The stores are closed. Across the street the neon sign for 'Möbel-Passage' [a furniture store] invites you over. Outside on the asphalt median of Stalinallee, parked cars reflect the colourful neon light. The café is full; the tables are occupied. Girls nibble biscuits, four young men spoon ice cream with cherries, a mother rocks a stroller with her left hand, while her right brings a cup to her mouth. A young man writes – a love poem? Modern sociability [*Gemütlichkeit*], entertaining relaxation, sweet reflection...<sup>65</sup>

Jupp's article conveyed some important ideas about drinking coffee, and he weaved the night life of this café into the surrounding urban landscape, presenting coffee drinking as a 'modern' experience of comfort, relaxation and sociability. Espresso Hungaria's location on Stalinallee was important for at least two reasons: first, the massive apartment complexes lining this street had been built in the early 1950s as part of the regime's attempt to address the housing problem and to provide a showpiece of Socialist engineering and prosperity. Second, because the Stalinallee apartments were expensive, and reserved for over-producing 'activists', 'innovators' of industry and other "heroes of labour" [*Helden der Arbeit*], they extended to the café an air of

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<sup>64</sup> Jupp, "Espresso Hungaria," *Berliner Zeitung*, 4 November 1961, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Jupp, "Espresso Hungaria," *Berliner Zeitung*, 4 November 1961, p.3. Other possible definitions for *Gemütlichkeit* include 'comfort,' or 'coziness.'

privilege and exclusivity.<sup>66</sup> Yet the invitation to join the ‘full’ café also suggested that coffee drinking was meant to be a leisure and communal activity: after all, the stores were closed and the workday complete. In turn, Jupp emphasized elements of the modern, such as the image of neon lights casting their colourful hues onto the cars - the quintessential symbol of the ‘modern luxury good’ - parked on the *paved* streets. To Jupp, Espresso Hungaria was “a small paradise of diversion with original recipes, specialities, at popular prices. To cultivate and construct such a paradise is a beautiful task, a valuable, exemplary contribution to the social life of the capital.”<sup>67</sup>

By noting the café’s location on Stalinallee and the affordable prices of its menu items, Jupp celebrated the café as an achievement of Socialism. At the same time, the overall tone of the piece clearly emphasized the café as a pleasurable experience; Espresso Hungaria’s “exemplary contribution” to Socialist society was its atmosphere of “modern comfort” which it provided. East Germans were meant to view coffee drinking as an enjoyable experience which depended on comfort, relaxation, and “the best coffee” available. Yet the article’s optimism also came at an important – and for many East Germans, uncertain – time. Published only three months after the erection of the Berlin Wall in August, his message of the comforts and achievements of socialism seem at odds with the closure of the borders and the sealing off of flight to the West. The article mimics a theme present in East German media, challenging the Federal Republic’s claim to representing the only legitimate German state, the East German leadership eagerly sought to make the GDR as appealing a place to live as possible.<sup>68</sup> While one cannot be certain of either Jupp’s motives or his directives, articles like these claimed that life

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<sup>66</sup> Doris Müller, “Die Stalinallee in der politischen Propaganda im ersten Jahr des ‘Nationalen Aufbauprogramms Berlin 1952,” in *Parteiauftrag. Ein neues Deutschland. Bilder, Rituale und Symbole der frühen DDR*, ed. Dieter Vorsteher (Berlin, 1997); Greg Castillo, “Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (April 2005): 261-288; Joachim Palutzki. *Architektur in der DDR*. Berlin: Riemer, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Jupp, “Espresso Hungaria,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 4 November 1961, p.3.

<sup>68</sup> Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p.42.



could be better under socialism, and that alternatives to Western capitalism were not only possible, but beneficial, to East Germans. Although Jupp's article encouraged East Germans to imagine themselves enjoying a cup of coffee in the ambiance of a modern café, the supply of coffee was hardly guaranteed in 1961. In a front-page article earlier the same year, Jupp's newspaper asked readers "do you like to drink a cup of coffee? Surely. But have you put any thought into where the coffee comes from?" The article explained the delicate balance between imports and exports on which the GDR relied for such goods, emphasizing that the GDR's ability to import goods like coffee required German export goods to be of the highest quality "on which our international reputation depends."<sup>69</sup>

Together, these two *Berliner Zeitung* articles exemplify the story of coffee drinking in the GDR in a number of ways. First, each tied coffee drinking to the achievements of Socialism, both in terms of workers' equal access to consumer goods, and of the domestic production on which that access relied. Coffee was not a given, but it was a product to which the regime committed resources, tying its political legitimacy to fulfilling its promise to improve living standards. Second, both articles took it for granted that Germans enjoyed their coffee. Coffee was best consumed for pleasure, in relaxing surroundings, whether alone or with companions – and above all, the coffee was meant to taste *good*. While scholars agree that the regime's inability to maintain the supply of consumer goods challenged its political legitimacy, coffee's importance lay in more than simply its availability.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Lothar Görne, "Kontrolle und Hilfe," *Berliner Zeitung*, 8 April 1961, p.1.

<sup>70</sup> Ina Merkel argues that consumption played a vital role in shaping expectations about improving living standards, a goal to which the SED committed itself, thus tying their political legitimacy directly to their ability to improve those living conditions. See *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999); Mark Landsman argues that while consumerism proved a constant thorn in the regime's side, "the maintenance of power required periodic concessions to consumerism." See his *Dictatorship and Demand: East Germany Between Productivism and Consumerism, 1948-1961* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), particularly p.222; Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum: Kaffeekonsum in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014).

This chapter complements these positions, arguing that by inserting the beverage into its own vision of socialist life, the regime emphasized coffee's long history in Germany, in the hopes of convincing consumers of socialism's superior capacity to improve living standards over capitalism. But the story is not simply one of sufficient supply; these messages, rather than convince East Germans that coffee was a 'false desire', in fact encouraged the consumption of coffee as a staple of everyday life, fostering a sense of entitlement among the population for a *quality* cup of coffee that was *supposed* to be enjoyed. Judd Stitzel argued that, in viewing consumption as a "manipulable process of managing needs fulfillment," the SED's optics blinded officials to the reality that social practices shape expectations, and perceptions of demand and value.<sup>71</sup> Providing consistent tasting brands of coffee, and working towards making them available to all Germans, helped 'democratize' access to a reliable product, and formed the regime's approach of managing the 'need' for coffee. This project of making coffee 'socialist,' I argue, in fact led East Germans to value their coffee based on their own personal taste preferences. Furthermore, by tying the social practices surrounding coffee drinking to its visions of participation in a modern socialist utopia, the state also encouraged East Germans' expectations that, among other improvements to their material lives, access to a pleasant tasting cup of coffee was hardly a luxury, but rather a staple of their everyday lives.

In order to argue that coffee became a highly politicized priority for the regime, the chapter traces the return of coffee, from a lengthy period of shortage and substitute products, to its presence as an object of everyday life by the late 1960s. Real bean coffee had been largely absent or scarcely available in Germany since the First World War, and this decades-long scarcity imbued it with considerable cultural value in the immediate postwar period. In a situation in

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<sup>71</sup> Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany, 1948-1971* (New York: Berg, 2005), p.144.

which bitter, tasteless – and expensive – Ersatz substitutes were the only kinds of coffee most Germans could find, having the right connections to access real bean coffee became a status symbol, as well as a valuable currency on the black market.

Second, the chapter examines the state's efforts to fulfill popular demand for coffee, attempts which were frequently fraught with challenges through the 1950s and early 1960s. After 1949, the regime focused its investment on heavy industry, all but ignoring daily consumer needs until the introduction of the New Course in 1953, through which the regime committed to increasing the supply of consumer goods.<sup>72</sup> Even here, coffee remained a low priority until the supply of basic food stuffs stabilized in 1958. At this point, state planners launched a program to bring coffee to the population, including the introduction of new brands, and elaborate advertising campaigns. Still, the return of roasted coffee was bedevilled by supply shortages, and debates within the industry regarding whether investment should be directed toward maximizing the quantity, or quality, of East German coffee.

Third, the chapter argues that over the next decade, through various media – newspapers, magazines, cook books and household advice manuals– official discourse inserted coffee into the state's visions of a modern socialist way of life.<sup>73</sup> State publications rooted the experience of drinking coffee in German – and indeed European – tradition, simultaneously finding a 'useable past' that reminded Germans of their connection to a much older culture, one that predated the upheavals of two world wars. In turn, the state connected this useable past to a modern socialist 'living culture' that deliberately inserted East Germany into to a broader and older European

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<sup>72</sup> Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 182-183.

<sup>73</sup> Household advice books are a rich source of material on everyday life in the GDR. For examples of their use, see Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private life in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the family, and communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially her discussion of these books as a means to reinforce bourgeois gender roles within East German households on pp.191-193.

identity.<sup>74</sup> Hundreds of articles in the regime's own widely circulating periodicals such as *Kultur im Heim* and *Wohnen* advised citizens on modern designs for the home, which often featured a shining white porcelain coffee service in a prominent location. East German media praised coffee for its 'reproductive powers' on account of its stimulating effects, particularly in discussions – both official and unofficial – about adapting to the broad social and cultural changes brought about by modern life. Urban dwellers in particular appeared in state media as living under 'increasingly hectic conditions' such as increased participation in the workforce and a loss of free time. Neither these tensions between a hectic lifestyle and relaxation, nor the solutions to these problems, were new; nor were they unique to East Germany. These kinds of issues constituted part of a 'modern dilemma' experienced throughout Europe. East Germany's answers to these problems often reflected approaches in the West, suggesting that East and West Germans shared similar experiences as they each encountered important cultural shifts in the second half of the Twentieth Century.

The story of consumption in Eastern European socialism is not just about scarcity and shortage; for the people living there, consumption was an experience of their everyday lives, and how they encountered the foods they ate, the goods they bought, tells us a great deal about their expectations, social interactions and personal desires. The practices of their everyday lives played a considerable role in shaping those lives, the routinization of social interactions, and the setting of general expectations of consumerism under socialism. Everyday practices could also,

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<sup>74</sup> There is a growing body of literature on the notion of a 'useable past' in both postwar Germanies. Briefly, a small sampling includes Robert Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Useable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, eds., *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002). Philipp Gassert and Alan Steinweis eds. *Coping with the Nazi past: West German Debates on Nazism and Generational Conflict, 1955-1975* (New York: Berghahn, 2006); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

depending on the circumstances, contribute to or detract from the internalization of ideology.<sup>75</sup> Public outrage over consumer goods occurred not only during times of shortage, but also when people did not enjoy what *was* available. Like the patrons in Espresso Hungaria, both East Germans and state authorities acquiesced to the “graceful seduction” of coffee’s allure, which blended patterns of sociability, social status and German tradition with personal desires for physical pleasure. This seduction would later prove politically volatile when the state tried to alter the quality of this beloved drink, not only because the public rejected any attempts at adulteration, but also because the GDR was trapped, beholden to an incredibly unreliable world coffee market. The regime was forced to *do something* about coffee, which was a volatility all its own.

### *Coffee, Scarcity and illegal ‘Schwarzkafee’*

It may seem odd to consider coffee in the context of the political and military collapse of the Third Reich in 1945. Germany’s military defeat brought with it an “overwhelming scale of loss” that left Germans “profoundly disoriented and without the energy for much more than a struggle of individual survival.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, between the devastation wrought by allied bombing raids, the pillaging and rape committed by occupying forces – especially in the Soviet occupation zone – and Germans’ daily struggles to secure their most basic needs, it seems difficult to

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<sup>75</sup> As noted in the introduction, Eli Rubin and Sandrine Kott in particular have argued that studying East Germans’ daily lives is important for understanding the “Gramscian ways” in which East Germans internalized the rules of socialism, the meanings behind ideology, politics, economics, culture, and their own identities as part of the system of socialism. See Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics & Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 8; Sandrine Kott, *Communism Day-to-Day: State Enterprises in East German Society*, trans. Lisa Godin-Roger (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 8. Michel de Certeau made a similar argument in a broader (and discipline-defying) sense when he challenged the idea that people were passive creatures, “guided by established rules.” Rather, he argued everyday life constitutes a *practice*, as through the everyday “art of doing,” human beings create, produce, and invent their own lives. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>76</sup> Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper, 2009), 393.

imagine that many Germans would have any particular concern over coffee. In fact, coffee was all but absent in Germany after the Second World War, and had been scarce since the First World War, when the British blockade prevented the importation of beans.<sup>77</sup> The coffee situation hardly improved during the interwar period, when Germany lost access to coffee producing colonial territories such as Tanganyika, and trading became difficult under the economic constraints of the Great Depression.<sup>78</sup> The focus on rearmament under National Socialism kept coffee off the government's priority list, and much of the coffee available in the Third Reich consequently relied on black market trade.<sup>79</sup> During the war years, "real bean coffee" was a luxury with "an air of exclusivity" that "became a gauge for normality in the public consciousness."<sup>80</sup> Thus, the coffee shortages of the post-1945 period reflected continuity with shortages and surrogate products stretching back over the previous three decades; in terms of coffee, shortages *remained* – they did not materialize.

The allied occupation forces tightly managed the distribution of foodstuffs by establishing their own regimes of rationing in their respective zones of occupation. These rationing systems prioritized immediate basic needs, and Germans could at best hope for a small allotment of substitute [*Ersatz*] coffee in their ration packs. Access to real bean coffee remained tightly controlled, and could only be obtained with a special permit and at a regulated maximum price.<sup>81</sup> Despite the living conditions, and the scarcity of coffee, Germans in fact put considerable effort into obtaining this humble brown bean. Indeed, this chapter argues that it was

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<sup>77</sup> Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin*. (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 204. For the interwar period, see Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 25.

<sup>78</sup> Ursula Becker, *Kaffee-Konzentration: Zur Entwicklung und Organisation des hanseatischen Kaffeehandels* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002), cited in Katherine Pence, "Grounds for Discontent? Coffee from the Black Market to the Kaffeeklatsch in the GDR," in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, edited by Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 199.

<sup>79</sup> Malte Zierenberg, *Berlin's Black Market, 1939-1950* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 82.

<sup>80</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*. p.25.

<sup>81</sup> Katherine Pence, "Grounds for Discontent?", 200.

precisely the overwhelming circumstances of the postwar period, and coffee's near absence, that imbued coffee with such a high degree of cultural and economic resonance in the years following the Second World War. A cup of coffee could offer a 'remedy' to the many 'shocks' Germans were facing amidst the destruction of war; a moment of calm and serenity, and the promise of a future.

For Germans seeking coffee's comforts, however, finding sources proved extremely challenging. To some extent, the allies' rationing systems provided relief. In the western zones, the private American aid organization C.A.R.E. (Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe) began distributing aid packages to Germans under their authority in 1946. These 'C.A.R.E.' packages, comprised of materials donated by American citizens, were an important source of basic supplies for Germans in these zones, and "almost always contained a 'standard' two pound bag of real coffee."<sup>82</sup> The Soviets provided a limited number of aid packages as well, but in contrast to Western C.A.R.E. packages, eastern residents could only receive Soviet packages if they had connections in the West. To obtain a package, a resident was required to write to their friends or family abroad, and instruct them to send a payment to a Swiss holding firm. Furthermore, the packages were subject to almost complete state control. The packages travelled to the Soviet zone via closed transport to the Berlin warehouses of the SED's welfare organization "People's Solidarity" [*Volkssolidarität*, from which these "SOLI" packages derived their name].

The uneven manner in which foodstuffs, let alone coffee, were distributed throughout occupied Germany frequently exacerbated shortages. Unable to secure desired goods legally, many Germans turned to illicit activities such as trading on the black markets to fill the gap. As recent scholarship has shown, Germans had in fact been participating in an active black market

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<sup>82</sup> Katherine Pence, "Grounds for Discontent?", 200.

economy since the late 1930s, in reaction to the shortages brought about by Nazi Germany's extensive regulation of goods.<sup>83</sup> In 1940, the state introduced new rationing laws aimed at combating the "harmful behaviour" of "war profiteers and hustlers" who "contributed significantly to the collapse of the home front" during the first world war. Berlin's public prosecutor specifically cited the illegal trade of tobacco and coffee as particularly 'harmful' to the *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>84</sup>

Coffee's scarcity gave it a high degree of economic power, contributing to its use as a currency, not unlike cigarettes. American soldiers' monthly rations typically contained about 453g of ground roasted coffee, as well as coupons to purchase up to 1.81 kg more. Soldiers could use these allotments to purchase 'mementos' on the black market.<sup>85</sup> Soviet soldiers, too, could generally afford goods like cigarettes and coffee they could then use to barter on the black market.<sup>86</sup> Other sources for coffee involved even more illicit activity on the part of soldiers. British officials complained in 1948 that pilots allegedly sold their planes' supplies during the Berlin air lift, including coffee and tobacco, on the city's black markets "to obtain Marks to enable them to have a night out" in the city.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Malte Zierenberg argues that in Berlin, black market trade in the late 1940s in fact represents a continuation of a system that had been in place since the mid 1930s, and that the dynamic of that trade is what changed after the war. What had previously involved personal contacts and secrete rendezvous in private dwellings now shifted to large scale meetings in public spaces. Consequently, the black market became "an influential everyday space of consumer experience during the 1940s", such that "[the 'long' 1940s] then can be seen as a period of dissolution and reformulation of social norms." See his *Berlin's Black Market, 1939-1950*, p.2, 210. As well, Paul Steege argues against a simplistic explanation of the popular turn to the black market as a desperate response by Germans, instead suggesting that the need to adapt to a changing market required a great expense in energy and time, for commodities which were even more valuable than fresh coffee in the postwar period. See his *Black Market, Cold War: Everyday Life in Berlin, 1946-1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. p.56.

<sup>84</sup> Malte Zierenberg, *Berlin's Black Market*, p.43. Zierenberg provides no specific source for this citation, though the introduction of new laws was certainly aimed at countering black market trade.

<sup>85</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, p.36.

<sup>86</sup> Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 35.

<sup>87</sup> Malte Zierenberg, *Berlin's Black Market*, 175. Zierenberg cites "Schwarzhandel der Post," *Tribüne*, November 10, 1947, 175, 119.



Yet fluctuations in both the price and availability of foodstuffs meant that even the black markets provided little stability. Malte Zierenberg has argued that, because they were dynamic spaces that “undermined” existing patterns of goods exchange, the black markets were “sites of constant insecurity” that “promoted a culture of mistrust” among Germans.<sup>88</sup> Bartering on the black market required customers to immediately identify “imitation products” and “the diluting of foods [...] to avoid getting swindled. They bore all the risk and all the cost for testing the quality of the goods.”<sup>89</sup> This dynamism often changed existing meanings and values assigned to particular goods, as it required Germans to constantly “reassess what a necessity or luxury was. The concept of luxury changed rapidly as a consequence [...] which reflected not only the general effects of supply and demand in the market but also individual privation and desire.”<sup>90</sup> A strong desire for coffee could make one a target for exploitation by profiteers. A report in the daily newspaper *Berliner Zeitung* warned readers of a man who approached city residents and “took cash in advance” for bacon, coffee and other scarce goods, but instead of producing the goods, he simply “turned and fled.”<sup>91</sup>

If illegal trade constituted a common practice of everyday life in Germany by 1945, the growing insecurity and ‘culture of mistrust’ to which it contributed nevertheless posed a serious problem in terms of restoring some semblance of order. Authorities worried in particular about the black markets’ move into public spaces, fearing that trading “[was now] seen as a symptom of a comprehensive process of disintegration.”<sup>92</sup> These concerns, combined with fears of postwar inflation, and the growing tensions between the allied powers, prompted the Western allies to

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<sup>88</sup> Malte Zierenberg, *Berlin’s Black Market*, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Malte Zierenberg, *Berlin’s Black Market*, 210

<sup>90</sup> Malte Zierenberg, *Berlin’s Black Market*, 8. Indeed, many things formerly taken for granted now constituted ‘luxuries,’ including, as Hanna Schissler points out, bathing. See Hanna Schissler, *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>91</sup> “Vorsicht schützt vor Schaden,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 1 February 1949, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Malte Zierenberg, *Berlin’s Black Market, 1939-1950*, 16.

enact a currency reform on 20 June 1948 in the Bizone.<sup>93</sup> Occupation authorities in the Soviet zone, together with the newly formed Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) announced their own currency reform on 26 June.<sup>94</sup>

The currency reforms did slow black market trade in the West, but because coffee was not decoupled from rationing in the East, the commodity remained too expensive in the SBZ to obtain legally, and many Germans continued to seek out illegal “black” coffee [*Schwarzkafee*’ as it came to be called].<sup>95</sup> The East German paper *Neue Zeit* praised “the end of the little dark men who peddle their stolen wares,” but also lamented that particular goods like chocolate, coffee and “Amis” (American cigarettes) were still available “in every desired volume, on every second street corner.”<sup>96</sup> Hoping to further combat illegal trade by offering material goods, SBZ officials introduced a state-run retail chain, or *Handelsorganisationen* (HO) in November 1948. As they were designed to improve citizens’ access to goods in an egalitarian way, the HO stores and restaurants offered foodstuffs and industrial goods at “free” prices: that is, prices that were

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<sup>93</sup> The reform introduced a new currency, the Deutsche Mark, in the Western zones, and provided each resident of those zones with a 40 DM handout. Additionally, the government eased controls on consumer goods and production norms. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_image.cfm?image\\_id=1018](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1018) “Extracts from the British Military Government Law No. 61: First Law for Monetary Reform (Currency Law) (June 20, 1948),” *Military Government Gazette*, No. 25, p. 848; reprinted in Beata Ruhm von Oppen, ed., *Documents on Germany under Occupation, 1945-1954*. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 292-94. *German History in Documents and Images*, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=2843](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=2843); accessed 24 Feb. 2016.

<sup>94</sup> By eliminating the dated Reichmarks of the National Socialist period, introducing a new *Ostmark* (Eastern Mark) helped stabilize prices and expectations of exchange in the Soviet Occupation Zone [*Sovietische Besatzungszone*, SBZ]. The move was also political, to show defiance to the Western currency reform, and therefore acted as a show of strength to the West. The SED also used the reform for another political benefit: controlling the rates at which the old currency could be converted served to “redistribute the assets of Germans living in the SBZ away from those who had flourished under the ‘Third Reich’ and towards less prosperous inhabitants and communist coffers.” See Jonathan Zatin. *Currency of Socialism*, 41. An additional side effect of the currency reforms in both Germanies was to complicate the matter of Germany’s division, by further solidifying that division during a time when officially, occupation authorities were at least still discussing the possibilities for Germany’s possible future reunification. In the West, the currency reform also replaced the Reichsmark, but had side effects such as a sharp rise in unemployment, as the new Deutschmark made paying workers more expensive. See Elizabeth Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany’s ‘Crisis Years’ and West German National Identity,” in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, edited by Hanna Schissler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 21-56, here 37.

<sup>95</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 38-39. The situation in Berlin became especially strained during the yearlong Blockade, where the black market “flourished in both halves of the city, even as the Berlin Airlift delivered coffee in its relief packages to West Berliners.” See Katherine Pence, “Grounds for Discontent?” p.200.

<sup>96</sup> “Es lohnt wohl nicht mehr?” *Neue Zeit*, 16 June 1949, 1.

set just above the ration card costs and just below black market prices, attempting to find that ‘sweet spot’ that could undercut both alternative sources of goods.<sup>97</sup> Through the HO, the Soviet authorities also hoped to eliminate illegal trading and absorb ‘surplus’ purchasing power of those Germans who could afford to buy goods at black market prices.<sup>98</sup> The HO played an important political role, argues Mark Landsman, as they were meant to reintroduce a sense of ‘normalcy’ into everyday life in the SBZ, offering Germans “the first legal means of shopping ration-free” since the war.<sup>99</sup> They were to “usher in socialism through retailing,” and provide “the appearance of material abundance” in a period of intensifying East-West political conflict.<sup>100</sup> HO stores were primarily intended to offer basic foodstuffs, but in their early discussions, state planners called for some *Genussmittel*, including 25 to 50 tons of coffee.<sup>101</sup> Katherine Pence explains that the decision to include coffee was a strategy to work around the lack of hard currency in the SBZ and its successor state after 1949, the GDR, because dividing up what little real bean coffee was available among the entire population would provide each German with only a negligible quantity.<sup>102</sup> Instead, HO planners felt it prudent to offer coffee in these stores for at least ‘select individuals:’ the so-called (male) ‘activist’ workers who achieved particularly high levels of production as part of the state’s *Hennecke* movement and other notables.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> André Steiner, *The Plans That Failed: An Economic History of East Germany, 1945-1989* (Berlin: Berghahn Books, 2010), 54. See also Annette Kaminsky, *Wohlstand, Schönheit, Glück: Kleine Konsumgeschichte der DDR*. (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2001), 25.

<sup>98</sup> Malte Zierenberg, *Berlin’s Black Market*, 153. See also André Steiner, *The Plans that Failed*, 54.

<sup>99</sup> Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 55.

<sup>100</sup> Katherine Pence, “From Rations to Fashions: The Gendered Politics of East and West German Consumption, 1945-1961.” (PhD. Diss., The University of Michigan, 1999), 230.

<sup>101</sup> On offerings in HO stores, see Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 55, and Annette Kaminsky, *Wohlstand, Schönheit, Glück*, 27; on coffee specifically, see Katherine Pence, “Grounds for Discontent?,” 201.

<sup>102</sup> Pence, “Grounds for Discontent?,” p.201. The distinction of ‘real bean coffee’ here is important, as ersatz coffee blends came off rationing in June of 1949. See Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 77.

<sup>103</sup> The Hennecke or “activist” movement was a production scheme intent on encouraging overproduction on the part of industrial workers in the Soviet Occupation Zone/early GDR, and was based on the tradition of the Stahkanovite movement in the Soviet Union. For more on the activist movement and Adolf Hennecke, see Sandrine Kott, *Communism Day-to-Day*, Chapter 3. On the gendered aspects of the state’s attempts to create a perfect, idealized “socialist consumer,” see Pence, “From Rations to Fashions,” chapter 4.

Problems persisted in maintaining an adequate supply of wares, and since prices were not substantially lower than those on the black market, the HO struggled to compete with illegal trade.<sup>104</sup> The HOs charged an excise tax on *Genussmittel*, a strategy to avoid black marketeers purchasing goods to resell at a profit, and as a way to demarcate which goods the SED considered to be ‘basic staples’ instead of ‘*Genussmittel*.’ One of the heaviest taxes was levied on coffee and sat at 966 per cent, which contributed to the public’s criticism of the HO as “the state-run black market” as most Germans could not afford to shop there.<sup>105</sup> Despite improvements to the supply of other material goods in the HOs, coffee remained either unavailable or unattainable into the 1950s, forcing coffee drinkers to continue their use of the black market. Thus, contrary to the state’s aims of democratically “levelling” society, “the system of consumption embodied by the HO was actually rife with hierarchical categorizations.”<sup>106</sup> Illegal trade in coffee rose in the newly formed German Democratic Republic, with increasingly brazen incidents. In March of 1949, authorities in Berlin uncovered seven sacks of bean coffee totalling around 250 kg in a “camouflaged garage” in the district of Prenzlauer Berg.<sup>107</sup> By April, the Berlin police had reportedly seized 84 t of food stuffs alone, including luxuries like 30 t sugar, 38 t of coffee, and 1.3 million cigarettes.<sup>108</sup>

One of the largest incidents took place in Leipzig, where police uncovered a “Coffee Ring” of nineteen alleged smugglers who had been active for most of 1949. According to the police report, the smuggling ring purchased precious metals in the East and “exchanged” them for hard currency. Taking this hard currency to West Berlin, the group used the western cash to

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<sup>104</sup> Annette Kaminsky, *Wohlstand, Schönheit*, Glück, 27; Pence, “From Rations to Fashions,” 224.

<sup>105</sup> Pence, “Grounds for Discontent,” 202; see also Sigmund. *Genuss als Politikum*, 94; Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, 30.

<sup>106</sup> Pence, “From Rations to Fashions,” 243.

<sup>107</sup> “Kleiner Berliner Chronik,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 3 March 1949, 6.

<sup>108</sup> “Wachsamer Volkspolizei,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 9 April 1949, 4. Also: East Germany used tonnes (1000 kilograms) in their measurements of coffee, whether in public media or private correspondence and government reports. Here the abbreviation ‘t’ will be used throughout the dissertation.

purchase large amounts of coffee, cigarettes and chocolate at lower prices than were available in the East. The group then distributed these *untaxed* goods to a variety of shops with known black market ties in the GDR, which resold the goods at profits of up to 300 per cent. Over the previous nine months alone, the group had smuggled 56,000 kg of coffee in this manner.<sup>109</sup>

This “coffee ring” episode suggests the extent of coffee smuggling in the immediate postwar years. Certainly, smuggling involved serious legal repercussions, including prison sentences if one was caught, as well as significant political risks. By publicizing these more extreme cases of smuggling, the police, as well as the SED, could vilify this behaviour as deeply anti-democratic and thus use these cases to try and sway public attitude against smuggling and black marketeers. Beyond explicitly illicit activities, the mere act of border crossing posed a direct threat to the SED’s legitimacy and authority. The movement of both people and beans between East and West revealed the porous nature of the border, and the SED’s inability to control the flow of either goods or people. Furthermore, by labelling black marketeers as ‘idle’, the state set smugglers and marketeers apart from the “valorization of labor and the postwar campaign for higher productivity.”<sup>110</sup> The police report made one further distinction about the perpetrators which, given the association of smugglers with ‘idleness’, was particularly troubling. The police indicated that the majority of the Leipzig coffee ring’s members were “Victims of Fascism” – a term denoting Holocaust survivors and other groups persecuted under National Socialism – and “members of the [local] Jewish community.”<sup>111</sup> The term also served an official memory discourse that prioritized socialists and communists over Jews in a hierarchy

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<sup>109</sup> BArchB, DC 1/74, Aktenvermerk, betr. “Kaffee-Ring Leipzig,” Zentrale Kommission für Staatliche Kontrolle, 28 October 1950, 1-4, here 1. Also discussed in Pence, “Grounds for Discontent.” It is not clear what the police report meant when it indicated the perpetrators had „exchanged“ the precious metals for hard currency, as the report was rather unclear on how they purchased these metals in the first place. At any rate, the crime seems to have had more to do with the reselling of untaxed Western coffee at exorbitant prices in the East.

<sup>110</sup> Pence, “Grounds for Discontent?,” 204.

<sup>111</sup> BArchB, DC 1/74, Aktenvermerk, betr. “Kaffee-Ring Leipzig,” Zentrale Kommission für Staatliche Kontrolle, 28 October 1950, 1-4, here 1.

of National Socialism's victims. As Katherine Pence rightly points out, the police's attempt to specifically identify the coffee ring's members as Jewish reveals a latent anti-Semitism within the SBZ/GDR, that could be deployed to "to demarcate the pardonable black-market activities of the average German petty trader from the 'parasitical' crimes of the major profiteers, defined as outsiders from the reconstructing German community."<sup>112</sup>

By the founding of the GDR, then, the humble coffee bean posed a number of problems for state officials, despite – of perhaps precisely because of – its special status as a *Genussmittel*. Coffee challenged the notion of the black market as a desperate zero-sum game. Recent scholarship indicates that Germans came to purchase as much 'black' coffee as legal coffee by 1950,<sup>113</sup> a parity that suggests citizens actively sought out coffee in whatever form they could acquire it, and were perhaps less concerned with the source than with obtaining the beans. Possessing minimal to no nutritional value, coffee's importance lay instead in its properties as a stimulant and in its ability to provide some semblance of pleasure in an otherwise chaotic and uncertain postwar world. Food scarcity became one of the facts of daily life in occupied Germany. As Alice Weinreb contends, starvation and hunger were an intrinsic part of the psychological experience of defeat and occupation, and Germans' experience with hunger in fact helped blur the lines of responsibility for the war's cruelty.<sup>114</sup> In an urban landscape covered in rubble, Germans often lacked adequate – especially safe, dry and warm – shelter, which deprived many of sleep, leaving them overly tired and distracted in their day to day activities. Under these conditions, drinking coffee could temporarily mitigate the pangs of an empty stomach, or

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<sup>112</sup> Pence, "Grounds for Discontent?," 204. Indeed, as Jeffery Herf showed, the GDR authorities remained committed to their rhetoric of official antifascism throughout the Ulbricht era and most of the Honecker era, only finally breaking with that line in the 1980s. While not explicitly anti-Semitic, the GDR certainly did not "display the kind of warmth or empathy that might be expected from any German government after the Holocaust." Jeffrey Herf, *Divided memory: the Nazi past in the two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 384.

<sup>113</sup> Sigmund. *Genuss als Politikum*, 59.

<sup>114</sup> Alice Autumn Weinreb, "Matters of Taste," 95.

increase alertness. For those who could obtain it, a cup of hot coffee also may have meant being able to enjoy a brief emotional respite from the trauma of Germans' postwar material and emotional environments.

Conscious of coffee's power, the new East German regime included the beverage in its official messages of the benefits of socialism. A 1949 advertisement for KONSUM *Kaffee-Ersatzmischung* ('Consume' Coffee Surrogate Blend) featured a young worker holding a cup of steaming coffee near his machine, saying "it tastes good to me, because I drink the good KONSUM coffee-surrogate blend!"<sup>115</sup> With his bright, youthful grin, the worker's enthusiasm promised German workers a bright future in the 'Workers' and Peasants' State,' rhetoric very much in line with the general messages associated with the regime's focus on heavy industry: "how we work today is how we will live tomorrow!"<sup>116</sup>

Figure 1.0: Advertisement for Kaffee-Ersatzmischung, 1949.



<sup>115</sup> Objekt Nr. PL 50/3: Plakat, "mir schmeckt's ... denn ich trinke die gute KONSUM Kaffee-Ersatzmischung!," Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig. *Darstellung 1949-1989: Leipzig in der DDR, Überholen ohne Einzuholen - Streiflichter des Alltags im Sozialismus*, [http://museum.zib.de/sgml\\_internet/sgml.php?seite=5&fld\\_0=p0004933](http://museum.zib.de/sgml_internet/sgml.php?seite=5&fld_0=p0004933); accessed 7 March 2016.

<sup>116</sup> Anne Kaminsky, "'True Advertising Means Promoting a Good Thing Through a Good Form,' Advertising in the German Democratic Republic," in *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany*, edited by Pamela E. Swett, S. Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R. Zatlín (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 262-286; here 263.

*Source:* Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig. Objekt Nr. PL 50/3.

Obtaining coffee nonetheless remained difficult for the average German, unless they benefited from a privileged position within industry, or had connections in the West. Although coffee was hardly a state priority at this point, planners made some tangible efforts to provide workers with coffee, particularly around the holiday season. In November 1952, district councils received instructions from the Free German Trade Union (*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, FDGB) related to a special operation entitled “*Sonderaktion Kaffee*” [Special Operation Coffee], slated for 1 to 10 December. Claiming the operation was designed “to supply our workers with a special allotment of roasted coffee of at least 125g,” district HO stores were responsible for distributing coffee to workers directly, though recipients were ranked in order of priority:

- a) to wage and salary earners who are employed in companies that are listed in the attached Priority List
- b) to wage and salary earners who work in other priority operations of the circle,
- c) to wage and salary earners who work in establishments situated in the immediate vicinity of the demarcation line and to wage and salary earners who work in establishments situated in the border districts or circuits of the demarcation line
- d) to members of the production cooperatives and to wage and salary earners of MAS and craft shops,
- e) to wage and salary earners in other production plants of state-owned cooperative or private sector (including agriculture) and craft enterprises,
- f) to wage and salary earners in the premises of the state, cooperative and private trade,
- g) employed in wage and salary earners in administrative departments, cultural institutions and full-time in the mass organizations and parties,
- h) to freelancers, that includes writers, painters, medical practitioners, artists, etc.<sup>117</sup>

The performative element of timing this operation so close to the Christmas holidays can hardly be overlooked. Providing a special allotment demonstrated the state’s power through its capacity to provide for its people at precisely a time when such an action would be most visible and appreciated. The *Sonderaktion Kaffee* formed part of “an early symbolic ritual marking transition from postwar privation to future abundance” under socialism, which also aimed to

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<sup>117</sup> BArchB DY 34/9567, Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, Zuckerverteilung und Kaffeeverteilung-- Sonderaktion Kaffee (Verkaufsaktion), Verteilung der Bohnen auf Röstbetriebe, “Anweisung über die Durchführung der Sonderaktion ‘Kaffee (Verkaufsaktion) für die werktätige Bevölkerung der DDR und des demokratischen Sektors von Berlin,’ 24 November 1952.”



counter images of abundance in the shop windows of West Germany.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile, ranking recipients reminded workers of the rewards for hard work and loyalty to the building of socialism, and confirmed the special status – and political power – of coffee. Yet the fact that the FDGB ranked the beneficiaries of this operation could also have contributed to social division, as workers lower on the list watched those higher up receive their allotments before them.

An important alternative source of coffee in the 1950s was the West. Above all, tourism and regular traffic across the German-German border provided opportunities to move coffee across the divide – legally or otherwise. Between 1953 and 1961, approximately 14.2 million people travelled from East to West Germany, while 13.5 million West Germans travelled eastward in the same period.<sup>119</sup> As well, thousands of people lived in the East and worked in the West, providing other opportunities to purchase goods like coffee and bring them home at the day's end.<sup>120</sup> East Germans regularly purchased both common items as well as semi luxury goods, from spare bicycle parts and children's toys to fruit and coffee. In the capital, official reports from 1954 estimated that East Berliners had spent roughly "DM 200 Million (eastmarks) per month" in West Berlin.<sup>121</sup> Those fortunate enough to have friends or family living in West Germany could hope to receive coffee as part of a gift package. These 'Westpakets' were a regular practise through the 1950s and 60s.<sup>122</sup> Approximately 42.7 million gift packets crossed the border during the height of the 1950s, briefly declined in 1960, and rose once more to 53.5

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<sup>118</sup> Pence, "From Rations to Fashions," 228. For more on mass rituals in the early years of the GDR, see Monika Gibas and Rainer Gries, "'Vorschlag für den Ersten mai: die Führung zieht am Volks vorbei!' Überlegungen zur Geschichte der Tribüne in der DDR," *Deutschland Archiv* 5, no.28 (May 1995): 481-494, cited in *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 110.

<sup>120</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 111.

<sup>121</sup> Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 144.

<sup>122</sup> In 1957, East Germany formed a specific enterprise to handle the volume of West Packages, Geschenkdienst und Kleinexport GmbH (GENEX). West Germans could order specific items for their care packages through GENEX, and the firm would assemble and send the packets to the recipients, thus adding another layer of control to the process. See Pavel Szobi, "Konsumsozialismus in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren am Beispiel der DDR und der ČSSR," in *Die ČSSR und die DDR im historischen Vergleich: Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zweier staatssozialistischer Systeme in Mitteleuropa*, edited by Miloš Řezník & Katja Rosenbaum, 49-62. Leipzig and Berlin: Kirchhof & Franke, 2013, 51.

million packets after the construction of the Wall.<sup>123</sup> Although the regime limited the amount of coffee sent in gift packages to 250 grams in 1954, *Westpakets* represented as much as between 10 and 15 per cent of the GDR's coffee supplies in the early 1950s, and trade officials recognized the need to avoid disrupting this source too greatly.<sup>124</sup>

Economic planning in the first half of the 1950s focused above all on heavy industrial production – primarily for reconstruction efforts and reparations payments to the Soviet Union – while consumer goods production – let alone luxuries like coffee – remained a low priority for the regime. At the second party congress of the SED in July of 1952, Party Chairman Walter Ulbricht proclaimed the Party's new initiative to “construct socialism” throughout the GDR. The policy implemented a new economic structure, including the expansion of collective farms and a forty per cent increase to industrial production quotas.<sup>125</sup> While the policy was promoted as a great new step in the GDR's history, associated with economic growth, stability, and a bright future for all East Germans, in reality it added to social tensions within the population. The increased production norms were not met with corresponding increases in wages, nor could workers see the results of these quotas, as the empty store shelves attested to continued material deprivation. Frustrations over stagnant living standards caused thousands to emigrate to the West over the following year.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 185. She discusses the gift packages at length, see pp.183-191.

<sup>124</sup> Jutta Voigt, *Der Geschmack des Ostens: Vom Essen, Trinken und Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Gustav Kiepenhauer Verlag, 2005), 159. cited in: Pence. *Grounds for Discontent*, p.206.

<sup>125</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 34.

<sup>126</sup> During the first half of 1952 roughly fifty-two thousand East Germans fled to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). By late 1952, those numbers had increased to seventy-eight thousand. By mid-1953, emigration estimates indicated that approximately eighty-four thousand people had fled the GDR. See “Memorandum from Lavrentii Beria to the CPSU CC Presidium regarding Mass Defections from the GDR, 6 May 1953,” Woodrow Wilson Centre, The Cold War International History Project digital archive: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110409.pdf?v=d41d8cd98f00b204e9800998ecf8427e>; accessed 10 October 2016. p.157

Joseph Stalin's death in March 1953 marked a clear turning point in Soviet policy regarding Eastern Europe. The interim leadership in Moscow introduced what they called a 'New Course', a policy aimed at pursuing a more moderate approach to socialism. The SED also adopted the New Course, pulling back on some of its recent agricultural appropriations and easing some agricultural production requirements.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, the regime's commitment to the New Course appeared inconsistent, as the State Planning Commission dramatically cut back on commodity investments from DM 41 billion to 38.2 billion, removing goods like fruits and vegetables, meats, butter, cocoa and coffee.<sup>128</sup> The policy changes made absolutely no mention of the hated industrial production norms, which led directly to an eruption of revolutionary upheaval throughout the country from 17-19 June 1953. As well, citizens' demands prioritized an immediate reduction in production norms, a cut in consumer prices by 40 per cent, and free elections.<sup>129</sup> Soviet armed forces quelled the uprising, but the episode sent a clear signal that the population wanted genuine improvements to their daily lives, and the state needed to address these concerns moving forward.

Under the New Course, the Ministry for Trade and Provisioning (*Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung*, MHV) planned to "meaningfully" improve the availability of real bean coffee

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<sup>127</sup> Gregory R. Witkowski, "Peasants' Revolt? Re-evaluating the 17 June Uprising in East Germany," *German History* 24, no.2 (2006): 243-266; here 251-252.

<sup>128</sup> Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 126.

<sup>129</sup> Report from A. Grechko and Tarasov in Berlin to N.A. Bulganin, 6:30 p.m. Source:AGSh, f. 16, op. 3139, d. 155, ll. 8-9. Provided and translated by Viktor Gobarev. Woodrow Wilson Centre, Cold War International History Project Digital Archive: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113123> (accessed 17 November 2016). For a sampling of secondary literature regarding the uprising, see Arnulf Baring, *Der 17. Juni 1953* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983); Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the People: Repression and Resistance in Eastern Germany 1945-1955* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945-1989*. New York: Routledge, 2005; Torsten Diedrich, *Der 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1991); Bernd Eisenfeld, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, Ehrhart Neubert (Hg.). *Die verdrängte Revolution: Der Platz des 17. Juni 1953 in der deutschen Geschichte* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2004); Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, Armin Mitter, Stefan Wolle, ed. *Der Tag X: Die 'Innere Staatsgründung' der DDR als Ergebnis der Krise 1952/1954* (Berlin: Links Verlag, 1995); Christian F. Ostermann. *Uprising in East Germany 1953* (New York: Central European University Press, 2001); Rolf Steininger. *17. Juni 1953: Der Anfang vom langen Ende der DDR* (München: Olzog Verlag, 2003).

“according to the population’s demands.”<sup>130</sup> Germany could not grow coffee, and therefore relied on the world market to secure beans. During the 1950s and into the 1960s, East Germany sought coffee from a number of African and Asian countries, notably the Congo, Angola, Uganda and Vietnam, though these countries provided only a very limited volume of product.<sup>131</sup> To some extent, structural barriers worked against the GDR’s efforts to secure beans. The International Coffee Agreement (ICA), signed in 1963, established a strict quota system for signatories and members of the International Coffee Organization (ICO). Producing member countries were limited in what they could sell to non-member states – a category which included the GDR along with most COMECON [Council for Mutual Economic Assistance] countries.<sup>132</sup>

A year later, however, planners still struggled to supply coffee to the population. In March 1954, the State Secretary of the MHV, Schneiderheinze, wrote to the Minister for Foreign and Inter German Trade, Kurt Gregor, saying bluntly “the supply for the population is not secured. Since 27 February 1954 hardly any coffee has been available for purchase over the counter in retail shops.” Schneiderheinze also noted that there was an insufficient supply of coffee for April, and reminded Gregor that both Easter and *Jugendweihe* celebrations were approaching.<sup>133</sup> The specific mention of religious festivals was particularly significant, indicating

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<sup>130</sup> BArchB, DC 6/33, Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung, Der Minister Wach an Elli Schmidt, Staatliche Kommission für Handel und Versorgung, Betr.: Bohnenkaffee. Berlin, 12 August 1953, cited in Pence, “Grounds for Discontent?” 206. On the ‘population’s demands’, see BArchB, DL 2/889, Hauptabteilung Import. Protokoll über das Exposé zur Kaffee- und Tee-Situation in der DDR, 6 September 1954, 154.

<sup>131</sup> BArchB, DE 1/25084, “Auszug aus der Preisbewilligung: Importabgabepreise für Rohkaffee I. Ergänzung zur PAO 1556.”

<sup>132</sup> East German state media accused America and Brazil of forming the ICA to secure profits and limit coffee for non-capitalist states. *Eulenspiegel*, the GDR’s principle satire magazine, told readers that only 42 of 73 million sacks of coffee were sold on the world market, because “the lords of speculation” had destroyed the remainder. See “Kaffee verkehrt,” *Eulenspiegel* No.5 (Feb 1961): 3; Similar criticisms appeared in other publications, such as a 1969 article in the household advice journal *Guter Rat*, telling Germans the world coffee price “comes not from good or bad harvests, but rather from monopolies. Record breaking harvests are destroyed in order to raise the prices.” See “Schwarz wie die Nacht, heiß wie die Hölle, süß wie die Liebe, so soll er sein, der Kaffee,” *Guter Rat* 3 (1969): 8.

<sup>133</sup> BArchB, DL 2/889, memo from Schneiderheinze (Staatsekretär at the MHV) to Gregor, dated 29 March 1954. The *Jugendweihe* was the socialist, secular ‘coming of age’ ceremony, which had been intended as a replacement for

that despite the regime's distaste for these rituals, it was precisely because citizens expected to be able to serve their guests coffee at these gatherings that planners sought to maintain supply. Schneiderheinze's memo was also telling for what it did not say. His claim that coffee had been unavailable "over the counter" in retail stores for a month [*über den Ladentisch*] invoked a specific turn of phrase that referred directly to *legal* purchases of coffee. In describing the shortages in this way, Schneiderheinze indirectly warned of the political problems of coffee being purchased "*under the counter*," and therefore out of the state's control. State officials could hardly rely on the people's trust in Socialism so long as the principle source of 'real bean coffee' continued to be the *West or black market*, not the East German state. The continuation of black market trade in this *Genussmittel* was intolerable to officials like Curt Wach, the Minister for Trade and Provisioning, who called this situation "unsustainable," and clearly connected coffee supply to larger issues of public satisfaction and the Party's political legitimacy when he urged his subordinates "to do whatever is necessary in order to meet *the legitimate demands of the population* for coffee beans."<sup>134</sup>

A first step in improving coffee provisioning relied on rebuilding a coffee roasting industry that had largely been inactive since the end of the Second World War. From winter to spring 1954, the State Planning Commission (*Staatliche Plankommission*, SPK) conducted an assessment of the current status of the roasting industry. Two officials – Walter Haltrich, technical director of People's Own Enterprise (*Volkseigenerbetrieb*, VEB) *Kaffee und Nahrungsmittelwerke* in Halle, and Erich Klose, manager of the combine *Kaffee und Nahrungsmittelwerk*,

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Christian confirmation rites. See Marina Chauliac, "Die Jugendweihe zwischen familiärem und politischem Erbe der DDR: Zur Erfindung einer neuen Tradition," in *Die ostdeutsche Gesellschaft: Eine transatlantische Perspektive*, edited by Sandrine Kott and Emmanuel Droit (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2006), 198-214, here 206; Betts, *Within Walls*, 81.

<sup>134</sup> BArchB, DL 2/889, Memo from Minister Wach (MHV) to Minister Gregor (MAI) dated 9 July 1954, 170-171. Emphasis added.

Magdeburg, oversaw an inventory of all existing roasting plants, including detailed analysis of their production capabilities based on structural and working conditions. The report found that the general state of the industry was hardly optimal for the GDR's coffee needs. Most plants still used manual labor for tasks like sorting, cleaning and packaging, and only half of the factories were "fully mechanized" for roasting.<sup>135</sup> During the first quarter of 1954, coffee firms had only fulfilled 77 per cent of the planned volume, leading Haltrich and Klose to conclude "it is questionable whether this year's total planned production of 42,500 t will be fulfilled."<sup>136</sup> To improve the coffee supply and meet the aims of the 4<sup>th</sup> Party Congress to cut costs and improve living standards, production could be consolidated to a "handful" of firms."<sup>137</sup>

Over the course of the 1950s, general food supply increased, and by 1958, the SPK could adequately meet East Germans' basic nutritional needs, bringing an end to twenty years of domestic rationing.<sup>138</sup> At the 5<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in July of that year, Ulbricht proclaimed the new "Main Economic Task" of the Party, which was for per-capita consumption to overtake western consumption by 1961.<sup>139</sup> With basic nutrition improving, state planners finally felt able to expand the supply of more specialized goods, such as coffee, but the shift in focus to consumer goods production was also central to a more general 'consumer turn' by 1958, through which political elites recognized the need to improve the material living conditions of the GDR.

Pressure to compete with the West increased over the 1950s, in part because of the Federal

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<sup>135</sup> BArchB DE 1/25085, Walter Haltrich und Erich Klose, "Bericht über die Kapazitäts-Überprüfungen in der Kaffeemittelindustrie," 12 June 1954, 3-13.

<sup>136</sup> BArchB DE 1/25085, Walter Haltrich und Erich Klose, "Bericht über die Kapazitäts-Überprüfungen in der Kaffeemittelindustrie," 12 June 1954, 13.

<sup>137</sup> BArchB DE 1/25085, Walter Haltrich und Erich Klose, "Bericht über die Kapazitäts-Überprüfungen in der Kaffeemittelindustrie," 12 June 1954, 16. The coffee industry was also one of the few industries still containing private firms. Of 18 roasting firms in the GDR, ten were already nationalized, while the remaining eight were still private firms. Haltrich and Klose recommended against closing these private firms, instead calling for the discontinuation of these firms' state support, "so that expansion is not possible," which would limit and eventually choke these private firms out of the industry. See BArchB DE 1/25085, Walter Haltrich und Erich Klose, "Bericht über die Kapazitäts-Überprüfungen in der Kaffeemittelindustrie," 12 June 1954, 16.

<sup>138</sup> Pence, "Grounds for Discontent?," 207.

<sup>139</sup> Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*, 33; Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 173; Steiner, *Plans that Failed*, 81-100.

Republic's claims to be the sole representative of all Germans, as well as the comparisons East Germans themselves could draw as they bore witness to the prosperity of West Germany's "Economic Miracle."<sup>140</sup> Perceiving the opportunity for better job prospects, greater material wealth, and political freedom, many East Germans chose to flee to the Federal Republic through West Berlin, leading to a mass exodus [*Republikflucht*] of nearly 3.5 million East Germans to the West over the course of the 1950s, most of whom represented the GDR's youngest professionals.<sup>141</sup> Improving the supply of foodstuffs like coffee was one way in which the regime could try to make the GDR a more attractive place to live, and plans began for an overhaul of the entire roasting industry.

The SPK ordered the MAH to import enough beans to cover the introduction of three new brands.<sup>142</sup> Officials within the food ministry announced dramatic plans to more than double the production of cocoa and coffee products by 1961, including the introduction of new blends of specific compositions in the coming years.<sup>143</sup> Despite new confidence among the GDR's leaders that they could now provide more than just the basic necessities, when it came to commodities like coffee, a great deal of work remained to ensure a steady stream. In 1958, the per capita consumption of coffee in the GDR sat at 712 g a year, compared to roughly 450 g of coffee per *month* in West Germany.<sup>144</sup> The coffee bean was an expensive commodity, difficult to obtain on the world market due to a lack of hard currency and the reluctance among most coffee producing countries to trade coffee through barter. State planners nonetheless committed to improving

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<sup>140</sup> Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 42.

<sup>141</sup> Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 36.

<sup>142</sup> Pence, "Grounds for Discontent?," 207.

<sup>143</sup> BArchB DY42/1401, "Ruling of the Central Conference of the Sweet goods, baked goods, coffee and tea industry from 29 April 1959 on the solution of the next task for the development of the Sweet and Baked goods as well as coffee and tea industry," 2, 12.

<sup>144</sup> BArch DC 20-I/4/344. Ministerrat der DDR---Sitzung des Präsidiums des MR vom 24.09.1959.

supply of the beverage, calling access to coffee “a barometer of public opinion.”<sup>145</sup> Import figures for the period indicate that the GDR made a genuine commitment to increasing the supply of coffee, as coffee imports surged after the 5<sup>th</sup> Party congress of 1958, in particular in the early 1960s:

**Table 1.0:** Raw Coffee imports, 1953-1965 (in t)

	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1965
<b>Raw Coffee</b>	4341	6273	6599	8852	12,067	15,780	22,557	23,245	35,825
<b>Tea</b>			1646	1595	1645	1737	1812	1340	1445
<b>Cocoa Beans</b>			5425	5137	5887	9198	14881	12438	14455
<b>Beer (1000ml)</b>			144.6	140.4	130.6	129.0	128.3	88.8	78.6
<b>Cigarettes (mil. Pcs)</b>			931.5	927.8	580.5	421.2	330.7	354.6	906.6
<b>Wine (1000 ml)</b>			235.9	217.4	311.0	373.6	388.5	531.1	642.5

*Source:* (for coffee) „Einfuhr ausgewählter Erzeugnisse, 1953 bis 1959,“ in: Statistische Jahrbuch der DDR, 1966 (Log 105) , 580. <https://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/toc/?PID=PPN514402644>, accessed 13 July 2016. For other goods: „Wareneinfuhr ausgewählter Erzeugnisse 1955 bis 1961,“ in: Statistische Jahrbuch der DDR, 1963 (Log 103) , 554 [http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514402644\\_1962|log103&physid=phys590#navi](http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514402644_1962|log103&physid=phys590#navi), accessed 14 Dec 2016.

Managers and planners within the coffee industry took to the new Main Task with alacrity. In her analysis of ministry correspondence, Monika Sigmund identifies a common attitude among planners, that the aim of improving coffee supply was above all ““to regain the population’s trust in our coffee.””<sup>146</sup> Trust in the GDR’s coffee, they felt, would in turn produce trust in the party’s visions of a prosperous future.

### *Consumer Socialism and making coffee ‘Socialist’*

Beyond simply acquiescing to public demand, the state’s efforts to provide the population with bean coffee became bound to the project of building socialism more generally. Both the New Course and the Main Economic Task proclaimed Socialism’s superior capacity to provide a higher standard of living than that offered by Capitalism; now planners hoped the return of this

<sup>145</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DE 1/25085. “Verlesen von Röstkaffee 25.06.1960” p.1

<sup>146</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 99. She cites BArchB DE1/25062, Schreiben des VEB Kaffee und Nahrungsmittelwerke Halle and die SPK vom 3.10.1959.



beloved beverage after so many years might imbue the state's messages with a degree of popular support, and prove socialism could deliver on its promises. It was precisely coffee's status as a *Genussmittel* that had facilitated its capacity as a means to move beyond the war's devastation. As gradual improvements to the basic food supply helped stabilize the everyday material experiences of Germans, coffee ceased to function as a way to mitigate against hunger and exhaustion.

Instead, coffee's meaning and significance shifted to reflect the more complicated and changing circumstances of the post war world. Coffee possessed (indeed, possesses) multiple meanings, in a material and experiential sense, which proved useful for the regime's attempts to depict East Germany as a modern state and society. As a substance, coffee acts as a stimulant capable of rejuvenating one's alertness, which fit well with an official discourse promoting a social and economic system heavily focused on productivity.<sup>147</sup> East German household advice books, cook books, popular magazines and trade journals frequently highlighted coffee's caffeine content and its effects on mental activity. Simultaneously, through its consumption coffee can aid relaxation, a fact which the regime promoted as a means to demonstrate the degree to which life was improving for East Germans. These two ideas – that coffee can both stimulate the mind and relax the person – seem rather inconsistent, or even contradictory, yet it was

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<sup>147</sup> The 1961 Third Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, from which the GDR took its cue, had proclaimed that “virtuous socialist leisure was understood [as] reproductive activity” that was meant “to restore [workers] for the next day's labour.” Susan E. Reid, and David Crowley, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 30. East German household advice books, cook books, popular magazines and trade journals frequently highlighted coffee's caffeine content and its stimulating effects on the body, and that coffee could increase heart rates and mental activity. *Kleine Enzyklopädie: Die Frau* (Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1963), 588. See also *Das kleine Haushaltbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1969), 133; *Das kleine Haushaltbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1976), 121. Prof. Dr. med. habil Fritz Lickint. *Wem schaden Alkohol, Tabak und Kaffee?* (Berlin: VEB Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1954), 7-8. One consumer guide on coffee firmly rejected popular opinions of roasted coffee being a daily ‘food,’ insisting on its label as a stimulant owing to its deleterious health effects, saying “Stimulants have no, or entirely insignificant, dietary value. Their value is based solely on their stimulating effects on the nervous system.” Adolf Krell, Bodo Körner, Carl Rabbel, and Joachim Stock. *Warenkunde Lebensmittel, 2. Auflage* (Leipzig: VEB Fachbuchverlag, 1961), 407.

precisely this complicated duality which made coffee so useful, because it could be portrayed as both a fuel, and reward, for work.<sup>148</sup> In these official imaginings of coffee drinking, it was not the *substance* which brought one comfort and relaxation, since by its very nature the physiological effects of coffee are intended to do just the opposite. Rather, relaxation through coffee consumption came from the *act* of preparing and drinking it: to say nothing of the fact that coffee drinking was often a *social behavior*. In official discourse, the beverage's value now also derived from its effects as a social stimulant, the sheer pleasure of its consumption, and for its connection to older European traditions. Thus, coffee's complexity granted it a flexibility which could be weaved seamlessly into the fabric of an official portrayal of a modern socialist way of life.

Blending traditional patterns of sociability with 'Socialist' aesthetics and values that promoted thrift, functional design, and equality, German communists encouraged coffee drinking as a way to cultivate simultaneously a virtuous, socialist life. Authorities highlighted Germans' long history of coffee drinking; from the first coffee houses founded within East Germany's borders, to its importance in the contemporary coffee break, official narratives used this past to promote the 'democratization' of a formerly aristocratic indulgence to an object of everyday life, made accessible to German workers by virtue of Socialism's stable prices. By drawing on a longer European history of coffee drinking, state media identified elements of a 'useable past' that were compatible with the state's attempts to construct a 'modern' socialist future. This 'useable past' also helped insert the GDR into a broader, *European* tradition of coffee drinking, in an attempt to 'normalize' the GDR's place in a globalizing yet divided world. As a plant

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<sup>148</sup> Themes such as relaxation, stimulation, and pleasure were present in ads outside of the GDR as well. In West Germany for instance, as early as the 1950s, ads "focused on celebration, fellowship, family life, luxury and pleasure, which had become part of the everyday." Similarities such as this further reinforce the need to discuss the ways in which East German cultural experiences often reflected, not contrasted, those of Western Europe. See Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 147.

incapable of growing on German soil, coffee itself could never truly be ‘German’, and it therefore found its ‘German identity’ through social practice. As a product that could stimulate both Germans’ labour and socialization, coffee could therefore easily be discussed as a ‘socialist’ drink.

Regardless of its effects as a stimulant (and perhaps because of them), the regime recognized a need to broaden its availability. In September 1959, the Council of Ministers [*Ministerrat*, MR] approved a general price reduction for coffee, as well as the preparation of two new mixtures, measures through which “the wishes and demands of the consumer will be met.”<sup>149</sup> The new brands were not merely aimed at increasing supply; rather, planners saw the introduction of these brands as a *qualitative* improvement to the supply. Descriptions of the brands focused on their composition, provenance and flavour, emphasizing quality and consumer opinion. Official materials characterized the brand *Mona* as “a fine, aromatic blend that combines spicy Indian green coffee with Columbia’s finest soft Santos to give this mixture the peak of flavour.” Meanwhile, public notices emphasized the “powerful flavour mix” of raw beans from Brazil, Africa and Java in *Kosta*, which would “appeal particularly among consumers who prefer a strong, spicy coffee.”<sup>150</sup> Additionally, the notice indicated that *Mona* and *Kosta* would be introduced in a variety of package sizes which “correspond to the wishes of consumers.”<sup>151</sup> Retail workers were instructed to create displays offering alternative ways of preparing coffee, to show customers that coffee was meant to be enjoyed in a variety of ways, suggesting that pleasure and leisure were key themes related to the public image of coffee

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<sup>149</sup> BArchB DC 20-I/4/344, Ministerrat der DDR, “Sitzung des Präsidiums des MR vom 24. Sept. 1959,” Punkt 2; the brands were later announced in the state’s legal gazette (which typically announced new laws in the GDR). See BArchB DE 1/25084, “Gesetzblatt der DDR, Berlin, 24 September 1959, Sonderdruck nr. 1151. Preisanordnung nr. 1556: Anordnung über Preise für Roh- und Röstkaffee vom 24 September 1959,” 1.

<sup>150</sup> BArchB DE 1/25084, “Merkblatt über Maßnahmen anlässlich der Preissenkung für Traubenwein und Röstkaffee, Berlin, den 25 Sept 1959,” 1. Also cited in Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 101.

<sup>151</sup> BArchB DE 1/25084, “Merkblatt über Maßnahmen anlässlich der Preissenkung für Traubenwein und Röstkaffee, Berlin, den 25 Sept 1959,” 1.

drinking in the GDR.<sup>152</sup> A third brand, *Rondo*, was introduced in the summer of 1960, with ads describing the product as simply “high end retail coffee” [*hochwertigen Kaffees*].<sup>153</sup>

Efforts to increase the volume and quality of East German coffee – especially when framed in terms of meeting the wishes of consumers – served the greater interest of convincing East Germans that life in the GDR was appealing, and in particular, that life was better in the East than in the Federal Republic. Stemming the flow of emigration posed considerable challenges, especially because Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev initially refused Ulbricht’s request to close the border, for fear of escalating Cold War tensions, and only relented when Ulbricht finally convinced him of the need for a political solution to the emigration problem.<sup>154</sup> Even after closing the escape route to the West with the Berlin Wall in August 1961, planners still faced enormous economic difficulties; for instance, shortages of meat, eggs and butter in 1962 necessitated the reinstatement of rationing for those products.<sup>155</sup> As well, though the Wall made it difficult to observe daily life in the West, East Germans nonetheless continued to compare their lives with their counterparts in the Federal Republic, through communications with family and friends, or Western radio and television, for those who could access them. Thus, while the Wall provided some much needed relief to a strained economy, that reprieve was at best temporary, and government officials recognized the need to address the broader structural problems of the economic system.

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<sup>152</sup> Pleasure also featured heavily in the themes of several other articles, for example, “Rezepte, die man sucht” in April, “Mixereien mit Kaffee; Spritzige und gemixte Getränke mit Kaffee” and “die Campingzeit beginnt” in June, “Rezepte und Zubereitungstips” and “Die Bedeutung des Kaffees bei uns in der DDR” in August, or “Eine gemütliche Kaffeestunde daheim: Wie decke ich einen Kaffeetisch” in September). BArchB, DE1/25085, Ulbricht, (Federführendes Mitglied des Werbekollektivs der Röstindustrie und des Redaktionskollegiums), “Themenplan für ‘Interessantes für Kaffeeverkäufer,’” 15 December 1960.

<sup>153</sup> BArchB, DE 1/25084, Werbedienst der Lebensmittelindustrie, “Kurzprotokoll über die Besprechungen der Werbekommission Kaffeewerbung am 25. Mai 1960 in Halle,” Berlin, den 27.5.1960, 3.

<sup>154</sup> Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 44; Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall*.

<sup>155</sup> Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 48.

With the introduction of these new brands, state planners assumed responsibility for providing the population with an adequate supply of coffee. Bringing coffee under the control of the planned economy could provide tangible evidence that life was getting better under socialism, so long as the flow continued. Beyond bolstering legitimacy however, official messages about coffee drinking – and about the new brands specifically – also emphasized the qualitative characteristics of both the beverage and the act of consumption, encouraging East Germans to not only expect coffee, but to expect coffee of a distinct and consistent quality and taste. Questions about the quality and taste of East German coffee arose frequently in debates between state planners and industry officials, who introduced a policy governing freshness in 1959 which prohibited the sale of any coffee that “was roasted more than 14 days previously.”<sup>156</sup> Timely deliveries to retail locations ensured “that the roasted coffee reaches the hands of consumers as fresh as possible and without any noticeable loss of aroma.”<sup>157</sup> The instructions included the stipulation that the roasting date of each batch of coffee be printed on each package, so that customers could see for themselves how fresh their coffee was. Germans cared about freshness a great deal, too. One customer was so distraught by the package of *Mona* he had purchased that he wrote to *Berliner Zeitung* to complain “the 20th of February is stamped on the packaging - on 17 March! Please!” He returned the coffee the next day, “mindful of the Ministry regulations” regarding freshness. The retailer apparently replied that “if we don’t take the coffee delivered by the wholesalers, we don’t get any!” demonstrating the real limits to supply and available coffee. *Berliner Zeitung* seems to have supported the customer, reasoning that perhaps

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<sup>156</sup> BArch DN 1/10943, “Verfügungen und Mitteilungen des Ministeriums für Handel und Versorgung, Anweisung nr. 14/59 - Handel mit Kaffee,” vom 6.3.1959, cited in Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 100.

<sup>157</sup> BArchB DY42/1401, “Ruling of the Central Conference of the Sweet goods, baked goods, coffee and tea industry from 29 April 1959 on the solution of the next task for the development of the Sweet and Baked goods as well as coffee and tea industry.” 12.

“the viewpoint of wholesalers ought to be revised as well, because the customer is entitled to quality!”<sup>158</sup>

While the overall volume of coffee imports increased during the first half of the 1960s, securing beans involved a great deal of uncertainty, especially in the unpredictable quality of shipments. Coffee is a fickle commodity, susceptible to a plethora of environmental, social and market impulses that can have a dramatic impact on the volume and quality of any given harvest. Frequent fluctuations on the coffee market in terms of both price and available stock plagued planners’ attempts to maintain a consistent supply and quality of coffee. *Mona*, *Rondo* and *Kosta* were each blended coffees; none comprised only a single type of raw coffee, and one way to compensate for trade shortfalls was by changing the ratio of raw coffee types in each blend.<sup>159</sup>

Since each had an established ratio of beans from various countries, alterations were as simple as adjusting the percentage ratios of raw coffee. Planners documented at least half a dozen cases in 1960 alone in which raw coffee deliveries were either so late or of such poor quality that the beans could not be included in regular production.<sup>160</sup> When, for example, a December 1960 delivery of raw Minas coffee contained an abnormally high portion of “inferior quality” beans, planners recommended an immediate 10 per cent reduction in the ratio of Minas

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<sup>158</sup> “Bärchen ärgert sich: Qualitätsstandpunkte,” *Berliner Zeitung* 16 (19 March 1960), 8.

<sup>159</sup> For instance, when it was first introduced, half of *Mona*’s recipe comprised raw coffee from Columbia and East India, with the remainder originating in Santos and Paraná. *Kosta* contained 40 percent coffee from Minas, 20 percent Robusta coffee and another 40 percent Santos beans. BArchB DE 1/25084, “Vorlage zur Änderung des Beschlusses über die Herstellung der Kaffeemischung “*Mona*” in 4 Röstbetrieben,” Staatliche Plankommission. 4.9.59.

<sup>160</sup> BArchB DE 1/25085, “Brief von Paschke (Staatliches Kontor für pflanzliche Erzeugnisse der Lebensmittelindustrie) an SPK lebensmittelindustrie grup pflanzlich Erzeugnisse,” den 16 Juni 1960; “Klevesath to the Rat des Bezirkes Wirtschaftsrat UA Lebensmittelindustrie,” 21 April 1960; BArchB DE 1/25085, “Brief von Paschke (Staatliches Kontor für pflanzliche Erzeugnisse der Lebensmittelindustrie) an SPK lebensmittelindustrie grup pflanzlich Erzeugnisse,” den 16 Juni 1960; BArchB, DE 1/25084, Staatliches Kontor für pflanzliche Erzeugnisse der Lebensmittelindustrie and der SPK, 24 November 1960. In July, industry officials called for the removal of Robusta beans from *Kosta* after 1 August as a temporary measure, in anticipation of “certain difficulties” in obtaining Robusta beans that summer. BArchB, DE 1/25084, Memo from Schöbe to SPK, 12 Juli 1960.

coffee in *Kosta*.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, representatives of the roasting firm VEB Kaffee und Tee Radebeul complained about the frequent recipe changes, informing the StaKo that “we do not believe it is right that consumers must be offered a qualitatively declining roasted coffee (*Kosta*) when a good blend was in retail for so long previously.” The regime had committed to supplying the population with more and better quality goods, and “this requirement should be taken into account with roasted coffee, and that only high quality products be made available.”<sup>162</sup>

Calls for “high quality products” sat at the centre of debates in the late 1950s and early 1960s over how best to upgrade the coffee industry. As mentioned above, industry reports over the course of the 1950s had identified a clear and urgent need for new machines, from new roasters, to cleaning, sorting and packing machines. Upgrades to the coffee roasting industry were but one element of a much broader effort to modernize the entire East German economy, particularly in the wake of the Wall’s construction, and planners sought ways to cut operating costs throughout the economy.<sup>163</sup> A principal concern among officials was the cost associated with any upgrades, since the GDR did not produce the required equipment and would need to purchase any machines from foreign – and usually Western – companies.<sup>164</sup> Part of the drive behind modernizing the economy had been to reduce the GDR’s reliance on Western imports, a hope that would later facilitate the introduction of sweeping reforms under the New Economic System [*Neues Ökonomisches System*, NÖS]. While the regime had publicly committed to improving coffee supply, the issue of modernizing production processes initiated a debate within

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<sup>161</sup> BArchB DE 1/25084, Schäbe an Niedergesäß (Staatliches Kontor für pflanzliche Erzeugnisse der Lebensmittelindustrie) 10.12.1960.

<sup>162</sup> BArchB, DE 1/25084, Staatliches Kontor für pflanzliche Erzeugnisse der Lebensmittelindustrie and der SPK, 24 November 1960.

<sup>163</sup> Steiner, *The Plans that Failed*, 104.

<sup>164</sup> Roasting machines, for instance, typically came from West Germany or the United States.

both the industry and the state apparatus as to precisely what kinds of upgrades could be justified economically and politically.

One official took a particularly keen interest in the mechanization of the entire coffee industry. Hans Gömann, a representative for the SPK in StaKo from 1960 onward, was a self-styled ‘coffee expert’ who had emigrated to the GDR in 1959, bringing with him thirty five years of experience in the industry.<sup>165</sup> Technological improvements in production methods, argued Gömann, would greatly improve both the volume and quality of coffee produced in East Germany, as well as save the state a great deal in material and labour costs. New roasting machines would ensure a consistent and thorough roast of raw beans, which in turn would ensure a consistent quality to the finished product. Generally, Gömann’s recommendations for new machines met with approval within the coffee industry; indeed, many of the factory managers had been calling for the upgraded roasting and packing machines for a number of years prior to Gömann’s arrival. One exception to this support arose when Gömann pushed for mechanizing the sorting of beans prior to roasting. When raw coffee arrived at East German roasting factories, it would first be unpacked and the beans would be sorted to remove any inferior beans (*Fehlbohnen*). Conducted manually at the time, sorting was an incredibly time consuming process; to sort approximately 8700 tonnes of raw coffee in 1961, the bookkeeper for VEB

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<sup>165</sup> Born in 1910, Gömann began working in the German coffee roasting industry at the age of 15 in 1925. He rose and eventually came to operate his own roasting firm during the late 1930s. After the Second World War, Gömann continued his roasting business, benefiting greatly from the financial inputs from Marshall Aid Program. By the mid-1950s Gömann’s company had risen to become one of West Germany’s largest roasteries. BArchB, DC 14/10877, Brief von Hans Gömann, am Stadtbezirkgericht Mitte, Kammer für Arbeitsrechtssachen, 5.1.1966. He allegedly fell into disrepute with Western authorities, and claimed that “because of my close economic cooperation with the GDR my company was destroyed by arbitrary and unjustified customs and tax investigations.” By 1959, he decided to emigrate to the GDR, and on 2 November, was hired by the State Control Board for agricultural goods to work in the coffee industry. BArchB, DA 1/3364, Memo from Gömann to Frau Dieckmann, 24 Jan 1963, 2.



Kaffee und Nahrungsmittelwerk Halle estimated the need for 646 workers whose annual wages totalled 3.8 million marks.<sup>166</sup>

Gömann criticized the manual sorting process for its gross inefficiencies, adding that it also posed a risk to quality, as too many inferior beans [*Fehlbohnen*] made it into the roasting process. He pointed out that a sorting worker could examine at most a single bean per second, and could thus theoretically sort 22 kg of coffee per hour. “But who is capable,” he questioned, “of sorting for 8 hours a day without looking up and without interruption?” Electronic sorting machines, by contrast, could complete 50 kg per hour, and could “work for three shifts without interruption, never get sick and require[d] no vacation.”<sup>167</sup> For all his concerns, Gömann’s frustrations stemmed solely from the *manual* form of sorting practices, and not from scepticism of the utility of sorting itself, and it was here where Gömann diverged from other officials on questions of mechanical improvements to the industry. Some officials contested the need for a sorting process at all, arguing primarily in favour of saving costs, as discontinuing the sorting process entirely would cut approximately 22 million marks in wages: an interesting position to take for officials who were supposedly committed to protecting workers’ interests in the name of socialism. Additionally, eliminating sorting could generate more revenue and spread supply further. Normally, inferior beans were combined and sold as their own, inexpensive mixture. Eliminating the sorting measures would allow factories to mix the inferior beans in with the normal roasts and sell them at full retail price.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, some officials doubted the very

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<sup>166</sup> BArchB, DE 1/25085, “Brief von Wiesner an Niedergesäß, 25 Juni 1960,” 2.

<sup>167</sup> BArchB, DE 1/25084, “Brief von Plistermann und Gömann an Thäle (Hauptdirektor of VVB Süß und Dauerbackwaren industrie),” 10 März 1960.

<sup>168</sup> BArchB, DE 1/25085, “Brief von Wiesner an Niedergesäß, 25 Juni 1960,” 2-3. A few officials also suggested that the GDR need not sort its beans when other socialist states did not sort theirs. Wiesner, one of Gömann’s detractors, emphasized how low a volume of *Fehlbohnen* was actually sorted out, suggesting a figure of 1-1.5 percent of total beans sorted. It is important to note that Wiesner was not complaining that the process was insufficient because it only found 1-1.5 per cent of inferior beans (of a presumably much higher amount of inferior content), but rather was arguing that if such a low volume of raw coffee was ‘inferior’, then investing any time or resources into its

need for a product of ‘higher quality’ at all, based on the findings of a customer survey conducted in restaurants throughout the country. “When purchasing coffee,” claimed one industry manager, “people prefer the cheapest variety, which is confirmed by *Kosta*’s 80 per cent share of total sales.” The results of his surveys further revealed that the majority of consumers “preferred a strong taste, and the earlier claims to a high-quality coffee, like fine acidity, earthy, etc., are not well known and are not required.”<sup>169</sup>

Gömann steadfastly defended his convictions, which stemmed from his desire to establish a coffee *culture* in East Germany. The German people desired and deserved a quality cup of coffee after so many years without it, he argued, accusing his detractors of treating coffee “only as a stimulant [*Anregungsmittel*] rather than a delicacy [*Genussmittel*].” He claimed his emphasis on quality reflected the desires of the population, saying

A person is not a machine, that needs to be goaded or pushed (coffee as stimulant), but rather we must strive to attempt to beautify [*verschönen*] the lives of workers in every direction. In any event, “the right cup of coffee” belongs to this [aim]. A coffee with culture! [...] I am of the view that whoever has something to do with coffee must be an idealist [...] One does not roast coffee to earn money, as I observed in the expressions of a few roasters in a number of firms, but rather, one roasts coffee as a virtuoso for the enjoyment and joy of life of tens of thousands of working people.<sup>170</sup>

In March 1963, StaKo approved the formation of a “Working Group” tasked with formally composing a list of recommendations for the coffee industry. At its first meeting, the Working Group for Coffee reviewed Gömann’s entire list of forty recommendations. The Working Group rejected over half of the proposals, and determined that most of the remaining proposals required “further testing” [*wird zur weiteren Prüfung*]. A handful of other items were left undecided and passed along to other bodies for review, while the remaining matters had

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discovery and removal was a waste of state resources. BArchB, DE 1/25085, “Brief von Wiesner an Niedergesäß, 25 Juni 1960,” 2-3.

<sup>169</sup> BArchB DE 1/25085, Brief von Wiesner an Niedergesäß, 25 Juni 1960, 3-4.

<sup>170</sup> BArchB, DE 1/25085, Memo from Hans Gömann to the State Planning Commission, no date.

already been approved.<sup>171</sup> Gömann simply neglected the state's priority of ensuring that Germans would have *enough* coffee to drink; questions of quality were of secondary importance. These tensions within the coffee industry also reflect broader changes and shifts within the political sphere of East German economic policy. The SED introduced the NÖS in 1963, which decentralized most of the state's planning authority, and allowed individual VEBs to determine their own production quotas. The NÖS was intended to streamline production in the hopes of achieving a more efficient economy by introducing profit incentives for firms, but because the SED refused to relinquish ultimate authority over the flow of money, and because firms were still beholden to the demands of yearly plan fulfillment, the system failed to achieve the flexibility originally intended.<sup>172</sup> For now, it seemed supply had 'won' – planners felt it more important to ensure sufficient supply than to encourage and foster a particular coffee drinking 'culture' among the population. However, despite planners' dismissal of quality and taste as a genuine public concern, the state's public portrayal of coffee encouraged precisely the opposite mentality. Through advertisements, periodicals, literature and other state media, East Germans encountered coffee drinking as not only an acceptable part of everyday life, but as a desirable practice Socialism could and ought to provide – and as a product from which East Germans should derive pleasure.

State organs monitored developments in both industry and among consumers to determine and track the growth of coffee drinking – and of their measures. Over the course of the 1960s, the Institute for Market Research in Leipzig (*Institut für Marktforschung*, IfM) conducted a series of surveys on coffee drinking, producing two reports by decade's end. Results from these

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<sup>171</sup> BArchB, DE4/12094, Protokoll über die Sondersitzung der Arbeitsgruppe Kaffee/Tee am 14.6.1963 zur kompl. Beurteilung aller bisher vorliegenden Verbesserungsvorschläge des Koll. Gömann, 3.7.1963, 19.

<sup>172</sup> Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline*, 49-54; Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*, 174-175; on the failures of the NÖS, see André Steiner, *The Plans that Failed*, 110-115.

surveys were not published, but instead were internal reports designed to provide a basis for future coffee production. Using the data from the 1960s, researchers hoped to develop a prognosis for maintaining coffee consumption until 1980. In their preamble, they indicated their aim to “determine the impact” of changing conditions “on objective and subjective consumer-shaped factors” over the coming decades.<sup>173</sup> Thus, while the reports require the same careful scrutiny, one would generally apply to most statistical data (especially that produced by a dictatorship), they nonetheless provide interesting insights into the intended outcomes of the IfM and coffee planners.

The study traced broad, general consumption patterns throughout the GDR, but also examined individual households based on a wide range of criteria, including gender, profession, and geography. Each of the 2480 households included in the study were asked to fill out a survey of sixty questions, covering matters of income, profession, level of education, number of persons per household, size of municipality, and even whether or not the wife worked outside of the home. Broadly speaking, results indicated a general trend of increasing coffee consumption: over the course of the decade, annual consumption of roasted bean coffee more than doubled, from an average 0.69 kg per capita in 1958 to around 2.17 kg per capita in 1969.<sup>174</sup> The IfM explained this increase as a result of “improved living standards,” citing increased incomes, variety of brands, and consistent prices for goods.<sup>175</sup>

In spite of the significant increase in coffee consumption over the course of the decade, in terms of scale this figure nonetheless reflects a rather low rate of overall consumption. To contextualize these figures, it is important to consider a number of important factors. First, East

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<sup>173</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Lutz Roland, Petra Leopold, and Ursula Krause, eds. *Prognose zur Entwicklung des Verbrauchs von Röstkaffee bis 1980 (Teil 1)* (Leipzig: Institut für Marktforschung, 1969), preamble (no page number).

<sup>174</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, 10.

<sup>175</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, 11.

Germans continued to supplement their supply of roasted coffee with surrogate products, such as *Kaffee-Ersatz* and *Malzkaffee*. The IfM's survey indicated that 61 per cent of respondents claimed to drink at least one cup of roasted coffee per day, and just over half indicated they drank at least one cup of *Kaffee-Ersatz* per day.<sup>176</sup> In particular, lower income households tended to drink higher rates of the more affordable *Kaffee-Ersatz*.<sup>177</sup> The IfM study failed to indicate if these figures were mutually exclusive, but they came from the same data sample, and there is evidence to suggest a great deal of overlap. Of note for instance is the fact that less than 1 per cent of respondents claimed to drink *Kaffee-Ersatz* on weekends, compared to 13 per cent of roasted coffee drinkers.<sup>178</sup> Though subtle, this important fact suggests that Germans drank the majority of their coffee in 'cheaper' forms on work days, and saved their supply of roasted coffee for more special occasions, perhaps entertaining guests.

These figures should be considered in comparison to consumption rates in other countries at the time. In West Germany for example, Monika Sigmund's research indicates that per capita consumption increased from just under 3 kg in 1960 to 4 kg in 1970.<sup>179</sup> West German sources indicate that market supply for roasted coffee jumped from 95.2 kt in 1955 to 169.5 kt in 1961, as household expenditures for coffee remained fairly consistent, representing between 17-19 per cent of monthly beverage expenses over the same period.<sup>180</sup> By comparison, today Germans drink roughly 6.5 kg per year, a rate that suggests that, while East German consumption certainly

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<sup>176</sup> The IfM's study was based on responses to surveys filled out by 1341 households throughout the GDR in July of 1968. 2480 households were originally approached. BArchB: DL 102/403, Lutz Roland, Petra Leopold, and Ursula Krause, eds. *Prognose zur Entwicklung des Verbrauchs von Röstkaffee bis 1980. Teil II: Verbrauchsgewohnheiten bei Röstkaffee – Befragungsergebnis* (Leipzig: Institut für Marktforschung, 1969), 3-4; *Ibid.*, Tabelle 109: Die Häufigkeit des Verbrauchs von Bohnenkaffee in befragten Haushaltgrößengruppen; Tabelle 116: Die Häufigkeit des Verbrauchs von Kaffee-Ersatz in befragten Haushaltgrößengruppen.

<sup>177</sup> BArchB: DL 102/403, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil II)*, Tabelle 118: Die Häufigkeit des Verbrauchs von Kaffee-Ersatz in befragten Haushalten untergliedert nach Einkommensgruppen.

<sup>178</sup> BArchB: DL 102/403, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil II)*, Tabelle 109; Tabelle 116.

<sup>179</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 121.

<sup>180</sup> Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (GfK), S 1962 046, "Der westdeutsche Getränkemarkt," Tabelle 16: "Marktversorgung mit Kaffee und Tee," 64. The author thanks Robert Terrell at the University of California, San Diego, for providing this document from his own archival research.

lagged behind the Federal Republic by half, neither country consumed a particularly high volume of coffee by today's standards.<sup>181</sup> In her comparative study, Sigmund uses this data to demonstrate the successful spread of coffee drinking in the FRG during this decade, and the slow, constantly lagging development of the GDR. Yet, when taken in greater context, this stark juxtaposition seems somewhat wanting. IfM researchers also compared consumption rates in the GDR with those from other European countries. While East Germany's figures certainly remain quite a bit lower than elsewhere, the Federal Republic *also* lagged behind other nations, suggesting that relative to the rest of Europe, the two German societies were both 'catching up.'<sup>182</sup>

**Table 1.1:** Per Capita Roasted coffee consumption in Europe (in kg)

Year	Sweden	Denmark	Switzerland	FRG	France	Italy	GDR	Great Britain	Czechoslovakia
1958	7.3			2.9	4.2	1.6	0.7	0.8	
1959	7.5			3.5	4.4	1.7	0.8	0.9	0.6
1960	7.7	9.1	5.6	3.5	4.3	1.8	0.9	1.0	0.6
1961	8.1	9.5	6.0	3.8	4.3	1.9	1.4	1.0	0.7
1962	8.8	8.8	5.4	4.1	4.4	2.2	1.5	1.2	0.7
1963	9.4	11.3	6.0	4.1	4.6	2.3	1.6	1.3	0.7
1964	9.7	9.6	5.1	4.4	4.8	2.3	1.7	1.1	0.7

<sup>181</sup> See "Why Germany's coffee market keeps growing," *Global Coffee Report* (Feb 2015) <http://coffeebi.com/2015/12/16/consumption-of-coffee-in-germany-2010-2012/>, accessed 17 Feb 2017; and "Consumption of coffee in Germany," Coffee Business Intelligence, December 2015, <http://gcrmag.com/market-reports/view/why-germanys-coffee-market-keeps-growing>, accessed 17 Feb 2017. It should also be noted that during the 1930s, Germans reportedly drank an average of 5 kg of coffee and coffee substitutes per annum, according to Adam Tooze. See Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: the Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 142.

<sup>182</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Tabelle 29: Pro-Kopf-Verbrauch von Röstkaffee in ausgewählten Ländern, 49.

1965				4.5	4.4	2.3	1.8	1.2	0.8
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*Source:* BArch: DL 102/394, Lutz Roland, Petra Leopold, Ursula Krause, ed. *Prognose zur Entwicklung des Verbrauchs von Röstkaffee bis 1980 (Teil 1)*. Leipzig: Institut für Marktforschung, 1969. Tabelle 29: Pro-Kopf-Verbrauch von Röstkaffee in ausgewählten Ländern, p.49.

What these comparative figures do highlight is the aspirational motives of the GDR's economic planners after the regime's official policy after the consumer turn of 1958 aimed to overtake Western consumption. Increasing – or rather, encouraging – coffee drinking in the GDR was not just about satisfying a desire the regime believed existed among the population: the point was to demonstrate socialism's ability to match and outstrip Western material prosperity. Even after the Wall's construction, the SED understood that for East Germans, the major referent for material prosperity was not chronological, but geographical: East Germans did not compare their everyday lives to the postwar period, but rather to the apparent abundance of West Germany.<sup>183</sup> Yet the rate at which coffee consumption increased in both countries reveals an important distinction: between 1955 and 1961, coffee drinking in the FRG nearly doubled, and increased by another one third by 1970, where it stabilized at about 4 kg per capita per year. Meanwhile, East German coffee drinking jumped between from 0.6 kg to 1.5 kg per capita between 1958-1962 – an increase of 200 per cent – before stabilizing until 1970, when it increased by another 66 per cent from 1.5kg to 2.17kg. The comparatively higher leap in the rate of consumption in the GDR reflects state efforts to improve access to the beverage, and testifies to the importance of this competition with the West.

Another important consideration is that the IfM survey only factored into its study those coffee brands manufactured within the GDR; left unaccounted for was the amount of Western coffee that made its way across the border through gift packages, tourism, or other means. As

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<sup>183</sup> Jonathan Zatin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 273-274. See also Castillio, *Cold War on the Home Front*; Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*.

Monika Sigmund pointed out in her recent comparative study of coffee drinking in the two Germanies, these figures likely represent a rate of consumption far lower than the reality, which she suggests places consumption at about 15 to 30 per cent higher than the IfM's figures indicate.<sup>184</sup> After the borders were closed in 1961, the trafficking of coffee slowed considerably, leaving few options for East Germans to obtain Western coffee brands, save through gift packages. Leaving aside the availability of western coffee for the moment, even the figures for the GDR's internal coffee consumption (purchases of coffee produced within the GDR) reveal both the increasing volume of coffee consumed, and East Germans' sustained desire for the beverage. The IfM's report revealed that over the course of the 1960s, not only had the rate of coffee purchases increased, but that the ratio of coffee purchases to total purchases of foodstuffs remained consistent. In 1961, for instance, of an estimated 26 million Marks spent on foodstuffs, East Germans had spent approximately 1.5 million Marks on coffee, or 5.5 per cent of their total household food expenses. By 1969, coffee consumption accounted for 6.8 per cent of total foodstuffs.<sup>185</sup> When these figures were broken down as a portion of the totals spent on *Genussmittel*, coffee represented between 17 and 21 per cent of all such purchases over the course of the decade.<sup>186</sup>

IfM Researches organized the results in ways that suggest their interest lay primarily in knowing who drank coffee, and where. Germans appeared to drink the majority of their coffee at

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<sup>184</sup> Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 163, 188-191. An issue with Sigmund's own estimates, however, lies in an absence of hard data on the volume of coffee in gift packages. She cites the IfM's study from 1978, which lists an estimates for the average volume of coffee in a gift package (about 363g), as well as the estimated total volume of western coffee imported through gift packs in 1977 (4257 t). These figures do not provide her with an average volume for 1960-1977, and even the IfM's own estimates were based on its calculations of the average volume of a single packet, based on the total number of packets. In fact, a section of the IfM report discussing gift packages specifically indicates that thought he IfM carried out an investigation of the volume of coffee arriving through such packages, the results were "to remain secret" and were withheld by the IfM. (section 4.4) It is thus very difficult to accurately estimate the precise volume of western coffee sent through gift packages for the period in question.

<sup>185</sup> BArchB: DL 102/403, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, 18.

<sup>186</sup> BArchB: DL 102/403, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, 18.



home, as 63 per cent of households drank at least one cup per day at home, compared to 25 per cent at work or 2 per cent in cafes and restaurants.<sup>187</sup> The IfM officials noted that households in which the woman worked outside the home reported an increase in the volume of coffee they consumed at restaurants and cafes,<sup>188</sup> and argued that the increased purchasing power granted by a dual income led “most people to visit restaurants to purchase their coffee.”<sup>189</sup> A higher rate of consumption at home compared to at work or in restaurants could prove troubling, because while coffee servings in these public venues were standardized at 6.5 g per cup, it was far more difficult to ration coffee in private domiciles.<sup>190</sup> Despite these difficulties, state publications nonetheless tried to encourage East Germans to drink their coffee using the same standardized volumes. One household encyclopedia pointed out that the ratio of coffee in a restaurant serving was 6.5 g per 150 ml cup, noting that a mocca required 13 g.<sup>191</sup> In another case, a special magazine about coffee and tea drinking began with a list of “the golden rules of coffee and tea preparation,” in which the authors suggested “on average, you calculate 30 to 35 g of coffee for every half litre of water. With instant coffee you can adjust as needed because you’re dealing with powdered coffee.”<sup>192</sup>

White collar professionals, who consumed an average of 6.5-6.6 g of coffee per day, seemed to have drunk more coffee than labourers and collective farmers, who drank only 5.7 g

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<sup>187</sup> BArchB: DL 102/403, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil II)*, Tabelle 139: Ort und Grad des Verbrauchs von Bohnenkaffee bei befragten Haushalten. See also DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose zur Entwicklung des Verbrauchs von Röstkaffee bis 1980 (Teil 1)*, 30.

<sup>188</sup> Households with ‘working women’ consumed approximately 1.5g in restaurants compared to 0.6g for ‘non-working women.’ The report noted a difference in rates of consumption between households in which the wife did or did not work outside the home. Although the authors suggested there was a notable difference, the rate only differed by 1.1 grams per household per day.

<sup>189</sup> This interpretation seems misleading, as both ‘types’ of household each drank 6.0g of coffee per day “at home,” and as such reflected the general trends more closely.

<sup>190</sup> State planners standardized coffee cup servings in the 1950s at 5 g per cup, raising it to 6.5 g in 1959. See BArchB, DC 20-I/4/344, Ministerrat der DDR – Sitzung des Präsidiums des MR vom 24. Sept. 1959.

<sup>191</sup> *Die Frau: Kleine Enzyklopädie* (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1977), 614.

<sup>192</sup> Rosemarie Sitte, ed. *Kaffee oder Tee* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau), no date.

and 5.2 g daily.<sup>193</sup> While higher income households did see marginal increases in coffee consumption, the IfM found that drinking rates were not universally higher among higher income households, and moreover, consumer choices in brands varied considerably given income. East Germany produced five principle coffee brands in the 1960s, in a variety of volumes. Together, *Kosta* and *Kosta-Melange* brands accounted for over 60 per cent of total coffee production throughout this period, yet according to the IfM’s own findings, consumers’ choices did not necessarily reflect these production levels. Compared to the report’s figures, consumption of each brand varied:

**Table 1.2:** Coffee Purchasing habits by income level (% of households purchasing given brand), 1968

Monthly Household income in Marks	<i>Mona</i>	<i>Rondo</i>	<i>Kosta</i> (incl. <i>Melange</i> )	None of the available brands
Under 400 M	10.49	39.02	32.46	18.03
400 – 800 M	10.46	39.15	40.95	9.4
800 – 1200 M	7.78	42.67	44.44	5.11
Over 1200 M	8.33	44.26	36.08	11.33
<b>Total % of market by household</b>	10.0	39.8	39.3	2.0
<b>Retail Price of Brand (in M/ 125g)</b>	10.00	8.75	7.50 (incl. Melange)	

*Source:* BArch: DL 102/394, Lutz Roland, Petra Leopold, and Ursula Krause, eds. *Prognose zur Entwicklung des Verbrauchs von Röstkaffee bis 1980 (Teil 1)* (Leipzig: Institut für Marktforschung, 1969), 36. (Prices are listed in the same document, on page 3) Also listed in the original document are consumption percentages for caffeine free coffee (2.1% of total market, a low number explained by both the high cost of production and high retail price (10M/125g package, the same as *Mona*), and no particular preference (6.8% of total market).

Respondents were instructed to select only one brand of coffee when indicating their preferences, for “Every coffee drinker consciously prefers a particular brand of coffee. For one it could be the taste, for another it could be the health considerations.”<sup>194</sup> And yet, when one breaks down consumption of each brand by income, a pattern emerges: in fact, demand for *Rondo* increased as incomes increased, while demand for *Mona* declined. Meanwhile, demand for *Kosta* fluctuated: as incomes increased, Germans consumed more *Kosta* than either *Rondo* or

<sup>193</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds., *Prognose (Teil 1)*, 28.

<sup>194</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Anlage 1: “Fragebogen,” 5.

*Mona*, but in the highest income brackets, Germans typically preferred *Rondo* by a significant margin (8% higher). Larger households, regardless of income, tended to purchase the “cheaper *Kosta*” and avoided *Mona*. Finally, respondents were asked to provide reasons for their coffee purchasing choices. The most frequent reason cited for purchasing particular brands of coffee, according to the report, were the “stimulating effects” of roasted coffee and “its taste (coffee aroma and flavour).”<sup>195</sup> The IfM did not speculate as to the reasons for these discrepancies, but the figures suggest that Germans treated *Kosta* as their ‘day-to-day’ coffee, and purchased it in higher quantities to ensure sufficient supply. Meanwhile, increased purchases of *Rondo* relative to income levels might suggest Germans purchased *Rondo* as a brand to offer guests, either on weekends or special occasions.

Researchers noted that East Germans generally drank more coffee as their incomes allowed it, but only as much as they felt they required (consumption generally levelled off around 150g per week, and did not increase despite higher incomes). As well, the report noted that higher incomes did not lead Germans to purchase the more expensive coffee brands, as purchases of ‘*Mona*’ – the brand researchers labeled as an “objectively higher value coffee” – in fact declined as incomes rose. To some extent, it is possible that Germans with higher incomes also had somewhat greater access to western brands of coffee, whether through western familial connections or even through illicit means. Nonetheless, access to coffee for anyone lacking western connections was extremely limited. Germans had also indicated that taste and stimulating effects outstripped any other reason for purchasing coffee. Researchers concluded that “those with higher incomes still spend their money economically and are mindful above else

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<sup>195</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Anlage 1: “Fragebogen,” 42.

of quality. That is, because of the supply situation in roasted coffee, increasing income is shifting demand to the middle-level varieties.”<sup>196</sup>

The IfM’s conclusions regarding purchasing decisions reflect their focus on coffee as a political problem of internal distribution, rather than as importation. Researchers held faith that “continued development of the system of socialism will mean the ever strong evolution of socialist living and consumer habits,” including habits related to roasted coffee.<sup>197</sup> As more and more time-saving appliances appeared in the home, argued the IfM, “the easing and reduction of work exertion in the household” would in turn lead to increased demand for instant coffee and the purchase of roasted coffee at restaurants. As salaries increased, so too would Germans’ disposable income, which would also lead to higher volumes of coffee purchased “on the basis of sociability, relaxation and recreation in family circles.”<sup>198</sup> New careers, too, would increase coffee consumption, especially as the GDR was expected to witness a rise in professionalization and the entry of more women into professional careers: “it should be considered that in the coming period the GDR will build up its position as a modern industrial nation, [...] which means a reduction in the use of manual labour, and a change in the whole career structure. Thus the [...] consumption habits of intellectual professions [will be] more and more dominant.”<sup>199</sup> Planners were especially keen to monitor and bear in mind these professional women’s opinions, as Donna Harsch notes, because consumption “became a central element of the fraught relationship between women and the SED.” Women understood the power they held as “arbiters of individual taste,” and represented a self-conscious “consumer lobby” vis-à-vis the State.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Anlage 1: “Fragebogen,” 37.

<sup>197</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Anlage 1: “Fragebogen,” 50.

<sup>198</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Anlage 1: “Fragebogen,” 50.

<sup>199</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Anlage 1: “Fragebogen,” 51.

<sup>200</sup> Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 166-168, here 167.

Nearly all of the recommendations listed in this report prioritized guaranteeing and improving access to the coffee that was available, rather than increasing the overall supply. In fact, the IfM researchers assumed coffee supply would simply increase with time: based on their calculations that coffee production increased by 34 per cent over the study period, the IfM concluded that production was “constantly increasing,” and they gave no indication that they believed this trend would cease. Using the statistical average household size of 2.6 persons, the IfM officials concluded that “households consume 0.416 kg of coffee per month and pay 27.26 M for this [item]. This is a relatively high sum (2.5% of average monthly income is spent on coffee),” an expense that the authors noted surpassed the average amount spent on shoes.<sup>201</sup> Their report suggested the potential for increased trade with the developing world, as more countries decolonized and would, presumably, be seeking new trading partners. Given these conditions, experts anticipated general reductions in the cost to import raw coffee in the coming years, and their recommendations thus allowed for adjustments to pricing schemes in the future, including one in 1969 that called for a 20 per cent price drop across all three of the major brands.<sup>202</sup>

### *Imbibing Tradition, Cultivating Socialism*

In its January 1967 issue, the East German women’s magazine *Für Dich* asked its readers, “Can you manage to go without coffee for a day? For weeks, months, years-your entire life?” The article cheekily answered: “The annual consumption in our Republic presents the opposite image: every year we import around 31,000 tonnes. [...] In homes, offices and factory

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<sup>201</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Anlage 1: “Fragebogen,” 59.

<sup>202</sup> BArch: DL 102/394, Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, Anlage 1: “Fragebogen,” 60.

cafeterias, 15 million cups of this “daily jolt” are drunk every day.”<sup>203</sup> This figure corresponded to about 1 cup per capita per day, and suggested East Germans enjoyed their coffee as a regular component of everyday life. But what role did coffee drinking play in fostering social ties among East Germans? What did it mean to enjoy a cup of coffee alone, or with friends, or colleagues? State rhetoric about coffee perpetuated three key ideas: first, that coffee drinking was a fundamentally European activity, drawing on the rich history of coffee drinking throughout the continent and especially in Germany; second, that coffee drinking was not only compatible with, but in fact aided in the construction of a modern socialist utopia, and third, that coffee drinking was a pleasurable activity which cultivated leisure and relaxation.

Germany -in particular the kingdom of Saxony – had a long and rich cafe culture dating back to the seventeenth century, when the famous “Zum arabischen Kaffeebaum” opened in Leipzig. The *Kaffeebaum* was the first coffee house in Germany, and happened to sit within the GDR’s borders, a fact about which state media wasted no opportunity to remind East Germans, pointing to it frequently in news stories related to coffee trade, or in magazine articles discussing coffee culture.<sup>204</sup> As inheritors of this cafe culture, East Germans could partake in a European heritage every time they enjoyed a cup of coffee in one of the ‘modern’ cafes they built. State media also drew on the works of Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach, who – by virtue of having lived in territories now within the GDR’s borders – could be claimed under the auspices of ‘East German’ culture. Specifically, references to Bach’s “Kaffeekantate,” a satiric opera about the coffee bans under Frederick the Great, made their way into magazines, newspapers and

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<sup>203</sup> “Kaffee Kaffee dass muss ich haben,” *Für Dich* 5 (January 1967): 24. This figure was also substantiated by the GDR’s own statistical data on beverage consumption, which placed bean coffee in fourth place behind non-alcoholic refreshments, alcoholic drinks, and milk, at 15.5% of total drink consumption. Kaffee-Ersatz followed, with 6.7% of total drink consumption. See Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 164.

<sup>204</sup> “Kaffee Kaffee dass muss ich haben,” *Für Dich* 5 (January 1967), 26; see also *Kaffee oder Tee* (Leipzig; Verlag für die Frau, 1970): 2; “Schwartz wie die Nacht, heiss wie die Hölle, süß wie die Liebe: Kaffee,” *Guter Rat* 3 (1969): 8.

radio shows. The opera follows the exploits of a nobleman’s daughter, who claims coffee “is lovelier than a thousand kisses,” and informs her father that any potential suiter would first have to “present me with coffee!” if he “wishes to please me.”<sup>205</sup> From live performances, or references to the opera’s most memorable line, “coffee, coffee, I must have it!” in popular magazines and state newspapers, *Kaffeekantate* was a visible reminder of this much older, respected heritage.

Coffee ads, labels and trademarks also contributed to the legitimation of socialist consumer practices by drawing on tradition to earn consumers’ trust. A 1954 essay in the state advertising trade journal addressed packaging and the significance of product labels, presenting a package of Kathreiner’s Malzkaffee as an example of “remain[ing] faithful to traditional packaging. The ornamental crest recalls the lace in our grandparents’ kitchen. This memory factor gives the packaging the trustworthy domestic character.”<sup>206</sup>

**Fig. 1.2:** Kathreiner Malzkaffee Packaging, 1954.



*Source:* Gerhard Boerger, “Unser Sorgenkind - die Verpackung,” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung* 6 (September 1954): 10.

<sup>205</sup> Quoted in Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee* (Basic Books, 2010), 33.

<sup>206</sup> Gerhard Boerger, “Unser Sorgenkind - die Verpackung,” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung* 6 (September 1954): 10.

This essay appeared only a decade after the war's end; rationing had not yet ended, and shortages - particularly for *Genusmittel* like coffee – still characterized many Germans' day to day lives, despite the New Course. In physically manifesting traditional artwork and imagery in this way, these labels offered something familiar to Germans, acting as both heralds for coffee's re-entry to the market, as well as the stabilization of everyday life. Drawing on these elements of the past had less to do with recreating a specific past in the present, than it did with fashioning expectations for the future, and inserting the GDR into the social and cultural landscape of postwar Europe. Certainly, in part, avoiding references to the National Socialist past, and drawing on a much older cultural heritage, was about erasing and avoiding the legacy and memory of National Socialism. Doing so contributed to a cultural amnesia in the East to an even greater extent than it did in the West.<sup>207</sup> But in the GDR, 'reaching back' in this way was not necessarily a search for 'better times', but rather an attempt to remind customers that, as East *Germans*, they still belonged to a much older, much broader European cultural heritage. This should not be read as an attempt on the part of the state to distance the GDR from the Soviet camp or Eastern Bloc networks, but rather serves to highlight that even in official discourse about food and culture, more than one identity was available to Germans. Especially in light of the fact that by the 1960s the average East German compared their material prosperity not with the immediate postwar years, but increasingly with West German prosperity, it was important for East Germans to view themselves as belonging to both a European identity, and to the broader socialist world.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory*.

<sup>208</sup> West German coffee firms also played with the blending of tradition and modernity. A series of Jacobs-Kaffee ads in the 1950s tried to unite tradition and modernity "under one hat." One Jacob's ad from 1957 portrayed a "grandmother" with a wooden, manual coffee grinder, while another ad portrayed a fashionable young woman with short hair, and both her electric kettle and grinder. The image of the grandmother still included elements of mid-century design, like modern kitchen cabinets and an artistic, stylized clock. The subtext read "freshly oven baked bread and homemade strawberry jam are gone, but the most important thing we still have: Jacob's Coffee." The



Deploying this ‘useable past’ was about legitimating the GDR’s existence, because if East Germans still felt connected to a wider Europe, they might also accept the proclaimed cultural authenticity of German state socialism. Through April to May 1965, for instance, *Für Dich* featured a trio of ads for the “Moketta II” coffee brewer, which boasted a capacity of “six cups in fifteen minutes!” The ad pictured a caricature of a bearded man wearing white robes and a turban, sitting cross-legged inside an arch while holding a cup of coffee. Beside this cartoon, a large image of the mokka pot dominated the ad, while the text told readers “Coffee expels melancholy; at least, thus claim the best coffee connoisseurs in the world, the Arabs. But isn’t it so? Its smell alone can conjure feelings of comfort.”<sup>209</sup> The second ad portrayed a 19th century European gentleman who sat at a quiet table reading the newspaper, a coffee pot in front of him, a cup in his hand. “Coffee gives comfort,” began the ad, referring to Viennese coffee drinkers who “spent a large amount of their free time in cafes. They appreciated the relaxing atmosphere.”<sup>210</sup> Finally, a third ad proclaimed “coffee affects stimulation!” and featured an 18<sup>th</sup> century woman sporting an elaborate coiffeur and bodice. She sat at a small table holding a small cup of “this fragrant and spicy drink,” which “has now been at home in Germany for almost 300 years.” Making use of the more archaic German Fraktur script in the third ad further linked the ad to older German cultural traditions, again invoking and romanticizing the past.<sup>211</sup> With each cup of coffee they drank, East Germans partook in a deeper European cultural heritage. Although advertisements and journal articles often invoked phrases like “in our republic” to refer to the GDR, they always wrote of coffee as a permanent and long-standing fixture of this much broader

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second ad with the younger woman read “She encounters the demands of the everyday. She knows nothing of the school of mixing, of roasting experience that Jacobs has for a century, nothing of the best coffee plants of the world. She knows only that she can trust in her taste. And on the taste of her mother, her step mother, grandmother, etc.)” See Sigmund. *Genuss als Politikum*, 146.

<sup>209</sup> “Moketta II - Für Freunden guten Kaffee!” *Für Dich* 16 (April 1965): 26.

<sup>210</sup> “Moketta II - Für Freunden guten Kaffee!” *Für Dich* 17 (April 1965): 26.

<sup>211</sup> “Moketta II - Für Freunden guten Kaffee!” *Für Dich* 18 (May 1965): 39.

culture – one that situates Europe, not the USSR or even Russia, at its pinnacle. Adopting such imagery appealed to that European past to authenticate East Germany’s place in the present.

**Fig.1.3:** Moketta II – “For friends of good coffee!”



*Source:* “Moketta II - Für Freunde guten Kaffees!” *Für Dich* 16 (April 1965): 26; “Moketta II - Für Freunde guten Kaffees!” *Für Dich* 17 (April 1965): 26; “Moketta II - Für Freunde guten Kaffees!” *Für Dich* 18 (May 1965): 39.

For all its utility in weaving the GDR into a European cultural heritage, this ‘usable past’ nonetheless presented coffee in a way that often reinforced a racialized understanding of Germans’ place in the world. The ‘Moketta man’ of the first ad was but a caricature of a Middle Eastern man, including exaggerated facial features, and the advertisement appealed to the authority of this racialized stereotype of Arabs as coffee ‘experts.’ Such an appeal hardly represented anything new, as the appeal to racial tropes characterized a long standing trend in German advertising. Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes that “from the very first, exotic motifs were typical of advertisements for colonial goods,” as early advertisements for tobacco traders frequently featured stock images of barely dressed “natives.”<sup>212</sup> As David Ciarlo’s work on Wilhelmine Germany has shown, ads which drew upon the public’s ‘knowledge’ of racial tropes

<sup>212</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants*. trans. David Jacobson (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 182.

were in fact themselves responsible for creating that ‘knowledge’ in the first place.<sup>213</sup> Even the spaces in which coffee was consumed contributed to these cultural biases. As Tag Gronberg argues, Viennese coffeehouses constituted “a distinctive form of Orientalism [...] in which references (both implicit and explicit) to the ‘Orient’ played a crucial role in the articulation of identities, for individuals as well as the city [Vienna] itself.”<sup>214</sup>

The Mocketta man was not the only time GDR cultural media drew on stereotypes or notions of racial difference. A 1950 edition of *Wie, Wann, Wo*, a household advice book on everyday life, provided readers with guidelines for brewing coffee, saying of the beverage:

The coffee is a Negro that robs us of our sleep, says an Arab poet. As far as we know, coffee is not yet a Negro, [because] it must be roasted before becoming dark brown. It is heated to 200 degrees Celsius in large, wide drums, thus preserving its brown color and good smell. Our grandmother used to ‘burn’ the coffee. Today this occurs in a giant roaster. So now we have the Negro. But why does he rob us of our sleep? What is robbing us of sleep is no Negro, but a snow-white substance: the caffeine, which is contained deep inside the beans.<sup>215</sup>

The casual manner in which the book anthropomorphized coffee beans, conflated coffee’s dark colour with ‘blackness’, and associated that ‘blackness’ with theft, exemplifies the extent to which certain ideas of race still lingered in the cultural milieu of East German society. German advertising had adopted racial motifs and tropes as early as the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, borrowing in particular from stereotypes and exaggerated portrayals of black people in American

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<sup>213</sup> For instance, Ciarlo points out that toothpaste ads in 1911 used a gleaming white smile of the African figure “because Africans [were] ‘known’ to have particularly healthy, white teeth. This ‘information’, however, was conveyed in Germany by two decades of toothpaste advertisements [...] in the first decade of the twentieth century.” See David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 312.

<sup>214</sup> Tag Gronberg, “Coffeehouse Orientalism,” in Charlotte Ashby, Tag Gronberg and Simon Shaw-Miller (eds.), *The Viennese Café and Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. New York: Berghahn, 2013, 59-77; here 60. Jonathan Wiesen has argued that during the Second World War, German ads occasionally deployed racist images of “hook nosed Jews” and “African savages cleansing themselves of their blackness in Henkel soaps” – not necessarily as a conscious attempt to promote National Socialist ideology, but as a means of “tapping into” the fears and desires of the population, “expressing prejudices consumers shared.” S. Jonathan Wiesen, *Creating the Nazi Marketplace: Commerce and Consumption in the Third Reich* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 92.

<sup>215</sup> Karl Hartl, *Wie, Wann, Wo – Wie das Alltäglichen wurde 1950* (Verlag Neues Leben, 1950), 57. *Verlag Neues Leben* was a firm which typically printed material aimed at youth and young married couples.

advertising.<sup>216</sup> These tropes intensified during the Third Reich, where they took on even more overtly racist tones, ultimately contributing to the National Socialist attempts to promote a racially pure Aryan racial state.<sup>217</sup> In East Germany, a country explicitly and ostensibly founded on the principles of anti-fascism and anti-imperialism, and a society which claimed to have solved racial inequality, the appearance of such tropes in conspicuous places like household encyclopaedias shows how little had changed in terms of casual, internalized and everyday racism. The GDR's official anti-imperialist rhetoric made *Wie, Wann, Wo*'s racialized portrayal of the beans particularly striking, given coffee's origins as a bean produced in countries who in 1950 were often still struggling to overthrow imperial rule.

A 1970 article in the design journal *Kultur im Heim* featured new coffee machines from AKA Electric. Atop the article sat a few paragraphs of text situated overtop a watermark drawing of two 'Arab' men sipping coffee. The piece discussed the "legendary origins of the popular, invigorating, accursed and well deserved coffee," mentioning possible roots in Arabia and Abyssinia, or Ethiopian monks. Whatever coffee's geographical roots, the article continued "it seems more probable that indigenous tribes [were the first] to discover the effects of coffee beans when, in their ignorance, they put the beans into their mouths."<sup>218</sup> The depiction of these 'tribes' as primitive juxtaposed their alleged 'ignorance' to the 'enlightened' coffee culture of Europe and Germany, as the article went on to discuss the spread of cafes as "centers of discussion" throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.<sup>219</sup>

The appearance of these racial tropes is especially interesting given official guidelines for packaging standards laid out in the mid-1950s which explicitly discouraged racialized

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<sup>216</sup> Ciarlo. *Advertising Empire*, 215.

<sup>217</sup> Pamela E. Swett, *Selling Under the Swastika: Advertising and Commercial Culture in Nazi Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), especially 202-206.

<sup>218</sup> "Ei, wie schmeckt der coffee süße...: Technik im Haushalt," *Kultur im Heim* 3 (1972): 22.

<sup>219</sup> "Ei, wie schmeckt der coffee süße...: Technik im Haushalt," *Kultur im Heim* 3 (1972): 22.

stereotypes in ads and labeling.<sup>220</sup> An article about packaging labels in *Neue Werbung* declared “Servile lackeys, tea drinking geishas and other popular design elements of a time since overcome have no place with us. [...] As at the building of socialism a new ornamentation has developed without the bombast of the past, a new path must also be found for packaging.”<sup>221</sup>

Despite an official denunciation of these tropes as tasteless and out of place in a Socialist society, these appeals to racialized ‘knowledge’ persisted in state-controlled and state-sponsored popular culture, reflecting an important tension: on the one hand, Socialist advertising could help establish a clear ‘break’ with a negative past, fulfilling Socialism’s ostensible aim of eradicating racial discrimination. On the other hand, the imagery in these and similar ads both betrayed the lingering cultural resonance of that past, and revealed some of the limits to the absorption of socialist ideology.

Portraying coffee drinking as a deeply European cultural activity provided a direct link between past ‘tradition’ and a ‘modern’ present. Even the names of the three principal brands of roasted coffee, *Kosta*, *Rondo* and *Mona*, were carefully chosen in order to blend together notions of tradition and hints of sensory impulses. The state advertising firm formed a working group in 1959 to determine names and trademarks for the new products. According to the state advertising trade journal, a product’s name held considerable importance in the development process, because a trademark “lets something unknown become tangible to us and achieve a living form. The thing is to be trusted by us by its name.”<sup>222</sup> As there were only two distinct price categories for coffee, assigning names meant choosing descriptions that would both accurately describe the

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<sup>220</sup> I understand and use the term ‘racialized’ as “the representational process whereby social significance is attached to certain biological (usually phenotypical) human features.” Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 74.

<sup>221</sup> Gerhard Boerger, “Unser Sorgenkind: die Verpackung,” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung* 6 (November 1954): 10.

<sup>222</sup> H. Richter, “*Mona, Rondo, Kosta*: Die psychologische Funktion des Namens in der Werbung,” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung* 7 (Juni 1960): 4.

physical coffee in each package, but also reflect its quality according to pricing categories. To do this, the working group chose a series of adjectives they felt could be associated with coffee generally: flavourful, balanced, smooth, premium, thick, strong, mild, mature, vital, and full-bodied [würzig]. Using these words, a survey asked participants “which features do you value in coffee?” The responses most frequently ranked ‘premium’ (edel) and ‘flavourful’ (aromatisch) as their top choices, while ‘full-bodied’ (würzig), ‘strong’ and ‘balanced’ (ausgeglichen) received average results; ‘mild’ and ‘thickened’ (gebunden) were frequently placed last.<sup>223</sup> Finally, the working group used these survey results to finalize the names and descriptions of the new products as follows:

- I. Quality: *Mona* flavourful, premium
- II. Quality: *Rondo* mature, smooth
- III. Quality: *Kosta* strong, full bodied<sup>224</sup>

By drawing on customer surveys to get a sense of what images and emotions each name conjured in Germans’ minds, planners signalled their interest in developing products that could meet popular expectations. These surveys also relied on the application of market psychology in order to choose names that could conjure sensation: it was not just a matter of providing enough coffee, but rather about supplying a coffee that conveyed meaning to those who drank it. A brand name was associated with a particular product, and thus became inseparably linked to the customers’ own experiences with that product.<sup>225</sup> The brand became a marker for the quality of a

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<sup>223</sup> H. Richter, “*Mona, Rondo, Kosta*: Die psychologische Funktion des Namens in der Werbung,” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung* 7 (Juni 1960): 5.

<sup>224</sup> H. Richter, “*Mona, Rondo, Kosta*: Die psychologische Funktion des Namens in der Werbung,” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung* 7 (Juni 1960): 6.

<sup>225</sup> A growing body of scholarship has come to discuss advertisements as historical sources, arguing they are not merely passive windows that reflect a certain time and place, but rather acted as interactive media that both conveyed and assumed meanings through both their production and consumption. A very brief set of examples includes Siegfried J. Schmidt, and Brigitte Spieß, *Die Kommerzialisierung der Kommunikation: Fernsehwerbung und sozialer Wandel 1956-1989* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997); Rainer Gries, *Produkte als Medien: Kulturgeschichte der Produktkommunikation in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR* (Leipziger Universität GmbH, 2003); Swett, *Selling under the Swastika*.

particular product – but only if that quality remained unchanged: “if the quality of goods change for the negative, so too does the trademark lose value and could affect their future opinion toward a lower quality,” argued Herbert Erasmus, editor-in-chief of *Neue Werbung*, in 1954.<sup>226</sup> Consumers were supposed to associate the names of these *East German* coffee brands with a particular set of sensory experiences (taste, smell, etc.), that, moreover, were supposed to remain consistent. State advertisers thus presented a public image of East German coffee that was at odds with the coffee industry’s prioritization of production volume, encouraging Germans to grow accustomed to the taste of these main brands.

From the late 1950s onward, household recipe books, food and gastronomy trade journals and other publications offered a plethora of recipes and directions on proper brewing methods, different styles of coffee drinks, and how to prepare coffee for guests. A guide to proper coffee brewing, printed in the trade magazine *Konsumgenossenschaftler* in 1969, advised readers to avoid over cooking one’s coffee: “There is still one or another housewife who to save money boils the grounds or does not clean out the old residue in the pot when new coffee is prepared. This spoils the taste of the new drink, as the coffee grounds contain tannic acid.”<sup>227</sup> Flavor came not only from proper brewing practices, but also a willingness to expand one’s palette, as many advice columns in household magazines invited Germans to try different recipes from around the world, further evidence of the attempts to insert East Germans’ coffee drinking habits within a global cultural tradition. One book told readers “coffee can be modified and enriched in flavour using new ingredients. There are a multitude of recipes [for coffee variants]. So, let yourself be guided by the smell of coffee and try one of the following recipes [...] For you also possess the

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<sup>226</sup> Herbert Erasmus, “Warenzeichen sind Qualitätszeichen” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung* 1, no.3 (August 1954): 1.

<sup>227</sup> “Kaffee-ABC,” *Konsum Genossenschaftler*, 19 Juli 1969, 8.

secrets of other coffee cooks [*Kaffeeköche*].”<sup>228</sup> Of course, one of the motives behind encouraging Germans to experiment with their coffee was as a response to the economic problem of supply shortages. By adding other flavours to their coffee, Germans might very well mask discrepancies in the taste stemming from the frequent changes to the recipes of roasted brands.

One might expect that in a social and economic system so heavily focused on industrial productivity, state messages regarding coffee would emphasize caffeine’s stimulating effects, and the ways in which coffee contributed to the alertness and energy of the East German workforce. Indeed, as Sandrine Kott has demonstrated, work sat at the core of the ‘Socialist way of life,’ which “More than anything [...] aimed at changing both the fundamental equilibrium of society and individual behavior. It attempted to institute work [...] at the center of Socialist morality.”<sup>229</sup> By contrast, public discourse about coffee drinking in fact concentrated on leisure and relaxation, both of which were compatible with socialist concepts of labor and daily life. As mentioned earlier, “virtuous socialist leisure” was defined as activity that was meant “to contribute to the integration of the individual, to allow her full self-possession and realization of her human essence as well as restoring her for the next day’s labour.”<sup>230</sup> Leisure contributed to the renewal of one’s energy, and therefore productive capacity, and was therefore a healthy and vital component of socialist morality.

Within the sphere of work, coffee has long been associated with breaks, dating back to its appearance in factory cafeterias in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>231</sup> As sources of renewal, coffee breaks

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<sup>228</sup> *vom Nachmittagskaffee zum Fünf-Uhr Tee* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 2. Auflage 1988), 4. See also *Kaffee oder Tee* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1970); Herbert Pilz, *Getränke ABC: 2000 Stückwörter über alkoholfreie und alkoholische Getränke* (Leipzig: VEB Fachbuchverlag, 1982), 118-119; *Wir Kochen Gut* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1968), 176-177.

<sup>229</sup> Sandrine Kott, *Communism Day to Day*, 100

<sup>230</sup> Reid and Crowley (eds.), *Pleasures in Socialism* 30.

<sup>231</sup> Alf Lüdtkke, “Cash, Coffee-Breaks, Horseplay: Eigensinn und Politics among Factory Workers in Germany circa 1900,” in *In Confrontation, Class Consciousness, and the Labor Process: studies in proletarian class formation*, edited by M. Hanagan and Ch. Stephenson (New York: Praeger, 1986), 65-95.



could easily be described as contributing to socialist virtue, but the *social* virtue of breaks relied just as much on interpersonal connections, facilitated above all by a warm cup of coffee. “The coffee break was holy,” recalled Jutta Voigt in her memoirs about daily life in the GDR. Whether in a factory, an office, or the home, “a cup of coffee formed the fundamentals of communication, whether with colleagues, comrades, friends, the mechanic from the auto shop, or the tradesman who just installed a new western faucet above the bathtub.”<sup>232</sup> Voigt’s emphasis on coffee as a social lubricant was a common thread in both official and popular conceptions of coffee and breaks. Paul Gratzik described coffee as a social *need* in his 1977 crime novel, *Transportpaule*:

The rhythm of people’s life between their old and new walls depends on their coffee breaks. You drink it sweet, hot and in quite a quantity. If you were an anarchist, you could demoralize all the people, were you to block the supply of the beloved coffee. Our work force can only afford mistakes if you never forget the procuring of coffee, even for a moment.<sup>233</sup>

The coffee break was so sacred, in fact, that its power could convey important messages of socialist virtue for East Germans, even children. Hannes Hüttner’s 1969 “At the Firehouse, the Coffee Goes Cold” [*bei der Feuerwehr wird der Kaffee kalt*] told the story of a group of firefighters who have just sat for their morning coffee break. Just as the captain is about to pour the pot, the phone rings, and the team must hasten to the scene in their truck, abandoning their coffee for the moment. Upon their return, the phone rings again and they must depart once more. This process repeats itself again and again, such that by the end of their day, the coffee has gone completely cold.<sup>234</sup> The tale itself is useful as an indication of how ubiquitous coffee break had become in everyday life; children’s books tend to avoid complicated tales with subtle symbolism, preferring clear language and direct messages to convey particular lessons or

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<sup>232</sup> Voigt, *Der Geschmack des Ostens* 160.

<sup>233</sup> Paul Gratzik, *Transportpaule* (VEB Hirnstorff Verlag Rostock. 1978), 51. Cited in Volker Wunderlich, “Die ‘Kaffeekrise’ von 1977. Genußmittel und Verbraucherprotest in der DDR.” *Historische Anthropologie* 11 (2003), 240–261.

<sup>234</sup> Hannes Hüttner, *Bei der Feuerwehr wird der Kaffee kalt*. Berlin DDR: Kinderverlag, 1969. (Reprint)

meanings. Children would recognize coffee as something their parents drank, so the coffee break provided an accessible theme through which to facilitate the story.

Beyond narrative considerations, *Bei der Feuerwehr* also conveyed an important political message: readers were meant to empathize with the firefighters for sacrificing their coffee. Editors at the State Children's Publishing Firm, responsible for determining the pedagogical and political value of all children's material, praised *bei der Feuerwehr* for providing children with a glimpse into the lives of firefighters, and lauded its political message. "The cheery and humorous manner in which the story is told," wrote the reviewer, "in no way detracts from the image of these firefighters as heroes of socialism, always ready and willing to sacrifice for the greater good."<sup>235</sup> Forgoing a coffee break was not simply an unfortunate turn of events: to state publishers, *bei der Feuerwehr* was worthy of printing because it could impart to children important lessons about sacrifice and duty as inherently socialist virtues. The book was approved, printed, and became a popular story, subsequently appearing as an animated film, radio show, and a theatrical production through the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>236</sup>

Coffee breaks continued to appear in state-run periodicals through the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the form of articles about particular factories and firms. Typically, these stories would include a picture of the featured worker or brigade group during their coffee break. Often, the physical space itself was important, as an appropriately decorated break space was believed to improve relaxation and worker rejuvenation. For example, a 1969 piece in *Für Dich* on Electromotor factories portrayed the recently converted "breakfast corner," a small table partially

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<sup>235</sup> BArch DR 1/2259a, "Druckgenehmigungsvorgänge. Hannes Hüttner: Bei der Feuerwehr wird der Kaffee kalt," (9.2.1968), 3.

<sup>236</sup> The animated film appeared multiple times -nearly annually in some places - over the following decade. See for example: "Was gibt's auf der Leinwand?" *Neue Zeit*, 12 January 1973, 5; "Was gibt's auf der Leinwand?" *Neue Zeit*, 4 January 1974, 6; "Was gibt's auf der Leinwand?" *Neue Zeit*, 8 September 1978, 8; "Rundfunkprogramm," *Berliner Zeitung*, 19 June 1975, 10; "Was spielt mein Kino?" *Berliner Zeitung*, 13 January 1977, 10. The book also remains in print to this day: Hannes Hüttner, *Bei der Feuerwehr wird der Kaffee kalt*, illustrated by Gerhard Lahr (Hemsbach: Beltz, der Kinderverlag, 1999).

enclosed by two half walls, where a group of workers sat drinking coffee. The image's caption explained that while the finances for this project were provided by the factory, the workers themselves purchased the flowers and decorations to 'beautify' their space.<sup>237</sup> While the space was part of the larger cafeteria, its naming as a 'breakfast corner' was an important distinction that gave the impression of comfort, and personalization. Beautifying break rooms was a popular activity, encouraged by the regime, often initiated by factory management.<sup>238</sup> A 1972 article in *Kultur im Heim* explored break rooms across different industries, asking readers "where do you take your meal during work? Where can you relax and collect new energy?" Whether one took a short coffee or long lunch break, "the break is certainly not a side issue and nowhere should be treated as such." Under the right circumstances, a proper atmosphere in the break room could "positively affect worker happiness and workplace enjoyment."<sup>239</sup>

As Katherine Pence has pointed out, the portrayal of workers enjoying coffee together in restful scenarios conveys a significant idea: coffee could foster solidarity between citizens through idle relaxation in the break room, not necessarily through work.<sup>240</sup> In a sense, then, workers' opportunities to form meaningful social bonds away from, yet within the context of, their labour, could be interpreted as a form of self-awareness, a kind of 'eigensinnig' behavior.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> "Schöner Leben mit Automaten," *Für Dich* 41 (1969): 23.

<sup>238</sup> In 1972 for instance, the management at the state baking firm (Bako) "ordered more comfortable chairs and paintings for the breakfast room. Beverage dispensers were set up and food vending was made available throughout the day, especially during breaks. Over time food provisioning became less of a vital necessity and the quality continued to improve. Above all, food was accompanied by and became the center of workers' leisure time and relaxation. It became unthinkable to hold a party without coffee and cakes for women, and beer and sausages for men." Sandrine Kott, *Communism Day to Day*, 59.

<sup>239</sup> Dagmar Lais and Bernd Wurlitzer, "Die große und die kleine Pause," *Kultur im Heim* 3 (1972): 4.

<sup>240</sup> Pence, "Grounds for Discontent?," 211.

<sup>241</sup> The concept of 'Eigensinn', or self-awareness, is one originally developed by Alf Lüdtké in reference to factory workers in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany (as mentioned here). Borrowing from his theory, GDR historians have come to apply the term quite broadly to many aspects of the social and cultural history of East Germany, from discussions of possible avenues for resistance vs 'resistenz,' to ways of understanding East Germans' internalization of socialist values. Andrew Port has suggested the term's utility is waning from its overuse – and frequent misuse – leading him to call its over-application one of the 'banalities of East German historiography.' The debates and discussions over the term's utility in the GDR are established, and would take up too much space to discuss in detail here, but a

Yet given the importance of workplace breaks in the state's promotion of a better life, another idea was likely at play, one which relied on the past in a subtle way to encourage a belief in the social harmony brought about by socialism. In his original concept of *Eigensinn*, Alf Lüdtkke argued that in the factories of the nineteenth century, breaks formed part of an experience of personal workplace protest, or self-awareness; not necessarily as a means of direct resistance to a capitalist system, but rather as a way of capturing a little dignity for oneself in an otherwise restrictive set of structures and relationships of everyday factory life.<sup>242</sup> We might examine the GDR's official discourse of work and breaks through a similar lens, in which case, it is precisely the state's explicit discussion – disseminated through trade journals, to household magazines – of the break as a time and space away from work that exemplifies the manner in which the regime viewed its relationship with workers, and the general population. Enjoying the company of fellow workers in restful, peaceful circumstances was a way to encourage a belief that the conflict of the past between worker and employer was overcome under socialism. Now the 'company,' synonymous with the state, encouraged the breaks and facilitated the improvements to the breakroom in a show of solidarity with workers. No longer at odds with one another, so the logic went, breaks had become democratized spaces in which worker and manager sat on equal footing.

In fact, it was precisely because modern life introduced so many new demands on the socialist body that relaxing with coffee could be praised as the answer to an increasingly hectic experience. "Everyone knows that city dwellers (above all Berliners) lead quite a hectic life,"

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sampling of relevant literature would include: (Port's introduction to *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, edited by Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port. Berghahn Books, 2013; and Port's *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German society from Hitler to Honecker*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005; Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*; Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*.

<sup>242</sup> Alf Lüdtkke. "Cash, Coffee-Breaks, Horseplay," 79.

wrote *Kultur im Heim* in 1958, noting that commuters especially “feel constantly driven by the second hands of their watches so as not to miss their streetcar or subway.” The pressures of work and family placed heavy demands on East Germans, leaving little time, the article implied, for indulgences. Yet indulging was precisely what *Kultur im Heim* recommended, insisting that “[t]his haste is not conducive to health, and you should therefore allow at least as much time as you can in the morning to drink a cup of coffee in peace.”<sup>243</sup> A healthy lifestyle depended on finding “balance between hard work and relaxation.”<sup>244</sup> Stress and illness were made worse by “the inability or failure to ‘disconnect’ in the evenings and weekends and to consciously distance oneself from the workplace.” It was quite easy, suggested the author of one household encyclopedia, to neglect the warning signs:

Work continues late into the evening. We need additional cups of strong bean coffee to stay awake. Accordingly we cannot go fall asleep - so a sleeping pill must help. In the morning we're tired - so again coffee and cigarettes! But this is exhaustive overextension of our health. It must not be so. Recovery and free time are important, healthy ingredients of our daily lives.<sup>245</sup>

For those with little time to prepare coffee and relax in these ways, *Kultur im Heim* also had an answer: a new range of steel, electric appliances, including coffee grinders and brewing machines. A series of images displayed the various coffee machines, each with a caption explaining its capabilities – highlighting in particular the number of cups per second each was capable of brewing. Rapid brewing time continued to be one of the most frequently highlighted features of coffee machines – consider again the Moketta II coffee maker discussed earlier, which premiered in 1965. Even the coffee itself could also contribute to saving time, depending on its form. As technology improved by the late 1960s and early 1970s, firms were capable of extracting caffeine powder from raw beans more efficiently, allowing for the development of

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<sup>243</sup> “Technik im Haushalt,” *Kultur im Heim* 2 (1958): 27.

<sup>244</sup> Wolfgang Polte, *Unser Haushalt* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1966), 29.

<sup>245</sup> Wolfgang Polte, *Unser Haushalt* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1966), 29.

instant-coffee. When the instant coffee “Im Nu” entered circulation in 1971, *der Fachberater* hailed it as “a modern instant coffee product!,” a “better tasting coffee” that could be prepared “by hand, in hot or cold water [without any machines]” because “most of the preparation work has been done at the plant.”<sup>246</sup> Nonetheless, instant coffee failed to achieve the levels of consumption of roasted and ersatz blends. A report in 1969 revealed that although most Germans were aware of the time-saving benefits of instant coffee (61 per cent of instant coffee drinkers cited time saving as their primary purchasing motive), the IfM lamented that “only 6.9 per cent” of households drank instant coffee.<sup>247</sup>

**Fig 1.4:** The modern socialist woman: Electric coffee grinders, 1957.



*Source: Kultur im Heim 4 (1957): 38.*

In the above cases, it is noteworthy that neither publication recommended simply drinking coffee as a means of stress management. Indeed, relying on coffee to ‘fuel’ an already unhealthy work schedule was precisely what these authors discouraged. Instead, the appropriate response to a hectic lifestyle and demanding work necessitated *relaxation*, and drinking one’s coffee “in peace.” Here, then, coffee acted primarily not as a stimulant capable of fueling East Germans’ capacity to work longer or harder; rather, the act of pausing for coffee was an antidote to that hectic lifestyle.

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<sup>246</sup> Harry Nowack, “Im Nu: ein modernes INSTANT-Kaffeemittel,” *der Fachberater 1* (1972): 7. Similarly, taking virtually no time to prepare at all, Bero Instant was “A modern coffee in our modern times. You can prepare this excellently flavored and tasty coffee in seconds-without a grinder. Without the old trappings! On the way to gastronomic progress!” Advertisement for Bero-Instant coffee. <http://ddr-design.com/index.php/werbung-plakate-schilder/werbung-und-plakate/instant-297>; accessed 6 July 2016.

<sup>247</sup> Roland, Leopold, and Krause, eds. *Prognose (Teil 1)*, 40.

Limited free time – or more importantly, an increased proportion of one’s waking hours dedicated to work – was not a problem unique to East Germany society. In fact, messages about the need to make time for leisure and relaxation in the GDR fit remarkably well with contemporary ideas of work – life – balance in the West. By the 1960s in West Germany for example, more and more women were entering the workforce, leading to the decline of certain household traditions such as the midday family meal at home. Working days grew in length, shortening lunch breaks and limiting free (and family) time to weekends. These trends led to changes in West German diets, in particular a turn towards foods that were less healthy, but required less preparation time.<sup>248</sup> Health officials in the Federal Republic also noted an increase in recreational drug use (including alcohol and tobacco) during the 1960s, which motivated advertising campaigns to defend “public health.”<sup>249</sup>

In the GDR, part of the tension between relaxation and hectic modernity is apparent in the way coffee drinking often fit rather awkwardly with official discourses about a so-called modern socialist aesthetic, for instance the degree to which notions of ‘ritual’ continued to surround coffee drinking. Home advice books, cook books, and customer buyers’ guides occasionally included instructions on “properly” brewing one’s coffee, from step by step instructions on how to brew your coffee, to storing fresh coffee in a “tightly sealed container.” After “finely grinding” the coffee beans, one must add “only freshly boiled water” to the beans to brew them, being sure to “preheat a porcelain pot which is only to be used for coffee.” Finally, the brewed coffee was supposed to sit “for five to eight minutes” after which it should be

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<sup>248</sup> Arnold Sywottek, “From Starvation to Excess? Trends in the Consumer Society From the 1940s to the 1970s,” in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, edited by Hanna Schissler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 341-358; here 350.

<sup>249</sup> Robert P. Stephens, “‘Wowman! The World’s Most Famous Drug-Dog’: Advertising, the State, and the Paradox of Consumerism in the Federal Republic,” in: Pamela E. Swett, S. Jonathan Wiesen, Jonathan R. Zatlin. *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Duke University Press, 2007. pp.230-261; here 239.

poured “into a second, also preheated porcelain pot.”<sup>250</sup> At the same time however, these and similar guidelines also constituted a subtle paternalism (or perhaps in the case of *Für Dich*, maternalism), as they embedded the process of making (as well as consuming) coffee into longer traditions of propriety, or ‘proper’ civilized living. The expectation that a host must offer one’s guests a cup of coffee – and that the quality of the coffee offered be worthy for one’s guests – demonstrated the compatibility of older traditions within the state’s visions of the present.

As mentioned earlier, state planners and designers tried to rationalize consumption by re-educating the public to make ‘moral’ consumer decisions that rejected “tasteless kitsch.”<sup>251</sup> Form and taste went hand in hand for functionalist designers. As one particularly influential designer, Horst Michel, told advertising tradesmen in 1955: “an object must be assessed on its usefulness, simplicity and clarity of its shape and not to his outward appearance and the low price.” To Michel, and designers like him, “useless decorations” and “poorly designed” products “do not provide coziness, but rather discomfort.” Designers, producers and retailers had a responsibility “to enlighten customers about quality and use value” as well as to teach restraint, so that customers recognized and avoided “petit bourgeois Kitsch.”<sup>252</sup> Home encyclopedias warned Germans of the dangers of ornament and ‘kitsch,’ elements which under capitalism “gave rise to extravagant modernism,” and were a “cheap imitation” of previously handmade (and presumably more ‘authentic’) products.<sup>253</sup> Making responsible, moral consumer decisions was a key element

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<sup>250</sup> Günter Bürgin, Vinzenz Ulbrich, Kurt Wolf, *Warenkunde Kaffee und Tee* (Leipzig: VEB Fachbuchverlag, 1963), 89.

<sup>251</sup> Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*, 69. A professor at the Hochschule für industrielle Formgestaltung Halle told *Für Dich* readers that “we want our environment- that is, the objects and the space of our surroundings- to be formed according to the laws of beauty and the demands of socialist development, and thereby influence the people of the socialist era.” See Burg Giebichenstein, “Lehrstuhl für Schönheit,” *Für Dich* 11 (März 1964): 4-5.

<sup>252</sup> Horst Michel, “Form und Zweck: Wenn nur Gutes produziert wird, kann nichts Schlechtes mehr verkauft werden,” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung* 2 (April 1955): 11.

<sup>253</sup> *Kleine Enzyklopädie: Die Frau* (Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1963): 461.



of state and party officials' attempts to construct a "socialist living culture," a culture to which coffee drinking belonged.<sup>254</sup>

Design journals sought to visualize the modern socialist apartment, publishing photos of furniture and decor which featured the simple lines and clean, clutter-free spaces that in part characterized mid-century modernism. Coffee was present in these utopian visions, typically in the form of a coffee set made of gleaming white East German porcelain sitting atop a table, in either a kitchen or living room.<sup>255</sup> Coffee's appearance in these particular articles or images at first appears peculiar. Design journals were interested in displaying the overall aesthetic of a room; human models typically did not appear in the photos, and it is highly unlikely that the photographers would have bothered to pour anything into the coffee sets in these staged images. Yet these images do not present us with a "Schrödingers' coffee" dilemma: it was not the coffee itself, but the idea of drinking coffee, either alone or with guests, which these images encouraged. In this way, coffee's nearly ubiquitous presence in these design journals acted more as a legitimation of the designs themselves. Coffee was tradition being brought into the modern aesthetic.

Made of *East German* porcelain, these coffee sets were important as much for the idea they conveyed as for the material from which they were sculpted.<sup>256</sup> Choosing the correct dishes and serving ware was integral to "decorating the modern table," as state architect Hans Lewitzky told readers in a 1964 essay.<sup>257</sup> Properly adhering to socialist principles of design could also

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<sup>254</sup> For example, there was a "concerted campaign" in the 1950s and 1960s to "'sell' modern, functionalist buildings and apartments as part of a completely new, perfected modern lifestyle." Rubin. *Synthetic Socialism*, 89.

<sup>255</sup> See for example "Drei neue Küchenmodelle," *Kultur im Heim* 2 (1957): 32; "Die Küche der Zukunft," *Für Dich* 51 (December 1963): 40-41; "Ein Essplatz ist notwendig," *Guter Rat* 3 (1967): 16-18.

<sup>256</sup> A March 1963 article in *Für Dich* praised an undecorated, simple design for a new set of porcelain coffee services: "whoever has searched so far in vain for practical, simply kitchen dishes, a dining and coffee service without flowers, and beautifully shape[d] [...] can now rest assured to find satisfaction in our new line." "Test mit dem 'Testladen'" *Für Dich* 10 (März 1963): 32.

<sup>257</sup> Hans Lewitzky, "Der gedeckte Tisch im modernen Wohnraum," *Für Dich* 10 (März 1964): 40-41.

enhance one's dining experience, as "The enjoyment of a meal is increased if the food and drinks, are served on tasteful dishes in elegant glasses."<sup>258</sup> Paul Krauß, the lead designer at VEB Porcelain Combine Colditz, argued that cultivating a genuine Socialist living culture could only happen "if we are mindful of our attitude to things, and realize that beauty does not come to us through poorly copied, minutiae of yesterday. Our society has the moral and material foundations to create the best cultural traditions that also include the everyday."<sup>259</sup> Household porcelain brought these cultural traditions into East German homes because it was, according to one magazine, "An ornament of the cultivated coffee table. A perfectly shaped design of our time. Inexpensive and affordable for everyone. Household porcelain: always a welcome gift of lasting value." 'Ornament' was in this case not a problem, because the other qualities of porcelain – being affordable for all, and conforming to accepted designs – recast 'ornament' within the accepted parameters of a 'socialist living culture.'<sup>260</sup>

Porcelain coffee pots and cups served two important interests for the regime. First, because porcelain was a material produced within the GDR, it relied on very little foreign imports, thus avoiding foreign currency expenses. Second, and perhaps more important, because it had been manufactured in the territories now encompassing the GDR for centuries, the gleaming, pure white porcelain coffee set could also serve as another form of a 'useable past' – but one which was now 'democratized' and accessible to all. One advertisement for decorative porcelain coffee services in December 1963 highlighted this very distinction, saying "[what was] once so prohibitively expensive [...] [is] a commodity today, thanks to mechanized production. In

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<sup>258</sup> Hans Lewitzky, "Der gedeckte Tisch im modernen Wohnraum," *Für Dich* 10 (März 1964): 40-41.

<sup>259</sup> Ria Liermann, "Paul Krauß: Ansprüche an einen Formgestalter," *Kultur im Heim* 6 (1978): 30-33.

<sup>260</sup> These ads also directly targeted women, with bold typeface proclaiming "Beautiful coffee dishes: the pride of every woman." See "Schönes Kaffeegeschirr der Stolz jeder Frau," *Für Dich* 23 (Juni 1964): 38. Similar ads for the same product ran through the summer months of 1964, each of which repeated the message that "women love porcelain...especially when it matches the style of our time." See "Schönes Kaffeegeschirr der Stolz jeder Frau," *Für Dich* 27 (Juli 1964): 30.

households of our time, porcelain, and china in particular, belong with the indispensable possessions of every housewife.”<sup>261</sup> A similar ad the following issue pointed out that “only 150 years ago the prerogative of the well-to-do, [the featured coffee service] is affordable as household porcelain for all today. Our lifestyle-adapted forms are products of a tradition-rich industry.”<sup>262</sup>

**Fig. 1.5:** “Three new kitchen models”



Source: “Drei neue Küchenmodelle,” *Kultur im Heim* 2 (1957): 32

It was in making appropriate design choices in both furniture and household accessories through which East Germans participated in this ‘socialist living culture.’ Even here, however, one can sense tension within these messages between sociability and supposed relaxation. A 1957 article in *Kultur im Heim* featured a colour photo of a woman sitting on a sofa bed listening to the radio and drinking coffee. In comparison to earlier examples, here we see a move towards a more private, cozy atmosphere, surrounded by elements of the new Socialist design aesthetic: simple decorations, functional shelving, and the radio, the woman appears relaxed and comfortable, her feet up – which was precisely the point: she was taking a moment to enjoy a cup of coffee and listen to the radio – she was not doing housework. Nevertheless, for all the

<sup>261</sup> *Für Dich* 50 (December 1963): 32.

<sup>262</sup> *Für Dich* 51 (December 1963): 28.

implication of leisure, the woman appears in an evening dress, her makeup applied and jewelry adorned; all rather formal attire for the simple indulgence suggested by the rest of the image. These final elements betray the staged nature of the photograph, but also demonstrate the uneasy fit between lingering dreams of female sociability with the design elements of a ‘modern’ functional socialist way of life.

**Fig. 1.6:** ‘Virtuous leisure’



Source: *Kultur im Heim* 1 (1957): 4.

The home was also where one entertained guests, and coffee played an important role in adhering to proper hospitality. Supplying one’s guests with coffee as they arrived, and after dinner, was typical when hosting guests – a practice neither unique to East Germany, nor out of fashion today. What to serve one’s guests was “not just a question of the purse;” argued *Unser Haushalt*, saying “It serves no purpose and gives a bad impression, if one wants to outdo each other. [...] [It is] *not what we set before our guests that is important, but how we maintain*

*sociability*.”<sup>263</sup> The purpose of entertaining guests, the article implied, was to foster community, solidarity, and meaningful exchanges between citizens, rather than using such events as opportunities to showcase one’s material prosperity. Whether *Unser Haushalt*’s readers adopted such a message is unclear, though the presence of such a ‘guideline’ implies a perceived need to direct East Germans in this way, suggesting that, at least to the book’s authors, there were concerns that East Germans held inappropriate views about their roles as hosts.

As a lubricant for social gatherings, coffee facilitated those exchanges, particularly after dinner, because according to *Unser Haushalt*, “any successful evening” would “conclude with a cup of coffee.” Sharing coffee with guests formed a part of ‘relaxation’, an indulgence enjoyed for its taste and power to bring people together, not always for its stimulating effects.<sup>264</sup> Consider for example the advice given by *Festively Decorated Table* [*Festlich Gedeckte Tisch*] that an engagement party “is best celebrated with coffee [...] nowhere else can two unfamiliar families get together more easily than with the fragrance of a delicious coffee! How cheery the conversation gets going!”<sup>265</sup> Images and ideas of coffee drinking facilitating restful social interaction drew on similar messages from as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. During this century, artwork which depicted meals often differed from that depicting coffee drinking, “in that in the former there was a real need at stake – hunger. Thus dining scenes contrasted with coffee scenes in the latter’s lack of urgency.”<sup>266</sup> Hosting and entertaining was supposed to be conducted in such a way as to reinforce new virtues of the socialist personality, by strengthening bonds with coworkers, neighbours, and friends. Above all, it was meant to break down the class barriers that would have previously made such gatherings unheard of. As one magazine put it, “the word

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<sup>263</sup> Wolfgang Polte, *Unser Haushalt* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1966), 532. Emphasis added.

<sup>264</sup> Polte, *Unser Haushalt* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1966), 541.

<sup>265</sup> *Festlich Gedeckte Tische für viele Gelegenheiten*. Bestellung nummer 607. Verlag für die Frau Leipzig (no date).

<sup>266</sup> Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants and Intoxicants*, translated by David Jacobson (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 174.

luxury has an aftertaste. It is an almost indecent word that delivers remorse immediately following pleasure.” A remedy to this conundrum, offered the book’s authors, was in the social activity of enjoying coffee with others, as “at the same time, coffee also fosters thought, begins conversations, inspires ideas...and thereby the word sounds new to us again. [...] We enjoy life, and are happy with such luxury.”<sup>267</sup> Indulgence was not a problem when the purpose focused on fostering solidarity between Germans.

Reality, however, could clash with this ideal. Unequal access to western coffee would prove divisive when, in 1974, the regime relaxed constraints on hard currency, making it lawful for East Germans to possess Western currency. At the same time, East Germans were now permitted to shop in the *Intershop* stores – high end tourist shops previously open only to Western tourists as a means of obtaining hard currency. Access to these stores – and the western coffee brands within – contributed to the stratification of East German society when, by exchanging their hard currency for *Intershop* coupons and purchasing their western coffee, certain individuals signaled their western connections [*Beziehungen*]. Offering a guest a cup of ‘rare’ coffee like *Jacob’s Kronung* might satisfy the requirements of being a good host, but placing that brand in front of someone who lacked the means to acquire it themselves also established one’s privileged access to ‘better’ goods. *Genussmittel* like coffee threatened the regime’s attempts to convince people of Socialism’s superiority when they exacerbated social differentiation in a social system that was supposed to provide equal access to goods.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> *Kaffee oder Tee* (Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1970), 3.

<sup>268</sup> Ina Merkel, “Working People and Consumption under Really-Existing Socialism: Perspectives from the German Democratic Republic,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 55, *Class and Consumption* (Spring, 1999), 92-111, here 92. As Daphne Berdahl explained, concepts of ‘social differentiation’ in East Germany often consider divides between political elites and citizens, but in fact this differentiation often manifested in resentment between citizens based on issues related to wealth, access to specialized goods, or other privileges associated with their status vis-à-vis political elites. See Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 112-113.

*Genussmittel* like coffee were entirely compatible with State Socialism, so long as the purpose and intent behind their consumption lay in fostering meaningful bonds with one's community. The regime's own rhetoric praised coffee not only for its physiological effects as a stimulant, but also encouraged Germans to enjoy their coffee as a social activity that fostered rest and relaxation, and one through which they partook in an older German, and indeed European, cultural tradition. In this way, the regime framed coffee and its consumption as a socialist product and practice. Yet weaving these ideas together encouraged Germans to value their coffee for its stimulant effects and for the sensory experience it offered through taste and aroma. Preferences of quality, taste, and pleasure persisted in East Germans' consumer choices, and they continued to believe that a product's economic value (its price) ought to reflect their own subjective taste preferences. In placing coffee so centrally into its own rhetoric of participation in the socialist state, the SED also tied its own legitimacy to its ability to facilitate that participation by maintaining supply of good coffee. As the SED would discover when world prices suddenly skyrocketed from 1975-77, East Germans were more than willing to defend their expectations for a quality cup of coffee when they felt their ability to derive pleasure from the *act* of coffee drinking disappeared because of the adulteration of the *substance*.

## Chapter 2: Bitter Grounds: ‘Kaffee-Mix’ and the “Coffee Crisis” of 1977-1978

In the first week of August 1977, Rudolf M. made his way to his local grocery store in the town of Rötha in the hopes of restocking his kitchen cupboards with his usual brand of coffee, *Mocca-Fix-Gold*. Upon his arrival he discovered that no more *Mocca-Fix-Gold* remained on the shelves. Like many East Germans, Rudolf was accustomed to periodic goods shortages, and so he approached a store clerk to inquire about their stock. The clerk told him that *Mocca-Fix-Gold* would no longer be produced, a revelation which disturbed Rudolf, because while shortages were common, the outright removal of a particular product was another matter entirely. The shop’s employees were unable to provide Rudolf with any further information, so he returned home, and decided to write an official petition letter (*Eingabe*) to the local authorities. Describing his exchange in the store, Rudolf insisted that not only he, but many other coffee drinkers were astounded by this information. The abrupt changes in coffee supply frustrated him, he explained, because “now there was finally a coffee that was practical and quick to brew, as well as being flavourful, and suddenly it disappears from the market.”<sup>269</sup>

Rudolf’s encounter in Rötha reflected similar experiences in stores across the country through the month of August, as East Germans found their regular roasted coffee brands replaced by ‘*Kaffee-Mix*,’ a mixture of 51 per cent roasted coffee and 49 per cent ‘surrogate’ products: chicory, sugar beet and rye. The mixture constituted the State’s response to a developing ‘coffee crisis,’ brought about by a disastrous frost in Brazil in July of 1975 which caused world coffee prices to quadruple between 1975 and 1977.<sup>270</sup> Suddenly, the GDR could only afford to purchase half of its planned volume of coffee for 1977, and by the spring state planners estimated reserves

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<sup>269</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Bericht an Genossen Hermann Pöschel: Leicht-, Lebensmittel- und Bez. Gel. Industrie. 19.08.77, Anlage 1, *Eingaben*, 2.

<sup>270</sup> Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (München: Econ&List, 1998), 171.



would not last until the end of the year, given current consumption rates. Facing crippling debt and the delayed effects of the world oil crisis at the same time, authorities scrambled to find a way to stretch supply and cover public demand for coffee. Planners opted to replace the most affordable brands (*Kosta*, *Mocca-Fix Gold*) with *Kaffee-Mix* in an attempt to ration the remaining raw coffee supply until world prices would, presumably, stabilize. Public reaction to this measure, however, was hardly accommodating. In the coming weeks, citizens complained in droves about the drastic changes, writing thousands of petition letters to roasting firms and retailers, as well as to state and party officials from the local to the national levels.<sup>271</sup> In some cases, public reaction went beyond verbal or written criticism. At the end of August, the district branch of the infamous Ministry for State Security (MfS, Stasi) for Cottbus reported “vehement reactions” to the coffee measures, including a workers’ strike that necessitated the reversal of the measures in some factories.<sup>272</sup>

That a crisis could erupt over something as seemingly mundane as coffee reveals precisely how significant this commodity became by the 1970s in the minds of East Germans, state planners, and the Party leadership. With regard to the GDR, ‘crisis’ is a term generally associated with very specific events, for instance 1953, 1956, 1961, and 1968; years in which the government faced mass- scale popular upheaval or mass emigration. Coffee always challenged the regime’s claims of the GDR’s self- sufficiency, as it placed the country at the mercy of the world market for a fickle cash crop. With each cup they drank, East Germans came to expect

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<sup>271</sup> Dr. Uto Dietrich Wange provided Günter Mittag with this figure a year after the initial coffee crisis. See SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Wange to Mittag, “Entwicklung der Improbe von Rohkaffee und der Qualität der Röstkaffeemischungen,” (10.8.1978), 480-481, here 481. Hans-Joachim Döring mentioned 14,000 *Eingaben* penned in the second half of 1977, and another 7000 in the first half of 1978, though he provided no source for these figures. See Hans-Joachim Döring, “*Es geht um unsere Existenz.*” *Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien.* Forschungen zur DDR-Gesellschaft (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag 1999), 121.

<sup>272</sup> BStU MfS BVfS Cottbus, AKG 4158. Bezirksverwaltung Cottbus, “Information über weitere Reaktionen unter der Bevölkerung des Bezirkes Cottbus zur Versorgung mit Bohnenkaffee,” (25.08.1977), 3.

coffee as a prerequisite for a higher standard of living, an expectation that was affirmed in 1971 when political power shifted to Erich Honecker and the Party announced the ‘Principal Task of Socialism’ would henceforth concentrate on improving living standards. Following similar course adjustments in the Soviet Union that March, the Principal Task placed a new emphasis on the consumer needs of the population, including housing and a more consistent supply of consumer goods. This shift had political motives: by prioritizing the consumer interests of East Germans, and improving living standards, Honecker sought to convince the population that the Party was making a genuine break with Ulbricht’s disastrous attempts at economic reform.<sup>273</sup> By the 1970s, tired slogans such as “the way we work today is the way we’ll live tomorrow” were growing stale, and East Germans increasingly recognized the disconnect between the SED’s promised utopia and the everyday reality of scarcity. Abandoning such rhetoric, the SED instead claimed East Germans could now reap the benefits of what it called “Real Existing Socialism” in the present.<sup>274</sup> By committing the Party to immediately fulfilling its rhetoric of the modern socialist utopia, the Principal Task tied the regime’s legitimacy directly to its ability to make good on the promise of improved living standards.

Rudolf’s *Eingabe* exhibits his personal affinity not only for coffee, but his growing expectation of quality. His use of the word ‘finally’ served as a reminder of previous scarcities, and implied a certain experience of longing, as if *Mocca-Fix-Gold* had at last fulfilled his desires for a good cup of coffee. Having waited so long for his coffee, Rudolf found its sudden

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<sup>273</sup> This move also helped to “reassert the SED’s fealty to Moscow.” See Jonathan Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany*, (Washington: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 66-67. Ulbricht’s economic reforms during the 1960s had led to increases in personal incomes and wages, increases in child benefits and old age pensions, and the reduction in working hours to a standardized five day work week. Yet, these increases only served to highlight for the population the growing disparity between income and costs of living, in particular consumer goods shortages, which led to growing anxieties by the end of the decade. See Zatlin, *Currency*, 46-50, and André Steiner, *The Plans That Failed: An Economic History Of East Germany, 1945-1989* (Berghahn Books, 2010), 126-132.

<sup>274</sup> Zatlin, *Currency*, 67.

disappearance unacceptable, and he warned authorities that “if [the story of its discontinuance] is true, one can’t speak of progress and not at all about an improvement of provisioning, as is so often publicized.”<sup>275</sup> By deploying the SED’s own rhetoric of progress in this way, East Germans invoked the political importance of coffee, creating a tangible reminder that their acquiescence to the Socialist system hinged on the state’s capacity to fulfill its responsibilities to the population. The coffee crisis challenged both the supposed superiority of the Planned Economy and the regime’s claims to legitimacy when it struggled to keep coffee flowing into East Germans’ expectant cups.

Yet, as public reaction to *Kaffee-Mix* demonstrated, merely maintaining supply proved an insufficient solution to the coffee crisis, because it failed to adequately account for taste and flavour. During the previous two decades, both official portrayals and lived experiences had reinforced the notion that drinking coffee was a social activity that fostered meaningful bonds among citizens. Whether on break at work or between neighbours at an afternoon *Kaffeeklatsch*, sharing a coffee was a social act that was meant to be enjoyable. Being able to offer one’s guests a cup of quality roasted coffee demonstrated one’s status, but it also formed an important part of social conventions of hospitality: one did not serve instant coffee with the cakes after the Sunday roast. After nearly twenty years of drinking roasted brands like *Kosta*, *Mona*, and *Rondo*, East Germans grew accustomed not only to having access to what they perceived as ‘their brand,’ but also to the particular taste and flavour of that brand. *Kaffee-Mix* may have guaranteed continued access to coffee, but it also represented a fundamental degradation in quality. Citizens’ adamant defense of a ‘quality cup of coffee’ illustrates a paradox of the East German brand of consumer socialism: despite the regime’s efforts to eliminate ‘false desires’ by ensuring equal access to

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<sup>275</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Bericht an Genossen Hermann Pöschel: Leicht-, Lebensmittel- und Bezirks Geleitete Industrie (19.8.77), Anlage 1, *Eingaben*, 2.

‘genuine needs,’ East Germans nonetheless continued to distinguish between different products based on their perceived ‘value.’ As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the regime encouraged coffee-drinking as a key part of the particular form of socialist modernity it sought to foster. By fostering such an association, the regime inadvertently perpetuated some of the very cultural mindsets it sought to eliminate. A cheap and tasteless substitute, *Kaffee-Mix* was bereft of cultural value, and to East Germans it constituted the abandonment of the Party’s commitments under Real Existing Socialism.

When they rejected *Kaffee-Mix* on account of its poor taste and quality, East Germans resolved to purchase *Rondo* and *Mona* instead, despite their higher costs. This behaviour guaranteed the rapid depletion of coffee reserves, not only jeopardizing the state’s plans to save hard currency, but effectively rendering the state’s conservation measures a complete loss. Having opted against a general reduction of supply as a politically unviable solution, the regime now faced the reality that its population would reject with equal vigour any measures affecting the quality of their coffee. If East Germans were only going to purchase brands with high coffee content, the regime had no alternative but to find new sources of raw coffee without increasing hard currency expenditures, a reality that would drive the regime to alter its foreign relations initiatives in the developing world over the coming decade.

### *The Brazilian Frost of 1975*

As they brewed their morning cups on 21 July 1975, coffee lovers around the world learned of a large cold front that had swept South America the previous weekend, assaulting Brazil’s coffee-producing regions of Minas Gerais, São Paulo, and Parana from 17 to 20 July.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> John Valentine, “Frost Damages Next Year’s Crop of Brazil Coffee: Half of Output May Be Lost,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 July 1975, 14.

Light frosts are not uncommon in the region, but in the majority of cases frosts generally only kill the leaves and flowers of coffee trees. Referred to as “white frosts,” these episodes leave the rest of the plant unharmed, and only have a limited effect on annual coffee yields.<sup>277</sup> Brazil’s coffee industry generally recovers from such ‘white frosts’ fairly quickly. Unlike ‘white frosts,’ the ‘black frost’ of 1975 froze the sap within the tree itself, turning it black and killing the entire plant.<sup>278</sup> Owing to the fact that the 1975/76 harvest had begun in April and was nearly complete, the frost did not affect that year’s crop; however, the dead trees would need to be replaced and the new saplings would take at least four years before they would bear sufficient fruit.<sup>279</sup>

Early damage estimates provided little clarity on the situation; according to some news sources, as much as half to three quarters of Brazil’s coffee crop had been destroyed, and the 1976 crop produced only four million bags, compared with 27 million in 1975.<sup>280</sup> The state coffee firm, the *Instituto Brasileiro do Café* (IBC) announced on 23 July that over half of the 1976/77 crop had been destroyed, and it suspended all coffee exports on 19 July as a protective measure, a risky move as coffee “account[ed] for 20 to 25 per cent of the country’s total exports.”<sup>281</sup> As a temporary solution, the Brazilian government announced plans to use its 21 million bags of reserve coffee to fulfill its current contracts while experts determined an official response.<sup>282</sup> Parana, Brazil’s main coffee-producing state, suffered particularly devastating losses. Accounting for approximately half of Brazil’s 1975 production, Parana lost virtually all

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<sup>277</sup> Usually such frosts result in a superficial layer of ‘hoar frost’ along the surface area of plants, leaving a crystalline like appearance not unlike the intricate ice patterns on car windows on particularly cold winter days. Encyclopaedia Britannica online. John Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement: The Political Economy of the Coffee Commodity Chain* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 68.

<sup>278</sup> Bruce Handler, “The 50- Cent Cup of Coffee? After the Brazilian Freeze,” *The Washington Post*, 5 August 1975, D7.

<sup>279</sup> Valentine, “Frost Damages Next Year’s Crop of Brazil Coffee,” Talbot, 68.

<sup>280</sup> “Frost in Brazil Said to Ruin Half of Coffee Crop and Peril Herds,” *The New York Times*, 24 July 1975, 10. On four million bag yield, see “Commodity Update: Frosts may have cut Brazil’s coffee yield by as much as 75%,” *The Globe and Mail*, 23 July 1975, B9.

<sup>281</sup> Talbot, 68; Valentine, “Frost Damages Next Year’s Crop of Brazil Coffee.” On use of reserves, see “Frost in Brazil Said to Ruin Half of Coffee Crop and Peril Herds,” *The New York Times*, 24 July 1975, 10.

<sup>282</sup> “Frost in Brazil Said to Ruin Half of Coffee Crop and Peril Herds,” *The New York Times*, 24 July 1975, 10.

of its coffee trees, leaving one inspector to comment that “[n]one of what we’ve seen will produce a single bean next year.”<sup>283</sup> Their public reports estimated that coffee production would be “substantially reduced” for at least two years.<sup>284</sup> Supplying roughly one third of the world’s coffee at the time, such a devastating environmental disaster had serious implications for the international coffee market.

News of the event caused such immediate panic that by 18 July the New York Coffee and Sugar Exchange (NYCSE) increased the limits for coffee futures by two cents per pound, and to four cents per pound four days later.<sup>285</sup> Other coffee-producing countries also increased their export prices in response to news of the frost, including Colombia and El Salvador.<sup>286</sup> By the end of the month, wholesalers began to follow suit.<sup>287</sup> The frost caused additional confusion as it hit at a time when many of the world’s other coffee-producing countries were experiencing upheaval. Ethiopia, which produced Arabica beans similar in quality to those of Brazil, as well as Angola, at that time the world’s second largest producer of Robusta beans, were embroiled in civil wars.<sup>288</sup>

Exacerbating matters was the uncertain situation within the International Coffee Organization (ICO). Established in 1963, the ICO regulated prices and quotas for coffee imports and exports.<sup>289</sup> In light of the falling US dollar in 1971 and the oil crisis of 1972/73, coffee-producing countries tried to negotiate higher export prices, but consuming countries refused. In

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<sup>283</sup> “Entire crop in Parana likely lost next year,” *The Globe and Mail*, 8 Aug 1975, B3.

<sup>284</sup> “USDA confirms frost in Brazil to reduce coffee output for 2 years,” *The Globe and Mail*, 22 August 1975, B4.

<sup>285</sup> Valentine, “Frost Damages Next Year’s Crop of Brazil Coffee;” “Retail Coffee likely up 20% within month,” *The Globe and Mail*, 23 July 1975, B5.

<sup>286</sup> “Brazil Suspends Export of Coffee,” *The Washington Post*, 20 July 1975, A5.

<sup>287</sup> “General Foods raises coffee 20 cents pound,” *The Globe and Mail*, 29 July 1975, B4; “Coffee Prices to Go Up Soon as Frost Hurts Brazil Crop,” *The Washington Post*, 29 July 1975, D8.

<sup>288</sup> For a more detailed summary of the Ethiopian and Angolan civil wars, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 257.

<sup>289</sup> See “International Coffee Agreements, 1962- 1968,” *The International Coffee Organization*. London: [http://www.ico.org/icohistory\\_e.asp?section=About\\_Us#sthash.XLTFrgT2.dpuf](http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp?section=About_Us#sthash.XLTFrgT2.dpuf), (accessed 1 January 2014).

response to this breakdown in negotiations, the ICO suspended export quotas (as well as all economic provisions) in December 1973, allowing free competition throughout the market at the time of the 1975 frost.<sup>290</sup> Thus Brazil’s black frost occurred amidst some of the worst possible market conditions, in effect creating a ‘perfect storm’ where coffee was concerned. Table 2.0 outlines the trajectory of the average coffee price per pound, based on ICO numbers, measured in dollars per pound. The real coffee price doubled between 1975 and 1976, nearly quadrupling by 1977.<sup>291</sup> By 1978, the price had sunk again by forty seven per cent of its 1977 rate, but this decreased price was still more than twice that of pre-frost levels. Such a dramatic rise placed the currency- poor German Democratic Republic in a financial quandary.<sup>292</sup>

**Table 2.0.** Coffee price per lb in US cents, 1975- 1978.

	1975	1976	1977	1978	Change from May 1977 in per cent
Coffee Price per lb (US cents)	71.72	142.45	256.39	158.40	- 46.5

*Source:* Research institute of the Ministry for Foreign Trade, Berlin. BArchBL- SAPMO, DL 2/6071, “Weltmarktpreise für Rohkaffee,” Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung, Planung und Finanzen, (Juni 1978).

### *A Crisis Brewing: March – July 1977*

If news of Brazil’s frost sparked quick reactions in western commodity markets, the mood in East Germany remained calm through the autumn of 1975. None of the three major East German state-controlled newspapers (*Neues Deutschland, Neue Zeit, Berliner Zeitung*) published anything about the frost until March 1977, when *Berliner Zeitung* reported on Brazil raising

<sup>290</sup> Hartmut Brandt, *The Formulation of a new International Coffee Agreement* (Berlin: German Development Institute, 1991), 72- 73; and “International Coffee Agreements, 1962- 1968,” *The International Coffee Organization*. London: [http://www.ico.org/icohistory\\_e.asp?section=About\\_Us#sthash.XLTFrgT2.dpuf](http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp?section=About_Us#sthash.XLTFrgT2.dpuf), (accessed 1 January 2014).

<sup>291</sup> The International Coffee Organization, “Comparative analysis of world coffee prices and manufactured goods,” International Coffee Council, 112th Session (accessed 3-7 March, 2014). London, 3.

<sup>292</sup> The International Coffee Organization. “The International Coffee Organization 1963-2013: 50 Years Serving the World Coffee Community,” International Coffee Organization: London, 2013. 12; see also The International Coffee Organization, “Comparative analysis of world coffee prices and manufactured goods,” 3. The GDR also recorded prices at the time, see: Research institute of the Ministry for Foreign Trade, Berlin. BArchBL-SAPMO, DL 2/6071, “Weltmarktpreise für Rohkaffee,” Ministerium für Handel und Versorgung, Planung und Finanzen, (Juni 1978).

coffee prices by 33 per cent. Even here, *Berliner Zeitung* spoke of price increases in vague terms, downplaying the frost:

As a rule Brazil receives a quarter of world revenue [for coffee]. However, in 1975 their crops were affected by dire frosts. The crop failure has not yet been fully felt in international supply. Trade could rely on surpluses from previous years. Nevertheless, the world supply on the market has meanwhile become ever scarcer. It is difficult to evaluate to what extent capitalist speculation had a hand in this.<sup>293</sup>

Despite referencing the frost, the article provided no specifics regarding the extent of damage or the time required to cultivate new trees, nor did it explain exactly what the price increases were. Instead, *Berliner Zeitung* presented an unclear picture of the world coffee supply, and hinted at Western manipulation being responsible. Apart from those who had access to western media sources like radio or television, East Germans received no further information regarding the world coffee situation until the late summer of 1977.

State and Party apparatuses also made scant mention of the frost in official correspondence. Despite their apparent inattention, by March 1977 planners found themselves caught off-guard by the dramatic increase in world coffee prices. Responsibility for monitoring the coffee situation fell in large part to Hans- Joachim Rüscher, head of the Central Committee's department for Light-, Food- and District- led Industry (*Abteilung für Leicht-, Lebensmittel- und Bezirksgeleitete Industrie des Zentralkomitee der SED, ABI*). In his initial assessment on 17 March, Rüscher indicated that per capita consumption of coffee had risen in the GDR from 2.52 kg in 1970 to 2.84 kg in 1976.<sup>294</sup> Import plans for 1977 called for 51,900 t of raw coffee, an increase of 1900 t over the previous year's coffee imports.<sup>295</sup> Of this amount, 42,900 t were

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<sup>293</sup> "Ein siecher Koloß: In Brasilien hapert es nicht nur beim Kaffee," *Berliner Zeitung*, 17 March 1977, 7.

<sup>294</sup> BArchB DY 3023/1218, Rüscher an Mittag, "Pro-Kopf-Verbrauch in der DDR/Rohkaffee/Sprühkaffee," 25.04.1977, 51. East Germany used the metric system of measurement; consequently, all volumetric measurements of tonnes in this dissertation reflect metric tonnes, unless specifically stated otherwise.

<sup>295</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, "Rüscher an Günter Mittag, 17/03/1977," 2. The GDR's coffee imports had increased steadily throughout the 1970s, from 45,000 t in 1970 to 47,915 t in 1975, and just over 50,000 t in 1976.



slated for the general population, and remaining supplies would be divided between tourist shops and reserves. Based on population figures of the time, these plans suggest a per capita import figure of approximately 0.352 kg.<sup>296</sup> The regime estimated a required budget of 231.8 million *Valutamark* for this plan, or 4,467 VM per tonne.<sup>297</sup> Like the Russian transferable Ruble, the *Valutamark* was an artificial currency that functioned as an accounting unit for the purposes of calculating the economic costs (the required volume of exports) of importing a given volume of goods. Officially, state economists took the *Valutamark* as the “notational equivalent of one West German mark.”<sup>298</sup> Lacking any real value, then, the *Valutamark* can only serve as an indicator of aggregate trade figures:

**Table 2.1:** GDR Import and Export totals (in million *Valutamark*), 1970s

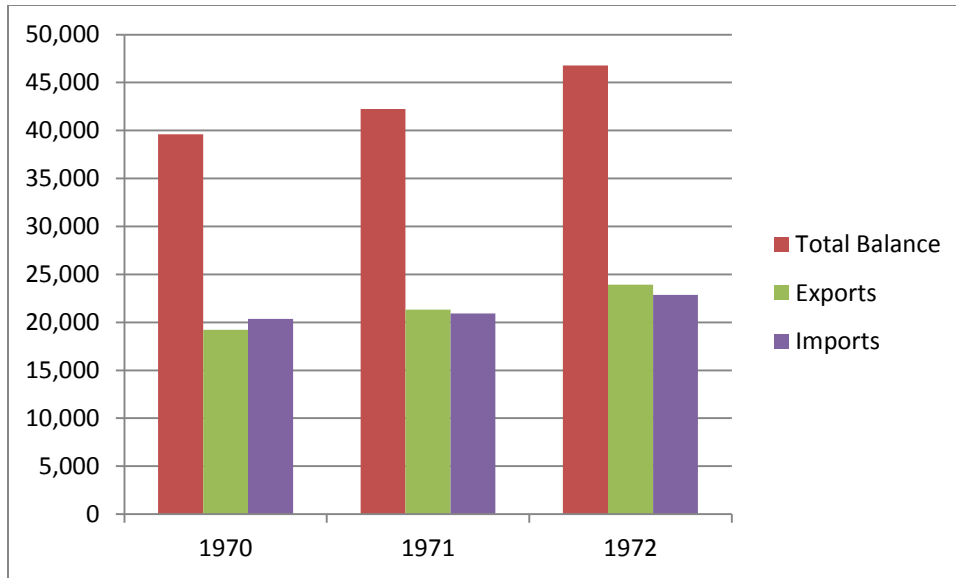
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No doubt planners anticipated a continued pattern of demand that would necessitate further growth in these volumes in the coming years. See BArchB DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, “Entwicklung des DDR-Imports Rohkaffee,” 25.04.1977, 50. It should also be noted that the coffee import volumes for the year included the volume entering the GDR via unofficial means, such as *Westpakets*, which planners estimated accounted for 19 percent of total supply in 1977. However, planners noted this volume represented a decline from previous years (23 percent of total supply in 1976), which they blamed on the rising coffee prices in West Germany. See BArchB, DY 30/16775, Bilanz Warenfonds Röstkaffee 1977 für die Versorgung der Bevölkerung (Anlage), 18 Mai 1978.

<sup>296</sup> The total Population for GDR in 1977 was 16,757,357. Removing those under the age of 18 (4,553,145), who presumably were not drinking that much coffee, leaves 12,204,212 adults. Accepting some margin for error, in particular without knowing the volume of coffee consumed by seniors, if 42900 was slated for the adult population, that suggests the per capita import figure is somewhere close to 0.003515 metric tonnes, or 0.352kg/capita). Population figures obtained through “Bevölkerungsstruktur und –entwicklung,” Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Zeitschriftenband 1979), Log 103, 341-348, here 341.

<sup>297</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, “Rüscher an Günter Mittag, 17.03.1977,” 2.

<sup>298</sup> Zatlin, *Currency*, 123 (Table 3 notation ‘a’). The German National Bank’s calculations of GDR payment balances also mentions this official 1:1 ratio. See “Die Zahlungsbilanz der ehemaligen DDR 1975 bis 1989,” Deutschen Bundesbank. Frankfurt am Main, 1999. 41.



Source: "Außenhandelsumsatz nach Ländergruppen," Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR, 1979 (log 74), p.232.

[https://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514402644\\_1978|log74&physid=phys260#navi](https://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514402644_1978|log74&physid=phys260#navi); accessed 13 July 2016. Note: data regarding import/export breakdowns not listed past 1973 edition of SJDDR.

Estimates for the 1977 coffee supply placed the price at 17- 20 thousand VM per tonne of raw coffee, more than a fourfold increase over the 1975 price.<sup>299</sup> Rüscher claimed these prices would cost the GDR 350.2 million VM *more* than was allotted in the plan.<sup>300</sup> The panicked tone of planners' correspondence for the remainder of the year demonstrates that industry and government officials viewed this problem as a genuine "coffee crisis [*Kaffeekrise*]." <sup>301</sup>

Examining the wider economic context in which coffee prices rose helps us understand both the delay in the state response and the resulting crisis situation by 1977. For planners reading about Brazil's frost in 1975, there may not actually have been much cause for immediate concern. In terms of supply, Brazilian coffee plantations had already completed the 1975 – 1976

<sup>299</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, "Memorandum from Rüscher to Günter Mittag, 17.03.1977," 2; see also BArchB, DC 20/10358, "Bericht über Möglichkeiten der Einsparung von Rohkaffee und Kakaobohnen in der Industrie und von Valutaaufwendungen für Import dieser Rohstoffe," 06.04.1977; BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Ehrensperger, "Übersicht über die Mehraufwendungen der DDR aus den Preiserhöhungen beim Import von Kaffee, Kakao, Wolle und Baumwolle in den Jahren 1977 und 1978 gegenüber den geplanten Aufwendungen in konvertierbaren Devisen," 25.7.1977, 189.

<sup>300</sup> BArchB DY 3023/1218. Rüscher to Günter Mittag, 17.3.77, Appendix: "Vorschläge zur Neugestaltung einiger Genußmittelsortimente - Kaffee und Kakao- Erzeugnisse," 12.

<sup>301</sup> Wolle, *Die Heile Welt der Diktatur*, 200. Wolle was the first scholar to apply the term 'crisis' to this particular shortage. Scholars have since continued the terms' use.

harvest before the frost, and the ICO and ICB were reporting sufficient world coffee stockpiles for two years. Thus, East German planners may have simply assumed that supply would not be a real issue until those stocks were depleted. Both the pricing patterns of the previous years and the breakdown of the ICO's negotiations in Paris just a week prior to the frost likely contributed to planners' perceptions. GDR coffee imports from 1970 – 1977 had increased by 5000 t, while prices had decreased over the same period of time, until the frost.<sup>302</sup> Even the immediacy of price increases in 1975 seemed manageable at the time. The suspension of quotas in the existing International Coffee Agreement meant that the coffee trade was deregulated at the time of the frost. East German planners may have seen an opportunity to obtain coffee from producing countries on a case-by-case basis.<sup>303</sup> Combined, existing contracts and structural buffers allowed East German planners to delay action in the short term, and instead observe the situation as it developed.<sup>304</sup>

In the eyes of state planners, therefore, East Germany benefited from several safeguards when it came to coffee. However, these safeguards could only bear so much strain, and when coffee prices soared in 1977, they did so just as much of this protection disappeared. Fears regarding a coffee shortage must therefore be understood in the context of the much broader economic difficulties gripping the government at the same time. Foremost of these economic strains was the growing debt crisis, the result of a shift in policy following Erich Honecker's ascension to power. At the eighth Party Congress in June 1971, the party announced a new 'Principal Task of Socialism,' with sweeping changes aimed at appeasing the population.

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<sup>302</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, "Preisentwicklung Rohkaffee ab Juni 1975 nach Quartalen," 25.04.1977, 50- 52.

<sup>303</sup> Certainly, this is an attitude with which planners interpreted the removal of quotas during the 1980s, discussed later.

<sup>304</sup> Brandt. *The Formulation of a new International Coffee Agreement*, 72- 73, and "International Coffee Agreements, 1962- 1968," *The International Coffee Organization*.  
[http://www.ico.org/icohistory\\_e.asp?section=About\\_Us](http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp?section=About_Us); (accessed 1 Dec 2015).

Abandoning the tired rhetoric of present-day sacrifice for future prosperity, the SED promised to adopt social policies that would immediately improve “the people’s material and cultural standard of living on the basis of a fast developmental pace of socialist production.”<sup>305</sup> In addition to tangible social benefits such as a reduction in working hours, increases to pensions and the introduction of extensive childcare facilities, the Main Task also involved the “comprehensive subsidization” of basic goods, including housing, food, and clothing.<sup>306</sup> The policy – renamed the ‘Unity of Economic and Social Policy’ (UESP) in 1976 – aimed at providing the population with social benefits and consumer goods, which the Party hoped would convince East Germans of the superiority of socialism, as well as provide incentives for increased production and technological innovation. However, as Jeffrey Kopstein has argued, since it “in effect promised the population that production increases and higher standards of living went together,” the SED’s turn to social policy linked the party’s legitimacy to the state’s ability to deliver on its promises, and social policy became “sacrosanct” over the course of the next decade.<sup>307</sup>

Financing the Main Economic Task proved beyond the GDR’s capabilities, and relied increasingly on large loans from West Germany. Tracing the GDR’s currency outlays in any period is a difficult challenge for scholars, as the principle figure used for measuring foreign trade balances – the *Valutamark* – had no real value, and the official 1:1 conversion rate of the East German mark to the West German Deutschmark was a fabrication. In addition to loans for consumer goods, the GDR also increased its oil imports starting in 1971, “practically doubling”

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<sup>305</sup> Protokoll der Verhandlungen des VIII. Parteitages der SED, 15. Bis 19. Juni 1971, Vol. II, Berlin (East) 1971, 296. Quoted in Steiner, *The Plans that Failed*, 143.

<sup>306</sup> Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 81.

<sup>307</sup> Kopstein, *Politics*, 81.

by 1980.<sup>308</sup> During the first world oil crisis of 1972-73, the GDR ran a shrewd policy of importing as much Soviet oil as possible, which it obtained at prices below the world average, and re-selling that oil to capitalist countries at current (and therefore profitable) prices.<sup>309</sup> Under the terms of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (CMEA, or COMECON), the price of Soviet oil was based on its average rate on the capitalist market over the previous five years, and then remained fixed for the following five years. Thus, the GDR did not immediately feel the effects of the first oil crisis, and in fact was able to profit from its resale of Soviet oil, which accounted for “nearly 90 per cent” of the GDR’s crude supplies from 1974 to 1979.<sup>310</sup> At first, the western currency earned through this system “held the debt at bay,” which also helped Mittag and Honecker keep the debt issue out of Politburo discussions.<sup>311</sup> Relying on this plan proved disastrous when in 1975, COMECON changed this policy so that the price of oil was calculated annually, based on a rolling five year average.<sup>312</sup> The following year, in response to poor agricultural harvests in the Soviet Union, Moscow increased the price of oil from 14 rubles per tonne to 35 in 1976, in spite of the rolling average through COMECON. These changes caused immediate shifts in Eastern European trade balances. From 1975 onward, each of the Eastern European members of CMEA shifted from “a pattern of balanced accounts and trade surpluses”

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<sup>308</sup> Ray Stokes, “From Schadenfreude to Going-Out-of-Business Sale: East Germany and the oil Crises of the 1970s,” in *The East German Economy: Falling Behind or Catching Up?*, edited by Berghoff, Hartmut, Uta Andrea Balbier (Washington and New York: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2013), 131-144, here 136.

<sup>309</sup> Ray Stokes, “From Schadenfreude to Going-Out-of-Business Sale,” 137.

<sup>310</sup> Ray Stokes, “From Schadenfreude to Going-Out-of-Business Sale,” 134. The GDR obtained its oil from a number of sources. In 1978 for instance, the GDR got its oil from Egypt (180,000 t); Iraq (1,576,000 t); Syria (258,000 t); USSR (16,012,000 t). See the *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Zeitschriftenband 1978*, 270 – 278.

<sup>311</sup> Zatlin, *Currency*, 113.

<sup>312</sup> Mark J. Ellyne, “Eastern Europe: Squeezing out of Debt,” *SAIS Review of International Relations* 5, no.2 (Summer/Fall 1985): 173-188, here 175.

to running trade deficits with the Soviet Union by the end of the decade.<sup>313</sup> This increase cost the GDR an extra 388 million West German marks (*Deutschmark*, DM) in 1976 alone.<sup>314</sup>

The GDR's foreign debt had already climbed to nearly 11 billion DM in 1975, and would reach just over 25 billion by 1979.<sup>315</sup> Having depended on the profits of reselling cheap Soviet oil, now the tables were reversed; by the late 1970s, the GDR "had to export 20 per cent more goods to the West just to keep even."<sup>316</sup> Between 1975 and 1985, the GDR "almost doubled" its exports to the USSR for a mere 7 per cent increase in oil imports.<sup>317</sup> Perhaps because the debt situation could potentially ignite political and social fires, the GDR stopped publishing separate import and export totals after 1976, henceforth issuing "only aggregate trade figures."<sup>318</sup> East Germany was not alone in this regard; the entire Eastern European bloc was suffering from a sharp spike in hard currency indebtedness in the late 1970s, more than doubling in almost every case between 1975 and 1980 (see table 2.2).

**Table 2.2.** Soviet and East European Hard Currency Debt (\$ Millions)

Country	1971	1975	1980
Bulgaria			
Gross	743	2640	3065
Net	723	2257	2730
Czechoslovakia			
Gross	485	1132	4890
Net	160	827	3640
GDR			
Gross	1408	5188	14410
Net	1205	3548	11750
Hungary			
Gross	1510	3929	9090
Net	687	2034	6694
Poland			
Gross	987	8388	24128

<sup>313</sup> Ellyne, "Eastern Europe: Squeezing out of Debt," 181.

<sup>314</sup> Zatlin, *Currency*, 75.

<sup>315</sup> Zatlin, *Currency*, 70. Jeffrey Kopstein provides a figure of over "39 billion marks" in 1979, though it is unclear which denomination he is using for this figure, and he provides no direct source. See Kopstein, *Politics*, 88. I have chosen to proceed with Zatlin's figures, as he provides a long list of sources.

<sup>316</sup> Kopstein, *Politics*, p.89.

<sup>317</sup> Ralf Ahrens, "Debt, Cooperation, and Collapse: East German Foreign Trade in the Honecker Years," in Hartmut Berghoff, Uta Andrea Balbier (eds.), *The East German Economy, 1945-2010: Falling Behind or Catching Up?* Washington, D.C. The German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp.161-176, here 172..

<sup>318</sup> Kopstein, *Politics*, 84.

Net	662	7725	22774
Romania			
Gross	1227	2924	9557
Net	1227	2449	9180
Total EE-Six			
Gross	6360	24201	65140
Net	4658	18840	56768
Soviet Union			
Gross	1800	10577	17565
Net	580	7450	9500
Total-CMEA			
Gross	8160	34778	82705
Net	5238	26290	66268

*Source:* Mark J. Ellyne, Mark J. Ellyne, “Eastern Europe: Squeezing out of Debt,” *SAIS Review of International Relations* 5, no.2 (Summer/Fall 1985), 173-188, here 176. Ellyne’s work relied on figures from the Wiener Institut für Internationale Wirtschaftsvergleiche (Vienna Institute for Comparative Economics), Vienna, Austria.

Crippling foreign debts, therefore, placed seemingly insurmountable challenges to planners when facing the sudden costs of coffee imports in 1977. Even the GDR’s most reliable source of hard currency in the early to mid-1970s had only been sufficient to slow its effects for a short period; with that source now removed, there was simply no way to finance any increase to the importing of consumer goods, especially one whose price had now quadrupled. There were no available currency reserves, and since the GDR already had to double its exports of manufactured goods simply to maintain oil imports, there was little hope of increasing goods production even further for a luxury like coffee. Yet, without coffee, the SED understood its claims of ‘real existing socialism’ would lose public credibility. Indeed, the SED’s decision to try and continue coffee provisioning despite the oppressive foreign debt situation merely highlights just how politically volatile the issue had become. Coffee is how the story of the political economy of this macroeconomic crisis played out.

Conceptualizing the coffee predicament in relation to the much larger economic challenges of 1977, but unable to refer to the situation as a ‘crisis,’ planners used a particular vocabulary to vocalize their growing anxieties about the industry’s inability to fulfill the party’s promises of a higher living standard. On 14 March, State Planning Commissioner Gerhard

Schürer, together with Economics Minister Günter Mittag, wrote to Honecker, warning that “years of excessive imports of commodities which, after their use in the GDR, do not contribute directly to increasing productivity and thereby to the sources of their repayment” were to blame for the current scarcity of hard currency.<sup>319</sup> Honecker did not receive the critique well, retorting: “We cannot simply change all of our policies overnight [...] what has been suggested means deep cuts [in the standard of living]. We would have to go before the Central Committee and say: We did not foresee this or we lied to you.”<sup>320</sup> Though this particular memorandum was about the general economic situation, Schürer mentioned coffee specifically in a separate report to Honecker on the same day as the letter he penned with Mittag. To save hard currency, Schürer recommended reducing the amount of coffee available to the public by 80 per cent, and claimed that “the State Planning Commission has not been drinking coffee for a long time, and it is all right, we are still alive.”<sup>321</sup>

During a meeting two days later, Mittag discussed possible ways to “maximize limits to imports,” and the hand-written protocol listed three possible solutions: importing “affordable” [*preisgünstiger*] coffee; introducing a new mixture; and reducing the number of coffee consumers [*gesellschaftlicher Bedarfsträger reduzieren*].<sup>322</sup> Thus, early strategies focused on lowering production costs, and already included potential adulteration to existing coffee blends. Rüscher wrote to Mittag in late April, forwarding a transcript of a broadcast from Radio in the American Sector (RAIS) that week, which discussed coffee prices. He also mentioned stories in

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<sup>319</sup> BArchB, DE1, 56323, Mittag and Schürer to Honecker, 14.3.77, 410, Quoted in Zatlin, *Currency*, 78.

<sup>320</sup> BArchB, DE1, 56323, “Zum Material vom 14.3.77,” 372, Quoted in Zatlin, *Currency*, 79.

<sup>321</sup> Zatlin discusses this correspondence in *Currency*, 78-92.

<sup>322</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, hand written protocol of a meeting with Günter Mittag, dated 16.03.1977.



western media about Jacobs coffee brand “buying up” a French coffee firm, saying that western media was concentrating on “preparing consumers for higher prices.”<sup>323</sup>

To Schürer, eliminating coffee imports was the logical solution to the coffee problem; under the circumstances, spending hard currency on a luxury good made little economic sense. The problem with Schürer’s proposal was that he neglected the political ramifications of sudden and dramatic changes in policy. Economic expediency was not a politically sound strategy if it resulted in a reduction in living standards, which the regime had publicly committed to improving. Indeed, it was all very well for the Planning Commission to have gone without coffee “for some time,” but it was both hubris and naive to suggest that the rest of the population would be willing to make such a sacrifice for the sake of balancing the budget.

With their hopes that East Germany could ride out the coffee storm shattered, planners’ internal reports and correspondence took on a distinctly panicked tone. Of immediate concern was the holiday provision of coffee, particularly with Easter and the secular ‘coming of age’ ceremony [*Jugendweihe*] approaching.<sup>324</sup> The Easter holiday had survived the regime’s attempts to secularize religious practices, and remained as an important annual family gathering for a majority of East Germans.<sup>325</sup> Easter tradition included the serving of coffee and cakes as a matter of course, and the threat of potential shortages so close to the holiday no doubt played a role in the timing of the state leadership’s shift in attention to assessing and resolving the coffee problem. For the time being, at least, the Ministry of District- led and Foodstuffs Industry (*Ministerium der Bezirksgeleitete Industrie und Lebensmittelindustrie*, MBL) assured Mittag on 8 March that the Easter supply of coffee was secure, yet even this reassurance carried a

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<sup>323</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Memo from Rüscher to Mittag, 25.4.1977, 53.

<sup>324</sup> *Jugendweihe* was the state-sponsored ‘coming of age’ ceremony, to replace the equivalent Christian ceremonies.

<sup>325</sup> For more on state attempts to intervene on religious observances, see Paul Betts’ chapter on Christianity in the GDR in Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 51-87.

foreboding caveat. MBL Minister Dr. Udo Dieter Wange also counseled that for the previous two months, “the only coffee that could be imported was of the quality normally used in brands of the highest price categories,” which he said had “already necessitate[d] the blending of expensive coffee” in the less expensive East German brands.<sup>326</sup> Thus, while East Germans would be able to enjoy coffee with their Easter cakes, planners were keenly aware that bringing coffee to Easter tables had been an expensive task and already forced the adulteration of existing blends.

Proposals for solving the coffee crisis fell into two main camps. On the one hand were those planners, like Rüscher, who sought ways to stretch remaining supplies of raw coffee so as to maintain supply for the public; on the other were those who recommended a flat reduction of the public coffee supply. Both approaches relied on various forms of product adulteration. As we have already seen, altering the recipe of coffee brands had been a common practice in the preceding decades, most often in response to import shortfalls, or shipments of inferior quality goods. Unlike these earlier approaches to rationalization, in which recipe changes typically involved a few hundred tonnes at a time, planners now faced the likelihood of adulteration on an unprecedented scale.

The earliest proposal included a restructuring of the entire retail coffee supply.<sup>327</sup> In 1977, East German retailers offered four varieties of roasted coffee: *Kosta* (including a subsidiary product, *Kosta-Melange*), *Rondo*, and *Mona* brands, as well as both a caffeine-free product (simply named ‘caffeine free coffee’) and a single ersatz (instant) coffee, *Im Nu*. A special roasted coffee, “First Class”, existed as well, but this product was extremely scarce and

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<sup>326</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 3023/1218, “Memorandum from Dr. Wange to Günter Mittag,” 8.3.1977.

<sup>327</sup> BArchB DY 30/25310. Rüscher to Günter Mittag, 17.3. 77. Appendix: “Vorschläge zur Neugestaltung einiger Genußmittelsortimente - Kaffee und Kakao- Erzeugnisse,” 2.

available only in Intershops.<sup>328</sup> Prices for each product were set by the SPK and roasting industry, and placed each coffee brand into a particular price category:

**Table 2.3** Prices for roasted coffee brands in the GDR, March 1977:

Coffee Brand	Portion of GDR Market (%)	EVP (Price in Marks/kg)	EVP (Marks/125g pkg)
“Kosta” (incl. Kosta-Melange)	70	60	7.5
“Rondo”	22	70	8.75
“Mona”	8	80	10
“Koffeinfreier Kaffee”	(limited distribution)	80	10
“First Class”	(only in Intershop)	117.5	14.70

*Source:* BArchB DY 30/25310. Rüscher to Günter Mittag, 17.3.77. Appendix: “Vorschläge zur Neugestaltung einiger Genußmittelsortimente - Kaffee und Kakao- Erzeugnisse,” 14.

At 60 Marks per kilogram, *Kosta* presented the most affordable and therefore accessible brand of roasted coffee for East German consumers, a fact reflected in its dominance of the retail market. *Rondo* still commanded a respectable percentage of coffee consumption, typically among members of the East German middle class whose incomes allowed them this option.<sup>329</sup> Rüscher’s office recommended replacing each of the existing roasted brands with three entirely new mixed blends, and the introduction of a new mixture comprised “of at least 20per cent ersatz product.”<sup>330</sup> Combined, Rüscher estimated his recommendations could save the state approximately 30 million VM in the second half of 1977.<sup>331</sup>

The second major approach to the crisis involved more radical changes in overall provisioning to reduce public consumption of coffee. In mid- April, Alexander Schalk-

<sup>328</sup> BArchB DY 30/25310. Rüscher to Günter Mittag, 17.3. 77. Appendix: “Vorschläge zur Neugestaltung einiger Genußmittelsortimente - Kaffee und Kakao- Erzeugnisse,” 14. See also Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum: Kaffeekonsum in beiden deutschen Staaten* (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 166.

<sup>329</sup> Monika Sigmund indicates that higher incomes did not necessarily result in a higher purchase rate for *Mona*. *Mona* was purchased predominantly by households with incomes of 800 marks per month or higher. Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 167-168.

<sup>330</sup> BArchB DY 3023/1218. “Vorschläge zur Neugestaltung einiger Genußmittelsortimente - Kaffee und Kakao- Erzeugnisse,” 15.

<sup>331</sup> BArchB DY 3023/1218. “Vorschläge zur Neugestaltung einiger Genußmittelsortimente - Kaffee und Kakao- Erzeugnisse,” 10. Note: his report included recommendations for chocolate production as well, which also suffered significant price increases at the time. He cited savings of 48.5 million VM for all measures including coffee and chocolate; the figure cited above is based on that number minus the estimated savings for chocolate.

Golodkowski, head of the Department of Commercial Coordination (*Kommerzielle Koordinierung*, or KoKo), submitted a ‘conception to enforce the saving of hard currency through coffee imports,’ a lengthy proposal which called for a more extreme reduction in supply. Where Rüscher’s office had offered solutions to stretch and maintain supply, Schalk sought to reduce the consumption of coffee more broadly, and called for the cessation in production of “all existing GDR brands” after 1 June.<sup>332</sup> Similar to his previous proposals, Schalk recommended replacing existing coffee with a single new brand, but now indicated this brand would be comprised of 50 per cent roasted coffee and 50 per cent surrogate. Retail consumption of coffee, argued Schalk, would decline by 25 – 30 per cent, which would “undoubtedly lead to an increase in the provisioning of the population through other sources such as through cross-border packages and postage traffic and the purchase in Intershop, which has hitherto played a marginal role.”<sup>333</sup> These forms of ‘provisioning’ likely appealed to Schalk, because they alleviated the GDR’s currency problems: increased deliveries of ‘Westpackets’ brought not only coffee, but other consumer goods, into the GDR, while purchasing coffee in Intershop required hard currency, which would inevitably find its way back into the regime’s coffers.<sup>334</sup>

The ABI’s and KoKo’s proposals prioritized different objectives – minimizing the impact on living standards or minimizing foreign exchange expenses, thus mitigating potential inflation – but their hectic search for as quick a solution as possible reflected the degree of importance the state assigned to this seemingly humble commodity. Rüscher’s proposal called for dramatic changes to the brands on offer, but in recommending the introduction of new mixtures, he seems

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<sup>332</sup> BArchB, DY3023/1218, Alexander Schalk, “Konzeption zur Durchsetzung der Einsparung von Valutamitteln beim Import von Rohkaffee,” 18.4.1977, 47.

<sup>333</sup> BArchB, DY3023/1218, Alexander Schalk, “Konzeption zur Durchsetzung der Einsparung von Valutamitteln beim Import von Rohkaffee,” 18.4.1977, 48.

<sup>334</sup> The *Institut für Marktforschung*’s research indicated that in the fourth quarter of 1977, *Westpakets* were responsible for the supply of 4257 t of coffee. See Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 190.

to have recognized the importance of choice to consumers. He calculated that the industry had already used over half of the year's supply of raw coffee, and since there would be no further imports for 1977, existing reserves needed to be held back for the second half of the year.<sup>335</sup> Adulteration was therefore the best chance for facing the shortfall, maximizing the regime's ability to fulfill consumer expectations under Real Existing Socialism.

By contrast, Schalk, whose responsibilities as head of KoKo included procuring and retaining hard currency, clearly prioritized a solution in which adulteration served as a lever to control and lower public consumption. The mounting payment imbalance necessitated more drastic measures to obtain and secure hard currency, such as lowering public coffee consumption. Schalk would see roasted blends reduced to a single product, and he proposed a price for this replacement of 120 M/kg, which was 40M/kg or 50 per cent higher than the existing mid-priced *Rondo*.<sup>336</sup> The media, too, played a role in reducing consumption, as Schalk called “[a]ll public relations (press, television, radio, film, advertising) to immediately refrain from promoting the consumption of these goods.”<sup>337</sup> Schalk's measures would marginalize coffee drinking and force East Germans to acquire their coffee through alternate means, if they had access to any. In particular, his mention of Intershop demonstrates his conceptualization of the coffee question as a problem of currency. These tourist shops only accepted West German marks in exchange for their wares; thus, Schalk hoped to force East Germans to purchase coffee in a way that directed marks into the regime's coffers.

Concerns regarding public consumption rates added to the debate surrounding the crisis and reflected planners' understanding of the crisis as a political matter. Since 1970, per capita

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<sup>335</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 20 April 1977, 1.

<sup>336</sup> BArchB, DY3023/1218, Alexander Schalk, “Konzeption zur Durchsetzung der Einsparung von Valutamitteln beim Import von Rohkaffee,” 18.4.1977, 47.

<sup>337</sup> BArchB, DY3023/1218, Alexander Schalk, “Konzeption zur Durchsetzung der Einsparung von Valutamitteln beim Import von Rohkaffee,” 18.4.1977, 49.

consumption had risen from 2.52kg to 2.88kg in 1977, an increase of 14 per cent over that seven-year period, or 2 per cent per year.<sup>338</sup> By June, planners measured a particularly sharp rise in demand during the first half of 1977. Rüscher calculated that coffee sales in the GDR increased by 253 t between January and June 1977, with a staggering jump of 102 t in May alone.<sup>339</sup> After two months of stressing the severity of the coffee situation, Rüscher expressed a palpable frustration at the lack of any concrete action on the matter, warning “if this development keeps up, it’ll drain the stockpile reserves by the beginning of September [...] from a political and economic perspective, decisions on these issues are essential.”<sup>340</sup> His concerns eventually reached the highest levels of the party apparatus. On 2 June, Erich Honecker met with other senior party officials, including Werner Krolkowski and Gerhard Grüneberg, to discuss the coffee problem. After summarizing the essentials of the pricing situation, Honecker turned to the others, saying:

We had thought to find a solution to this with mixed coffees and offering different brands with different prices. For this you need special machinery that we can’t get, at least not this fast. We have to have a way to tide us over in the meantime. One can’t have a price increase of 100 per cent. The thing is that at the moment we offer different types of coffee; can’t we tweak the ratio between the different types of coffee on offer? My opinion is that we can’t manufacture more disproportion in the national economy because of this coffee thing. You can simply only import as much coffee as we have money allocated for it.<sup>341</sup>

In Honecker’s assessment, drastic price increases were clearly a non-starter, but a mixed coffee would take time to produce – thus the logical temporary solution was to change the make-up of the varieties available to the public. Grüneberg suggested price increases may not be all that risky, asking “couldn’t we in this exceptional case talk openly with the people and change

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<sup>338</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, “Preisentwicklung Rohkaffee ab Juni 1975 nach Quartalen,” 25.04.1977, 50- 52.

<sup>339</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 8.6.77, 60.

<sup>340</sup> “if this development keeps up...” see BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 8.6.77, 66; “from a political and economic perspective...” see BArchBL-SAPMO DY 30/25310, Gerhard Rüscher, “Brief an G.Mittag,” 24.6.1977, 2.

<sup>341</sup> BStU MfS HA XVIII, No. 20842, Bd.1, “Betrifft: Kaffee und Kokao,” 2.06.1977.

the prices in such a way that the problem is brought to a solution?” Krolkowski offered rationing as a solution. Honecker dismissed both ideas, claiming: “The thing is that you then get a much wider ranging discussion [*Flächendiskussion*] because prices also rise in other areas. The people will still buy coffee and then you still have the discussion about the price increase [...] We would get public unrest.”<sup>342</sup> Even at the highest levels of the party apparatus, then, the Nomenklatura were concerned with finding a politically viable solution to the coffee problem, and were intensely aware of the likelihood of public backlash if the issue were mishandled.

The growing sense of ‘crisis’ surrounding coffee in the spring of 1977 generated an urgent need to find alternate sources of raw coffee that would not increase the country’s hard currency expenses. Werner Lamberz, a special envoy from KoKo, conducted a ‘coffee trip’ through a number of African countries from 11 – 23 June 1977, including South Yemen, Ethiopia, Angola, Zambia, Mozambique, Nigeria and the Congo.<sup>343</sup> While the details of Lamberz’s activities will be addressed in a later chapter as they pertain to the GDR’s broader goals in foreign relations, the trip helps reinforce two points here. First, the trip occurred precisely as planners’ coffee anxieties peaked, illuminating the level of urgency surrounding the crisis. Second, because Lamberz negotiated contracts that provided Germans with coffee without increasing hard currency expenses, his trip also satisfied both political conditions of the crisis: maintaining living standards without adding to the payment imbalance.

Lamberz sought to secure coffee from Angola and Ethiopia on a barter system, a goal that was partially achieved. The changing political situation in both countries made them amenable to the GDR’s proposals, in particular Ethiopia, which sought additional military supplies and equipment for its civil war. Ethiopia agreed to deliver five thousand tonnes of coffee annually

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<sup>342</sup> BStU MfS HA XVIII, No. 20842 Bd.1, “Betrifft: Kaffee und Kokao,” 2.06.1977.

<sup>343</sup> BArchB, DY 30 J IV 2/2 1680, “Anlage Nr.8 zum Protokoll nr. 26/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977,” 131- 133; see also Döring, *Es geht um unser Existenz!*, 58.

from 1977 – 1982 at a cost “equal to the international price of coffee” as of the time of the contract’s signing.<sup>344</sup> Payment for the first two years of this contract could be made through East German finished goods, also priced according to current world market value. Primarily, these finished goods were to take the form of “equipment of special foreign trade” (East German shorthand for military equipment). An immediate shipment of 550 East German “W 50” heavy duty trucks and other supplies would pay for the first delivery of 4000 t of coffee.<sup>345</sup>

Angola also agreed to send 5000 t of coffee per year under a five-year contract (1977 – 1982), in exchange for East German technical and logistical support, including the sending of 200 specialists and tradesmen “for long-term deployment” in Angola.<sup>346</sup> However, the Angolan negotiations also included a fascinating provision: a second “internal” agreement would be signed between the VRA and GDR for 1977 – 1978 for coffee deliveries payable with East German finished goods. Angola agreed to send the first 2000 t within “six to eight weeks” of the contract’s signing, and the calculations for payment would be made through a special account. In such a form, this accounting constituted “a bilateral line of credit” between the two countries, which would require “no payment in hard currency” for the first two years. Not only was this special agreement to be signed separately, but Angola stipulated that the contract was “to remain absolutely confidential, because Angola has rejected similar proposals from other socialist countries (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia (SFRJ), Czechoslovakia (CSSR), Cuba).”<sup>347</sup>

The ‘coffee trip’ was a whirlwind affair that both exemplified East Germany’s sense of urgency and provided a politically viable solution to the shortage, albeit a partial one. Lamberz visited six countries in twelve days, and both of the resulting contracts emphasized a need for

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<sup>344</sup> BArchB, DY 30 J IV 2/2 1680, “Anlage Nr.8,” 116.

<sup>345</sup> BArchB, DY 30 J IV 2/2 1680, “Anlage Nr.8,” 116.

<sup>346</sup> BArchB, DY 30 J IV 2/2 1680, “Anlage Nr.8,” 148.

<sup>347</sup> BArchB, DY 30 J IV 2/2 1680, “Anlage Nr.8,” 136.



haste. Each contract took effect immediately upon their signing (rather than negotiating contracts starting in the new year), and combined they provided East Germany with an immediate infusion of 12,000 t of coffee by the end of 1977 – certainly a welcome relief to planners trying to stretch a remaining 18,000 t over the second half of the year. In each case, the conditions of the trade clearly identified these contracts as exceptions to the ‘normal’ forms of trade to which Angola and Ethiopia were accustomed – particularly in the case of the ‘special agreement’ with Angola. While the coffee situation provided the impetus for exchange, sending Lamberz to investigate alternate sources of raw coffee also formed an important part of East Germany’s strategy for handling the crisis. Coffee possessed a political power, one the regime’s planners and trade officials understood as emanating from the party’s own promises of rising living standards. Finding new sources, then, was about far more than merely satisfying a growing demand for coffee under extraordinary pricing situations. Successfully negotiating contracts with Angola and Ethiopia ensured an influx of coffee that could help stretch supply for the time being, without requiring more hard currency from an already beleaguered East German economy.

From 14 – 16 June, Werner Krolokowski, a member of both the Politburo and the economic commission, met with Werner Buschmann, deputy minister for the MBL, to discuss the coffee problem. The pair wrote up a draft proposal for the Council of Ministers, which adopted the more radical solutions offered by Schalk in April, including wide-spread removal of certain brands and the introduction of a mixed brand. Under this proposal, only *Mona* would remain in retail stores, as well as caffeine-free coffee, at existing prices of 80 Marks per kilogram. The production of roasted coffee blends *Kosta*, *Rondo*, as well as Brazilian instant would cease.<sup>348</sup> The draft also called for the production of a mixed coffee called “*Kaffee-Mix*” – the first time the proposed mixture had a specific name associated with it – and included a more

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<sup>348</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 8.6.77, 69.

specific idea of its contents, providing the ratio of 51 per cent roasted coffee and 49 per cent surrogate products, listing chicory, rye, and barley specifically.<sup>349</sup> Production of this new mixture would require some technical and mechanical alterations in the industry, primarily in VEB (*Volkseigene Betrieb*, People's Own Enterprise) Kaffee Halle, which was designated as the primary production facility for *Kaffee-Mix*. To this end Halle was instructed to cease production of *Mocca-Fix* and convert those lines for *Kaffee-Mix* production.<sup>350</sup> The draft planned for VEB Kaffee Halle to produce 3500 t of *Kaffee-Mix* by the end of the year, which Buschmann said would require an additional 30 working shifts [*Schichtarbeitskräften*] in the district by 1 August.<sup>351</sup>

On balance, Buschmann and Krolokowski's draft more closely reflected Schalk's recommendations from April, designed to reduce overall public consumption of coffee by reducing both available brands and the quality of those remaining on offer. Yet this new draft differed from previous proposals in one important way: it would extend the measures even further. According to their conception, once factory lines had been converted to accommodate *Kaffee-Mix* production, the upgrades "would provide the production possibilities for 36kt of mixed coffee." Therefore, the pair surmised, "the provisioning for 1978 will proceed with 80per cent mixed coffee [...] and 20per cent roasted coffee mixture '*Mona*.'"<sup>352</sup> Fears of being unable to maintain supplies of coffee caused such anxiety that planners intended to change the coffee supply in 1978 so that nearly all of the GDR's coffee would be *Kaffee-Mix*. Buschmann, however, expressed apprehension regarding the measures, warning "there is no experience to

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<sup>349</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 8.6.77, 70; see also BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, Arbeitsgruppe für Organisation und Inspektion beim Ministerrat, "Information über die eingeleiteten Massnahmen zur Durchführung des Beschlusses des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28.6.1977 über die Entwicklung und Produktion eines Mischkaffees." Berlin, den 4. Juli 1977, 1.

<sup>350</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 8.6.77, 71.

<sup>351</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 8.6.77, 71.

<sup>352</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, appendix, "Beschluß zur Durchführung der Produktion und der Versorgung mit Kaffee und Kakaoerzeugnissen," (Draft proposal by Buschmann), 17.6.1977, 79.

date with the production of a mixed coffee or the development of its consumption, so it cannot be estimated whether sales will develop in the direction in which we strive based on the measures alone. We must assume a higher demand for *Mona*, which can only be covered for a short while.”<sup>353</sup> Rüscher seemed to echo Buschmann’s worries, and added, “under the present circumstances, [Mona] coffee will become an object of speculation since there is no product of comparable price to compensate.”<sup>354</sup> As demand for increasingly less available coffee rose, no doubt Rüscher also feared the resulting inflation that would further degrade living standards, and in turn put yet more political pressure on the state apparatus.

On 28 June, only a few days following Rüscher’s ominous warning of speculation and Lamberz’s drafted contracts, the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED sat to discuss, among other economic concerns, the growing problems associated with coffee. Krolikowski presented the final draft to the Politburo, and “in principle” the committee approved the implementation of measures by 1 September, which emphasizes the haste the Party felt was necessary in taking steps to guarantee supply.<sup>355</sup> Meanwhile, the Politburo also approved Lamberz’s draft agreements with Angola and Ethiopia, securing the additional volume of raw coffee for the next two years. Politburo approval nonetheless came with modifications to the provisions of Buschmann and Krolokowski’s proposal that combined the motives of stretching resources to cover demand, saving currency expenditures, and curbing anticipated inflation. For instance, *Rondo* and *Mona* were both to remain in retail, though each would undergo a recipe change to lower their roasted coffee content slightly. *Kaffee-Mix*’s composition would remain 51 per cent roasted coffee and 49 per cent surrogate, but would be produced as quickly as possible

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<sup>353</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, appendix, “Beschluß zur Durchführung der Produktion und der Versorgung mit Kaffee und Kakaoerzeugnissen,” 17.6.1977, 79.

<sup>354</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO DY 30/25310, Gerhard Rüscher, “Brief an Günter Mittag,” 24.6.1977, 2.

<sup>355</sup> BArchB, DY 30 J IV 2/2 1680, “Anlage Nr.6 zum Protokoll nr. 26/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977,” 52- 55.

and released at a price of 48M/kg. The new product's price was four-fifths the cost of the brand it replaced (*Kosta*), but given *Kaffee-Mix*'s composition, its price nevertheless represented a premium to the state, as a price adjusted for inflation ought to have been half that of *Kosta*, or 30M/kg. Alexander Schalk had called to reduce consumption by simply removing up to 80 per cent of the coffee in circulation, a tactic he felt could save hard currency while reducing the strain on industry. Yet the numbers produced by the State Planning Commission showed a clear and steady increase in coffee consumption among the population. His strategy was deemed too politically unsuitable because the regime feared – quite rightly – the population would interpret this as a conscious decline in living standards. Planners instead chose an option which would simultaneously reduce consumption by raising prices slightly, and would ease hard currency expenses by stretching raw supplies through adulteration of the core product. Restaurants and retail distributors would only be supplied with *Kaffee-Mix*, and production of the surrogate *Malzkaffee* would increase. Despite the retention of *Rondo* and *Mona*, however, the final draft retained the clause of increasing *Kaffee-Mix* production in 1978 to account for 80 per cent of total coffee supply.<sup>356</sup> Both of these tactics, by planners' estimates, would still more or less guarantee the population a consistent *volume* of roasted coffee available, while mitigating both the financial and political risks. Of course, even this solution held as much potential political fallout as had Schalk's; planners either failed to realize this, or decided the political risks of their 'compromise' were acceptable. The problem was that, as planners' own figures showed, consumers' demand for coffee was tied not to price, but to the sheer desire to enjoy a product to which they had grown accustomed as a staple of everyday life – a custom that had, after all, been actively encouraged by the regime itself. Because demand was not tied to price in the way

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<sup>356</sup> BArchB, DY 30 J IV 2/2 1680, "Anlage Nr.6 zum Protokoll nr. 26/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977," 52- 55.

planners assumed, introducing *Kaffee-Mix* as this premium price risked increasing inflation, which would only exacerbate the broader pressures faced by the beleaguered East German economy. Thus, when faced by this ‘coffee crisis’, planners had very limited options; every choice they faced involved perilous political risks.

That the coffee supply issue reached the highest levels of government demonstrates the severity of the pricing situation and the perceived problems it presented. While it was not unheard of for the Politburo to address a shortage of an individual consumer good directly, the party typically focused on the broader concerns of the entire food industry, leaving decisions about specific goods to industry officials. Officially, coffee did not belong to the “*Waren des täglichen Bedarfs [Goods of Daily Need]*,” yet the regime singled out coffee for attention in this case. Despite its official designation as a stimulant and luxury, state officials recognized that in the eyes of the population, coffee was indeed a ‘daily need.’ Simply allowing coffee to disappear entirely from store shelves would likely prove politically dangerous, because it would lead to speculation and hoarding among the population, who would also interpret coffee’s disappearance as a decline in living standards, thereby belying the success of Real Existing Socialism and challenging the regime’s legitimacy. Thus, the Politburo committed to maintaining coffee supply in spite of the extraordinary price situation, simultaneously affirming both coffee’s cultural significance and its political power.

Yet, to some on the Politburo, replacing the most affordable roasted coffee brand was as dangerous as allowing coffee to disappear altogether. It was precisely their perception of coffee’s cultural significance that led some to fear the political ramifications of the proposal. Following the meeting, Politburo member Albert Norden wrote a private letter to Honecker, expressing his concern that the proposed measures went too far and would “cause great dissatisfaction” among

the population.<sup>357</sup> In particular Norden criticized the decision to continue with plans to effectively replace real bean coffee with *Kaffee-Mix* throughout the country. Such a drastic move was “simply unthinkable,” argued Norden, who believed that the regime faced “not just any sort of supply situation, but rather that of a national luxury good in the best sense of the word.” While economically expedient, Norden found the measures to be reckless because they relied on a new product with which “we have experience in neither its production nor its taste, let alone consumer behaviour.”<sup>358</sup>

One experience Norden did possess, however, and one of which he reminded Honecker, was the shortage of the postwar period. “You will remember, as will I, the time of the introduction of State Trade Stores [*Handelsorganisation*, HO] goods and prices,” he wrote, reminding Honecker that “from the earliest point citizens seized coffee, even though it was (and is) expensive.”<sup>359</sup> Norden’s appeal to Honecker’s memory represented an important reminder of the political ramifications of the Politburo’s ruling. Introduced to combat the black market, HO stores were designed to provide equal access to consumer goods by establishing consistent prices for available goods. The HO stores successfully contributed to the demise of the black market by undercutting prices on basic necessities and foodstuffs, but luxury goods such as chocolate or coffee remained high due to high rates of consumption taxing.<sup>360</sup> Thus, Norden linked the current crisis to a time when Germans facing far greater shortages and lower living standards still prioritized the purchase of coffee in spite of the costs.

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<sup>357</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Norden to Honecker, 28.6.1977, 111.

<sup>358</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Norden to Honecker, 28.6.1977, 111.

<sup>359</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Norden to Honecker, 28.6.1977, 111.

<sup>360</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that HO stores genuinely solved shortage issues. In fact, their high prices meant that HO stores 36.1977, p.49.t tonnage, a quite different measurement. I suggest that if you want to give the import tonnaeor the majority of their purchases. Mark Landsman explains that the regime assigned high consumer taxes to luxury goods both as a means to “absorb excess purchasing power and to help stabilize the currency” and “to serve as a counterweight to expanding subsidies and thus contribute to balancing the state budget.” See Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005), 78.

For Norden, the coffee crisis was more than a mere matter of supply. In light of the GDR's growing debt and the onset of the oil crisis, questions of hard currency savings were absolutely critical. Norden recognized the need to save currency, saying: "Naturally we are compelled to draw certain conclusions from the foreign economic situation. Without drastic hard currency savings it will not work. And that must no doubt include the consumption sector." Some discretion, however, was required in making decisions about consumer goods with such symbolic importance as coffee: "which items are cut or reduced is in my opinion a political issue of the first order."<sup>361</sup> In pointing to the question of quality, Norden's reservations represent an important factor in our consideration of the coffee crisis. Volker Wunderlich claims that Norden's letter "remains as the only opinion in the entire party files that at least to some extent acknowledged the political sensitivity and symbolic importance of coffee."<sup>362</sup> In light of planners' efforts to stretch supply, traders' efforts to find more raw materials, and the Party's decision to commit to *some form* of supply, such a conclusion is insufficient. The regime recognized coffee as a politically sensitive issue, but tended to consider its significance only in terms of people's continued access to coffee. Planners' solutions reflected the primacy they placed on hard currency, as they turned to options that would maintain a minimum supply without incurring further debt. Norden differed in *why* he recognized coffee as political: he saw coffee as a pleasurable luxury, and recognized that citizens were not likely to be satisfied merely by an adequate supply of mixed blends. They expected a certain quality to their coffee. For now, Norden's concerns fell on deaf ears, and the regime proceeded with measures to continue supplying coffee by reducing its quality. Nonetheless, Norden had demonstrated a critical understanding of citizens' relationship with coffee, and as the regime would soon learn, merely

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<sup>361</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Norden to Honecker, 28.6.1977, 112.

<sup>362</sup> Volker Wunderlich, "Die 'Kaffee Krise' von 1977: Genussmittel und Verbraucherprotest in der DDR," *Historische Anthropologie* 11, no.2 (2003): 248.

maintaining access to a consumer good without regard for the quality of that good proved an insufficient solution in the eyes of East German coffee drinkers.

*Implementing the measures (working section title)*

Following the Politburo ruling on 28 June, planners moved forward on introducing *Kaffee-Mix* to the public. As part of the decision, the Council of Ministers formed a working group whose task it was to monitor the implementation of the coffee measures. Among its initial observations, the Working Group explicitly warned that the activities related to *Kaffee-Mix* production must remain absolutely secret out of fear of public reaction. Comparing higher consumption levels in the spring of 1977 to those of the previous year, the working group worried that if the changes were known publicly, they would cause “anxious purchasing” throughout the population.<sup>363</sup> Controlling the flow of information was crucial to avoid panic, as “already a large number of people are aware of the retail measures [...] all persons must be obliged to secrecy in writing.”<sup>364</sup>

Fears of speculation continued to haunt planners’ interactions, for instance in a confidential memo from Politburo member Hermann Axen to Honecker on 1 July regarding price increases for cocoa, coffee, wool and yarn in Czechoslovakia. Axen reported that Czechoslovakia’s Central Committee approved a measure, effective 20 July, to increase the retail prices for coffee by 50 per cent. He also included charts comparing prices in the CSSR, GDR and Poland. The data made it clear that the GDR would have the least expensive prices for coffee between the three countries after 20 July, which could result in speculative purchasing along the

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<sup>363</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, “Arbeitsgruppe für Organisation und Inspektion beim Ministerrat,” Berlin, den 4. Juli 1977.

<sup>364</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, “Arbeitsgruppe für Organisation und Inspektion beim Ministerrat,” Berlin, den 4. Juli 1977.



borders.<sup>365</sup> Axen was not the only official to spread word of this pending price increase. Mittag and Lamberz wrote their own memo to Honecker on 6 July to notify him that they were informed “in absolute secrecy” about the pending price hikes for coffee in both Czechoslovakia and Poland.<sup>366</sup> Lamberz and Mittag advised that the politburo address coffee again at the next meeting and change the ruling to come into force on 1 August, instead of 1 September.<sup>367</sup> To stymie hoarding along the borders, they also urged the large distributors [*Grossverbraucher*] to be supplied with mixed coffee instead of roasted coffee. The pair further cautioned Honecker about the continued need for secrecy, writing in a post- script that “aside from us, nobody knows about this letter.”<sup>368</sup>

It now seemed as though even planners’ chosen actions would be inadequate as East Germans would have to compete with tourists for access to the most affordable coffee. Mittag sent Honecker a revised schedule of measures for the coffee problem on 13 July, with a request “for a decision on whether this proposal can be dealt with” at the next Politburo meeting on July 26.<sup>369</sup> The draft confirmed the previous month’s ruling, but stepped up the implementation of these measures to August instead of September. Included in the draft was a copy of the rationale and justification behind the changes to supply, which spoke explicitly about the political necessity of taking action. Measures to guarantee the continued supply of the population with coffee were taken, the draft declared, “in order to be able to carry on the policy of the Principal Task.”<sup>370</sup> Improving living standards for East Germans supposedly living in “real existing socialism” meant keeping the coffee flowing. Yet coffee competed with a host of other goods

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<sup>365</sup> BArchB, DY 30 J IV 2/2 1680, Axen to Honecker, 1.7.1977, 131.

<sup>366</sup> The pair were concerned that Czechs, Slovaks and Poles would travel to the GDR in larger numbers to purchase what would be cheaper coffee in East Germany’s shops, further diminishing already depleted reserves. BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Mittag and Lamberz to Honecker, 6.7.1977, 156.

<sup>367</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Mittag and Lamberz to Honecker, 6.7.1977, 156.

<sup>368</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Mittag and Lamberz to Honecker, 6.7.1977, 156.

<sup>369</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Mittag to Honecker, 13.7.1977, 162.

<sup>370</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Mittag to Honecker, 13.7.1977, 171.

and services. In order to supply the population with coffee, “other imports from capitalist countries, necessary for provisioning the population, would have to be respectively reduced. In the interests of carrying out the Principal Task, this is not possible.”<sup>371</sup> When faced with an ‘either – or’ dilemma, therefore, the regime was unwilling to sacrifice one good in favour of another, when each possessed a perceptively equal measure of political significance.

Planners did not wait for the Politburo to make a decision on changing the timeframe for the changes, instead moving forward on upgrading the roasting industry with the equipment necessary for *Kaffee-Mix* production. Despite the overhauls of the 1960s, by 1977 most existing equipment and machines were old and inadequate to handle the increased capacities demanded by the Central Committee.<sup>372</sup> Installation of newly-purchased machines occurred over the first three weeks of July. Although the upgrades involved significant conversion—switching *Mocca-Fix* lines to accommodate the new mixture – planners still sought to keep secret as much of the process as possible. Anticipating that workers might (correctly) interpret large-scale conversions as a dramatic change in overall coffee supply, planners sought to use training to mislead workers at the factory level. Managers were responsible for carrying out instruction in such a way “that it will be clear, that this is to be considered a new product, which will be produced in the highest quality from the first day,” though the reference to ‘quality’ likely referred more to encouraging consistent batches and minimizing material losses, rather than to the taste of the finished product.<sup>373</sup> Worker brigades in converted roasting plants were to be instructed “on the production

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<sup>371</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Ehrensprenger to Mittag, “Argumentation zur weiteren Versorgung der Bevölkerung der DDR mit Kaffee und Kakaoverzeugnissen unter den Bedingungen ausserordentlicher Preissteigerungen auf dem Weltmarkt,” 27.7.1977, 196.

<sup>372</sup> Indeed, some equipment even dated back to the 1930s. Take for instance the use of vacuum packing machines in VEB Bero that had not been replaced since before the war. BArchB, DG 5/1893, Memo from Neidergesäß to Wange, 25.2.1974, “Rostkaffeeverpackungsmaschine für VEB Bero Berlin.”

<sup>373</sup> BArchBL, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 19.7.1977, 185.

of the mixed coffee, *without addressing the other questions related to coffee production.*”<sup>374</sup> The initial test in VEB Kaffee Halle had positive results; long-term production of *Kaffee-Mix* was now “guaranteed” and could begin by 1 August.<sup>375</sup> The Politburo gave final approval to the coffee measures on 26 July, although the ruling in fact functioned more as a post- hoc affirmation of measures already underway.<sup>376</sup>

### *A Matter of Taste: Public Reception of Kaffee- Mix*

*Kaffee-Mix* entered the market on store shelves and in most state-run settings, for example hospital and factory break rooms, civil service offices, and trade union vacation homes.<sup>377</sup> Bright gold and brown foil bags with ‘*Kaffee-Mix*’ emblazoned across the front in gold lettering, promised consumers a tantalizing experience. The packaging described the contents as “a blend of exquisite roasted coffee and fine-tuned coffee surrogate,” a statement whose language seemed to claim a particular degree of quality.<sup>378</sup> As they arrived for their weekly shopping trips on Monday 1 August, East Germans thus faced the following options for coffee:

**Table 2.4** Pricing scheme for packaged coffee as of 1 August 1977 (In Marks)

Coffee Brand	Volume	EVP (in Marks)
<i>Mona</i>	125g	10.00
<i>Rondo</i>	125g	8.75
<i>Mocca- Fix</i>	125g	8.75
<i>Kaffee- Mix</i>	125g	6.00

Source: BArchBL- SAPMO, DY 30/25310, Helmut Kozioliek, Zentralinstitut für Sozialistische Wirtschaftsführung beim Zk der SED. Memo to Carl- Heinz Janson. 3.8.1977.

<sup>374</sup> BArchBL, DY 3023/1218, Rüscher to Mittag, 19.7.1977, 185. Emphasis in original.

<sup>375</sup> BArchBL, DY3023/1218, Wange and Rüscher to Mittag, 25.7.1977. 190.

<sup>376</sup> BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1685, Protokoll der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED ab 26 Juli 1977, “Durchführung des ‘Beschlusses des Politbüros vom 28. Juni 1977 zur Produktion und der Versorgung mit Kaffee- und Kakaoerzeugnissen,” Anlage 2.

<sup>377</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, “Bericht über die Lage der Durchführung des Auftrages des Präsidiums des Ministerrates vom 1977.07.28 in Bezug auf die Erfüllung der Produktion von und die Versorgung mit Kaffee,” 8.8.1977, 1.

<sup>378</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 42- 2437, Fengler an Bezirksvorstand Berlin, “Information,” 3.8.1977, 1.

Public reaction to the changes in available coffee – and to *Kaffee-Mix* in particular – was overwhelmingly negative, and centered around three paramount issues: the lack of information about the abrupt changes to supply, the price of the new product, and above all, the poor quality of *Kaffee-Mix*. East German coffee drinkers expressed their dissatisfaction in a number of ways, and their objections to the changes reflected the importance East Germans placed on decent coffee as a measure of the country's progress. From private petition letters (*Eingaben*) and in-store complaints, to even a few cases of work stoppages, East Germans expected access to a good-tasting coffee, to which they had spent twenty five years growing accustomed, lay at the heart of their outrage over *Kaffee-Mix*. These growing expectations formed part of the 'soft power' of the SED's authority, as Eli Rubin demonstrates, "by allowing GDR citizens the comfort and privileges of a modern society without falling prey to the deception and exploitation of Western capitalist consumerism."<sup>379</sup> Without those comforts, the purported success of the entire socialist project was in jeopardy.

State planners monitored customers' reactions from the first days of *Kaffee-Mix*'s delivery. Efforts to receive public feedback varied, but the first method was through direct interaction with customers. The Trade Administration ordered stores to position clerks in the aisles to engage customers in conversation about the new product.<sup>380</sup> Trained to be knowledgeable advisors and "tutor[s] of consumers," retail workers acted as "liaisons between industry and the consumer to represent the consumers' interests while also monitoring their demands and guiding their taste."<sup>381</sup> These 'sales discussions' were already an established

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<sup>379</sup> Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics & Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 54.

<sup>380</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, "Bericht über die Lage der Durchführung des Auftrages des Präsidiums des Ministerrates vom 1977.07.28 in Bezug auf die Erfüllung der Produktion von und die Versorgung mit Kaffee," 8.8.1977, 5.

<sup>381</sup> Katherine Pence, "Women on the Verge: Consumers between Private Desires and Public Crisis," in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Life*, edited by Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Michigan: University

practice in East German stores since the 1950s, as trade officials sought to “canvas the opinions of consumers” as a way to develop “a more sophisticated ‘market observation’ [*Marktbeobachtung*].”<sup>382</sup> Customers were already well accustomed to having these kinds of discussions with store clerks by the 1970s, and, because retail stores operated under the direction of the state, East Germans understood their conversations as an important part of the ‘normal’ or ‘established’ system of reporting their concerns.<sup>383</sup>

During the coffee crisis, these in-store discussions ultimately served as sources of customer reaction for State planners more than they did as information conduits for customers. Industry planners took care to ensure the new coffee was developed in the utmost secrecy, actively taking steps to avoid information leaks. Consequently, retail workers found themselves offering a product about which they knew virtually nothing. According to one report, in many stores *Kosta* had still been available on 1 and 2 August, giving some customers the impression that their coffee brand had been replaced quite literally overnight and making it “difficult to be certain about [public] reaction.”<sup>384</sup> In a number of cases, retail stores only learned of the changes as *Kaffee-Mix* arrived at their loading bays early on Monday morning, far too late for them to effectively prepare; in extreme cases, even the local party offices only learned of the changes between 1 and 3 August.<sup>385</sup> Without prior notification, then, shopkeepers had little to no

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of Michigan Press, 2008), 291. The role of retail workers as informed, knowledgeable advisors was also visible in Stalin- era Soviet retail environments. See Amy Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

<sup>382</sup> In this way, retailers helped promote a specifically German, socialist seller culture (*Verkaufskultur*), as well as providing a valuable contribution the state-led market research. “Die Erforschung des Bedarfs der Bevölkerung nach Konsumgütern durch den sozialistischen Binnenhandel,” *Neue Werbung: Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Werbung*. 7.Jahrgang (Mai 1960), 3; see also Annette Kaminsky, *Wohlstand, Schönheit, Glück: Kleine Konsumgeschichte der DDR*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2001, 72. On the early efforts towards “market observation,” and a more detailed discussion of the concept of ,*Verkaufskultur*’ see Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand*, 93.

<sup>383</sup> Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 104.

<sup>384</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, “Information für Genossen Hoffmann. Berlin,” 3.8.1977.

<sup>385</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, “Information für Genossen Hoffmann. Berlin,” 3.8.1977.

information with which to engage customers who, like Rudolf M. of Rötha, found their regular coffee shopping patterns disrupted.

Even if unable to clarify customers' questions, these conversations nonetheless proved a valuable source of information for the regime. For state planners anxious to report their quantitative fulfillment of the plan by the deadline, clerks provided vital confirmation that *Kaffee-Mix* arrived on time, and was making it into the baskets of East German shoppers. As well, clerks were able to relay customers' immediate reactions back through state channels, giving planners insights into the reception of the new product. As these initial staff–customer discussions revealed, however, public reception of the new product hardly provided cause for celebration. Some customers drew comparisons to the West, complaining that “real coffee” disappeared in the GDR while prices for coffee declined in West Germany. Others expressed their expectation of decent coffee in terms of daily need, such as one customer who explained “we’ve gotten used to enjoying bean coffee and it’s impossible, especially amidst the chaos in which we live, to abstain from it.”<sup>386</sup> A summary report of a survey conducted in seven retail stores in Berlin on 3 August concluded that, generally speaking, “it became obvious that the majority of customers are treating the new coffee brand with a wait-and-see attitude.”<sup>387</sup>

Rudolf M.'s frustration at shopkeepers' lack of knowledge drove him to write an *Eingabe* to the nearest roasting plant, as did many East German coffee drinkers. VEB Kaffee Halle had already received an *Eingabe* about *Kaffee-Mix* by 2 August in which the author (unnamed) wrote that “the stuff tastes terrible. I would like to know what is in it.”<sup>388</sup> Over the next two weeks, East Germans wrote what Rüscher called a “higher volume of *Eingaben* than normal” to various

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<sup>386</sup> BStU MfS BV Halle KD Hohenmölsen Nr.1850, “Information für Genossen Hoffmann. Berlin, 3.8.1977. zu Fragen der Versorgung mit Bohnenkaffee,” Hohenmölsen district office, 06.09.1977, 1.

<sup>387</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 42/2437, “Akttenotiz über die durchgeführten Überprüfungen zur Einführung der neuen Kaffeesorte ‘Kaffee-Mix’ am 2.8.1977,” Berlin, 3.8.1977, 2.

<sup>388</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, “Information für Genossen Hoffmann. Berlin,” 3.8.1977.

coffee firms and state organs.<sup>389</sup> Writing these petitions formed an important part of citizens' response to the coffee crisis specifically, but their use in the coffee crisis also adds to scholarly debate on the role of *Eingaben* within the broader context of the East German dictatorship. On the one hand, some scholars argue that petition letters served as one of the few ways East Germans could legally express dissatisfaction or even engage the regime directly. There were also limits to what could be said in these letters: any open criticism of the political or economic system itself was prohibited, and could place citizens under the suspicion of the state apparatus. Thus, *Eingaben* could be seen as 'filtering' opposing viewpoints by limiting both the opportunity to complain and the language in which complaints could be expressed. Other scholars conceptualize petitions as a useful tool for the regime, acting as information conduits through which the regime could gain a sense of the public mood. Through *Eingaben*, "people turned to the authorities in a personal way in the hopes of making their concerns known and heard," but they did so as individuals, not as a group, which greatly limited the potential impact their letters might have had.<sup>390</sup> Thus, *Eingaben* never provided East Germans with a genuine means of challenging state authority, because by "channelling citizens' opinions," the regime effectively sheltered itself from "a genuine broad-based engagement with public discontent."<sup>391</sup>

In another vein, scholars argue it is important to take seriously East Germans' desire to write complaints, and their expectation that the state would listen. East Germans wrote letters to bring the regime's attention to issues they faced in their everyday lives, and did so with the belief

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<sup>389</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, Memo from Rüscher to Hermann Pöschel, 19.8.1977, p.4. Rüscher wrote, "Vom Parteiorganisator des ZK in der VVB Süß- und Dauerbackwarenindustrie wurden uns dazu einige der sich bei den Kaffeebetrieben häufenden Eingaben übergeben, die wir abschriftlich als Anlage zur Information beifügen."

<sup>390</sup> On the 'filtering' of opinions in *Eingaben*, see Jochen Staadt, *Eingaben. Die institutionelle Meckerkultur in der DDR. Goldbrokat, Kaffee-Mix, Ausreiseanträge und das Generalsekretärskonto* (Arbeitspapiere des Forschungsverbundes SED-Staat nr.24, 1996), 5; on the 'individualization' of complaint writing, see Anja Schröter, "Eingaben im Umbruch: Ein politisches Partizipationselement im Verfassungsgebungsprozess der Arbeitsgruppe 'Neue Verfassung der DDR' des Zentralen Runden Tisches 1989/90," *Deutschland Archiv* 45 (2012): 1.

<sup>391</sup> Schröter, "Eingaben im Umbruch," 1.

that the regime would act on these issues. Not all *Eingaben* were written on an individual basis, as some worker collectives or neighbourhood groups submitted letters together. Even when written individually, argues Mary Fulbrook, petitions “still related to systemic shortcomings that the complainant hoped might be dealt with for the good of the wider community.”<sup>392</sup> East Germans understood the act of writing petitions as part of a system, but felt a certain responsibility in submitting their concerns to the regime on behalf of fellow citizens. *Eingaben* were, in this context, a sort of “plebiscitary element” within the GDR, in legal terms, a ‘citizens’ petition.’<sup>393</sup> With each letter they wrote, East Germans solidified their role in a “participatory dictatorship” and bolstered the SED’s legitimacy, which found its currency in precisely this active involvement.<sup>394</sup> An important consideration in this line of argument rests in the language employed in the *Eingaben*. Over time, East Germans came to construct their letters in particular ways, adopting the regime’s own rhetoric to suit and express their individual needs, in essence ‘learning to speak’ the regime’s language. This tactic, argue some historians, reflects East Germans’ internalization of the ‘rules’ of everyday life under socialism: there were limits to a person’s agency, but by adapting to certain ‘rules’ one could safely navigate and effect change within the limits of the system.<sup>395</sup> Interpretations focusing on language in this way complement studies in other fields of history and other disciplines, where adopting the official transcript of ruling elites so as to hold them accountable for their own promises has proven an effective tactic by the ruled. These tactics become the “weapons of the weak,” as James Scott put it, with which subordinates use the state’s own rhetorical tools to create their own voice, their own space for

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<sup>392</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 287.

<sup>393</sup> Ina Merkel, and Felix Mühlberg, “Eingaben und Öffentlichkeit,” in: “*Wir sind doch nicht die Mecker- Ecke der Nation:*” *Briefe an das DDR-Fernsehen*, edited by Ina Merkel. (Köln, 1998), 19.

<sup>394</sup> On the GDR as a ‘participatory dictatorship’ see Mary Fulbrook’s analysis: *The People’s State*, 269-288.

<sup>395</sup> Mary Fulbrook, “‘Normalization’ in the GDR in Retrospect: East German Perspectives on their own lives,” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979*, edited by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 304, 307.



negotiation with the power structures in which they live.<sup>396</sup> Similarly, Stephen Kotkin revealed how by “learning to speak Bolshevik,” Soviet citizens turned the state’s promises against it so as to effect improvements in living standards in Magnitogorsk during the 1930s.<sup>397</sup> East Germans employed these ‘weapons,’ phrasing their criticisms within these ‘rules’ which, argues Judd Stitzel, “implied that the GDR’s entire political and economic system, despite its highly visible and dramatic flaws, was fundamentally sound and legitimate and could be reformed through relatively localized, cosmetic measures.”<sup>398</sup>

Petitions about coffee reflect this second interpretation, in particular in terms of invoking the state’s rhetoric to tie the coffee issue to specific political messages. Some pointed to the incongruity between government policies and the coffee measures, such as Frau L., who told an industry director: “my opinion is that this product cannot possibly be in the interest of the 9th Party congress of the SED, of raising the living standards of our citizens.”<sup>399</sup> Even though most East Germans submitted petitions individually, they all responded with the same immediate anger over precisely the same issues. They also couched their complaints using the same language about illegal price hikes, secrecy, and being misled by the state which claimed to represent their material interests.

The regime’s decision to keep the coffee measures strictly confidential produced anger and mistrust among the population. Like Rudolf M., Germans criticized the utter lack of information or forewarning about the changes. Shoppers felt misled and did not understand why they “would be informed through our mass media of similar measures, for example in the CSSR,

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<sup>396</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>397</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 198-237.

<sup>398</sup> Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany, 1948- 1971* (New York: Berg, 2005), 160.

<sup>399</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Elfriede Lucke, Weißnfalls, “Eingaben,” August 1977.

but not be informed about measures in our own land in the same way.”<sup>400</sup> Planners’ fear that the price hikes for coffee in Czechoslovakia and Poland would lead to panic at home seemed justified in retrospect, but the decision to be silent on domestic coffee supply issues had clearly been a misstep on the part of the regime. The tone of their *Eingaben* indicates that most East Germans understood the realities of the world pricing situation: “when the prices increase on the world market, in particular coffee, crude oil and fruits, every one of us knows that our GDR will also have to overcome these difficulties so as to guarantee a stable price.”<sup>401</sup> Silence regarding this reality, however, was something many East Germans found inexcusable, like Frau K., who demanded: “efforts should be made immediately to inform the public honestly about these measures.”<sup>402</sup>

East Germans were offended by the regime’s silence, interpreting the lack of information as an indication of the state’s lack of faith in the population’s ability to understand the global and domestic economic situation. Ursula B. remarked that if the state had hoped to quell panic by keeping citizens in the dark about the pending measures, the exact opposite had in fact occurred, and this secrecy “would surely incite panic throughout the population.”<sup>403</sup> Horst T. reflected that the silence bred speculation and rumours, which would in turn “disrupt the relationship of trust between government and people.”<sup>404</sup> Instead, many letter writers argued that “an official open disclosure regarding the circumstances that led to the discontinuation of coffee [...] would serve the common cause of our state more than the current rumours and whispers” because it would

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<sup>400</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/IV B 2/5/947, Sekretariatsprotokoll nr. 34 vom 18.8.77 (Bezirk KMSt), “Anlage 8: Info über Meinungen der Bevölkerung zum Beschluss des Ministerrates über die Versorgung der Bevölkerung mit Kaffee und Kakaoerzeugnissen,” 16.8.1977.

<sup>401</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Birgit Kiunke, “*Eingaben*,” 11.8.1977.

<sup>402</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Birgit Kiunke, “*Eingaben*,” 11.8.1977.

<sup>403</sup> BArchB, DL 1- VA, 22954, *Eingabe* from Ursula Buhl, Leipzig, 10.8.77. Also see Frau Johanna Focke, *Eingabe* from 10.8.77.

<sup>404</sup> BArchB, DL 1- VA, 22954, Bd2, *Eingabe* from Herr Horst von Tümpling, 31 August 1977.

treat East Germans as responsible citizens.<sup>405</sup> Dr. R. from Zwickau wondered whether it was “really too much to ask, that you expect to be an informed citizen about such things, and can learn from more than mere speculation?”<sup>406</sup> Retail employees were furious that the Trade Minister had seen fit to inform them of the changes “only with the delivery of *Kaffee-Mix*,” saying the measures went against the policies of the party and government, and “furthermore hamper the political and ideological work of citizens.”<sup>407</sup> Citizens’ petitions thus connected coffee to politics, identifying the ways in which the apparent dishonesty about this matter could deteriorate the relationship between state and citizen.

When they turned their attention to *Kaffee-Mix* itself, citizens most frequently criticized the product for its quality, which they discussed in terms of taste, aroma, and ease of preparation. In terms of preparation, letters commonly expressed the complaint that *Kaffee-Mix* did not fit through the filters of standard coffee machines found in hotels, restaurants, and worker cafeterias.<sup>408</sup> This problem was not limited to public places, as household “Kaffeeboy” coffee machines were also incapable of filtering the new mixed brand.<sup>409</sup> Frau L. explained that she “noticed that the grounds were much too fine and were therefore not suitable for use in my machine,” a problem shared by Herr and Frau S., who complained that “the water does not flow through the filter. [...] The whole thing is a disaster!”<sup>410</sup> In their haste to ensure a stable supply of coffee, planners chose a recipe that rendered the product entirely useless in the most common

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<sup>405</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Birgit Kiunke, “*Eingaben*,” 11.8.1977.

<sup>406</sup> BArchB, DL 1- VA, 22954, Bd2, *Eingabe* from Dr Claus- Steffen Reitzenstein 95 Zwickau, Ernst- Grube Str 155, 22.8.77.

<sup>407</sup> BStU MfS BVfS Cottbus, AKG 4154, “Information über Reaktionen der Bevölkerung des Bezirkes Cottbus zur Versorgung mit Kaffee und Kakaoerzeugnissen,” 11.08.1977, 2.

<sup>408</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, “Bericht über die Lage der Durchführung des Auftrages des Präsidiums des Ministerrates vom 1977.07.28 in Bezug auf die Erfüllung der Produktion von und die Versorgung mit Kaffee,” 8.8.1977, 3; BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, Kollegen der HO-Werbung, Löbau. *Eingaben*. August 1977.

<sup>409</sup> Katherine Pence, “Grounds for Discontent? Coffee from the Black Market to the Kaffeeklatsch in the GDR” in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, edited by Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 217.

<sup>410</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, Elfriede Lucke, Weißnfall. *Eingaben*. August 1977; Kurt and Hertha Stenzel (Herrn and Frau S), Dresden. *Eingabe*, August 1977.

household appliances, jeopardizing the entire point of their efforts to maintain supply in the first place.

While *Kaffee-Mix* struggled to filter through household Kaffeeboy machines, *Eingaben* continued to stream into state, industry and party offices regarding the beverage's poor quality. Letter writers evaluated the product's taste, aroma, flavour, smell, colour, and thickness, and universally rejected the brand on these criteria. Some of the most cynical, overtly political and even humorous petitions came from groups of citizens writing together. A group letter from Erzgebirge drew on memories of the Second World War and subsequent years of occupation, saying that "the coffee we had in the War didn't taste so miserable!"<sup>411</sup> Customers called *Kaffee-Mix* "a waste of valuable roasted coffee," and most, according to retailers, purchased the product "only hesitantly," while some even went so far as to discourage other customers from buying the brand.<sup>412</sup> More avid coffee- drinkers refused to even consider *Kaffee-Mix* 'real' coffee, a categorical rejection most frequently based specifically on the product's taste, claiming for instance that they "felt *Kaffee-Mix* was not strong enough, and rejected it on principle."<sup>413</sup> A Stasi report from Leipzig indicated that citizens felt the mixture "has no resemblance to coffee," and that they would "prefer to be without coffee than drink this mixed stuff."<sup>414</sup> Many letters even mentioned specific health effects, such as Frau S. who claimed "after we drank a cup, we did not need to wait long for a stomach- ache and were forced to take stomach drops."<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> BArchB, DL 1- VA, 22954b, *Eingabe* 1517/7, from the citizens of Erzgebirge.

<sup>412</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/IV B 2/5/947, Sekretariatsprotokoll nr. 34 vom 18.8.77 (Bezirk KMSt), "Anlage 8: Info über Meinungen der Bevölkerung zum Beschluss des Ministerrates über die Versorgung der Bevölkerung mit Kaffee und Kakaoerzeugnissen," 16.8.1977.

<sup>413</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 42/2437, Gewerkschaft Handel, Nahrung und Genuss, "Info über die Probleme bei der Einführung der neuen Kaffeesorte ‚*Kaffee- Mix*‘," 12.8.1977.

<sup>414</sup> BStU MfS BVfS Leipzig, AKG 00243 /02, "Information über Reaktionen der Bevölkerung unseres Bezirkes zu den Veränderungen im Kaffeesortiment," 23.08.1977, 4.

<sup>415</sup> BArch- B, DY 30/25310, Beate Spott (Frau S.), "*Eingaben*," August 1977.

Some Germans turned to humour to express their dissatisfaction. In Leipzig, the Stasi noted the circulation of a number of “derogatory names” for *Kaffee-Mix*, including several that integrated Erich Honecker’s name. Calling the mixture ‘Erichs Krönung’ [Erich’s crown/coronation], for instance, was a play on “*Jacob’s Krönung*,” a popular West German brand. Other names included ‘*Kaffee-HAG, Honeckers Arbeiter-Gesöff*’ [Honecker’s Workers’ Swill, though alternative translations for *Gesöff* include “gnat piss”]; ‘*Homo: Honecker-Mocca*’; or even ‘*Ein Erichs letzte Mischung*’ [Erich’s final mixture], which invoked particularly aggressive overtones.<sup>416</sup> In one of the most striking examples of humorous takes on the situation, a self-identified “coffee drinker collective” [*Kaffeetrinker-Kollektiv*] in Karl-Marx-Stadt wrote a cheeky letter containing what they called the “test results” of a probe they conducted on *Kaffee-Mix*. Claiming, “we imagine we can give you some valuable insights, so as to improve the quality of this product,” the group submitted their results for review, of which some highlights included:

Benefits of *Kaffee-Mix*:

- 1) The drink should be consumed if possible before the start of the work day, because the first spontaneous laughing fits also tend to sweep up those employees who always seem to appear in a foul mood. (Earlier start to work is guaranteed!)
- 2) Additional savings in work time and energy, because the majority of passionate coffee drinkers will immediately abstain.

Drawbacks to *Kaffee-Mix*

- 1) *Kaffee-Mix* is suitable exclusively for taste- and smell- deprived people, because they can consume this drink without a great deal of resistance.
- 2) The test roused in several participants the following symptoms:
  - a. Colleague (woman): a few hours after *Kaffee-Mix* – still speechless!
  - b. Colleague (woman): (Special case) is apparently already so internally dysfunctional from a disreputable lifestyle [*liederlichen Lebenswandel*] (coffee, black tea, cigarettes and sometimes alcohol), that she exhibits absolutely no effects – outside of smell and taste troubles)
  - d. Colleague (woman): moans about stomach discomfort/troubles and exhibits euphoric impulses (a bit like after the enjoyment of a high concentration of alcohol)

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<sup>416</sup> BStU MfS BVfS Leipzig, AKG 00243 /02, “Information über die derzeitige Stimmungslage unter der Bevölkerung zu ökonomischen Problemen, Leipzig den 19.09.1977,” 5. The use of ‘final’ in this context may have also suggested echoes of the ‘final solution’ of the National Socialist regime, a word choice that would have obvious political implications for a Socialist regime whose founding myth was based on anti-Fascism.

- f. Colleague (male): after drinking *Kaffee-Mix* suffered from sexual depression (fortunately it was overcome after a short time) and complained of pain in the hair (fear of hair loss as a consequence).

Conclusions for the use of *Kaffee-Mix*

- a) It was previously common in our group to sentence undisciplined colleagues to pay for a round of coffee (*Kosta*, because we are not heavy earners!) From now on such employees will be threatened, that depending on the degree of the breach of their discipline, one or two cups of *Kaffee-Mix* will be administered orally (more would be irresponsible!) We suspect that through this [action] worker discipline will significantly improve.
- b) The packaging of this product should lead to a large volume of sales (if you have not yet changed it to identify the percentage of surrogate components inside), at least give a warning on it, that consumption is at your own risk.
- c) We are convinced, that only a few citizens of the GDR will put up with this attack on their taste and their wallets!
- d) If there are difficulties in selling it (as we suspect there to be), then we recommend it for use as
  - i. Surrogate for Unkraut-Ex (a herbicide based on sodium chlorate)
  - ii. Surrogate for a chemical depilatory
  - iii. Surrogate for laxatives
  - iv. Surrogate for alcohol (over 60per cent)

All kidding aside, we were honestly disappointed by the cost of your new product. Even if we expect and accept the economic need to save on coffee, *Kaffee-Mix* is in no way a replacement for *Kosta*. You should seriously examine/test this product once again!

Please do not take our strongly exaggerated description as seriously as we do ourselves. Nevertheless in our opinion it is not a matter of a proper coffee blend and brand, but rather a disgrace. Our alternatives (for recipients of our wage and salary levels) remain either giving up the enjoyment of coffee or spending 30 to 50 marks more per month.<sup>417</sup>

In an example of East Germans' 'internalizing the rules' of state socialism, the "coffee drinker collective's" use of humour served as an effective way to convey their clear disdain for the new drink while tying coffee to specific political issues. The collective's deployment of productivist rhetoric allowed them to frame their criticism as the legitimate concerns of conscientious members of the proletariat, for instance their quip that factory productivity would increase as workers skipped their coffee breaks to avoid *Kaffee-Mix*'s horrible taste. A lack of quality – specifically in terms of taste and enjoyment – characterized this group's primary objection to *Kaffee-Mix*, a sentiment clearly visible in their suggestion that it was suitable as either a form of

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<sup>417</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Bericht an Genossen Hermann Pöschel: Leicht-, Lebensmittel- und Bez. Gel. Industrie. 19.8.77, Eingabe der "Kaffeetrinker- Kollektiv" Karin Klingberg, H.Heller, H. Rothe, U. Riedel, A. Lindner, 9041 Karl- Marx Stadt, Ernst- Enge- Str 88.

punishment bordering on torture or as an effective pesticide, but certainly not as an enjoyable beverage for the break room.

Yet the point was not to merely emphasize how horrible the coffee tasted, but to identify the political ramifications of a decline in workers' ability to enjoy their coffee because of its taste. These workers feared their living standards – and specifically, their working conditions – would suffer as a result of *Kaffee-Mix*. Note that the collective framed the coffee break in rather absolute terms: it was hardly worth taking a break at all if the only coffee available was *Kaffee-Mix*. Workers valued their breaks as opportunities to remove themselves from work and socialize, but doing so required a particular atmosphere, which could not exist without proper coffee. In a far more serious tone, the collective concluded that merely replacing quality tasting coffee with a poor substitute was as ineffective as it was irresponsible, as a poor tasting coffee provided East Germans with but two options: pay more for their coffee by purchasing different brands, or abstain from coffee altogether.

In addition to quality, many *Eingaben* highlighted *Kaffee-Mix*'s price, a complaint lodged as frequently as overt criticisms of *Kaffee-Mix*'s taste. In some cases, complaints about price in fact revealed Germans' belief that the price did not reflect the product's perceived value. A scathing critique from a group of people in Reichenbach identifying "as strong coffee drinkers" claimed "we know how bean coffee should taste. But your new bean coffee '*Kaffee-Mix*' tastes like half and half. Namely, half winter barley and half spring barley. And all this for six marks."<sup>418</sup> In other cases, frustrations over price could and did reflect a popular awareness of class differences, which were exacerbated by the coffee crisis. As the letter writers of the above

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<sup>418</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, *Eingabe*, kein Unterschrift (Anonymous), August 1977. In the German context, Winter Barley (Wintergerste) is primarily used for animal feed, and is not fit for human consumption. Its application here as a description for *Kaffee-Mix* is thus quite revealing, and might explain the authors' desire for anonymity.

mentioned “Coffee Collective” mentioned, spending an extra 30 to 50 Marks per month on coffee was not a simple or easy decision, if indeed such a decision was available to them. By the mid-1970s East Germans were already spending approximately 25 – 50 Marks per month (based on an 800 – 1200 Marks/month income), or 3 – 4 per cent of their monthly income.<sup>419</sup> Buying the more expensive brands (which in any event were less accessible) would double a household’s monthly coffee expenditures. East Germans’ willingness to even consider spending so much of their total monthly income on coffee alone speaks to their deep desire for this product and their unwillingness to go without or accept lesser surrogates.

Access to decent coffee could also serve to exacerbate social tensions, privileging some while depriving others. As their concluding remarks highlight, the workers in the ‘Coffee drinker collective’ also demonstrated an awareness of the class differences in GDR society, differences which “for recipients of our wage and salary levels” were put into sharp focus when their regular *Kosta* was swapped for *Kaffee-Mix*.<sup>420</sup> Herr von T. spoke of cafes and restaurants as the places where “workers would be provided ‘their’ cup [i.e. the new mix] of coffee during breaks or after work,” but pointed out that “industrial or agricultural workers do not belong to the typical guests of restaurants of high price categories or Interhotels, where coffee is still offered as before.” In his view, the way in which the regime went about introducing *Kaffee-Mix* “create[d] the feeling that enjoying a cup of coffee is an extortionate extravagance that the majority of the population ought not to have.”<sup>421</sup> Frau M. raised the specific case of fixed-income pensioners, saying it was “a big disgrace” that pensioners would be forced to buy more expensive coffee brands: “do you

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<sup>419</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Arbeitsgruppe für Organisation und Inspektion beim Ministerrat. Berlin, (ohne datum), 5.

<sup>420</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Bericht an Genossen Hermann Pöschel: Leicht-, Lebensmittel- und Bez. Gel. Industrie. 19.8.77, Eingabe der “Kaffeetrinker- Kollektiv” Karin Klingberg, H.Heller, H. Rothe, U. Riedel, A. Lindner, 9041 Karl- Marx Stadt, Ernst- Enge- Str 88.

<sup>421</sup> BArchB, DL 1- VA, 22954 Bd2, *Eingabe* from Herr Horst von Tümping, 31 August 1977.



think that pensioners can afford more expensive coffee? Do you even know, *with your great salaries*, what it takes to make ends meet with 300 marks a month? The only thing a pensioner has achieved was coffee, and that is also taken from us. And you want to be a workers' government?"<sup>422</sup> Germans' complaints and letters confirmed that which planners had feared since March: the population would not tolerate a lack of coffee. But the public's reaction also revealed how greatly state officials misjudged the importance of quality and taste. Turning to adulteration was supposed to have alleviated public concern and distracted Germans from the larger economic woes of the country. Instead, it was precisely adulteration which illuminated how bad things had become: Germans could literally *taste* the economic crises their country faced.

Angered by what they perceived to be a false choice between poor coffee and a far more expensive brand, Germans called the measures an "indirect" or "illegal" price increase, terms that drew on state policies of fixed prices for consumer goods, and demonstrated citizens' fluency in party rhetoric.<sup>423</sup> Accusing the state of introducing illegal price increases was an effective strategy, as it drew on the memory of the failed Revolution of 17 June 1953, when public outrage over a 40 per cent increase in HO prices sparked a nationwide uprising and forced the regime to adopt the New Course. Following 1953, Mary Fulbrook points out the regime became ever more hesitant to even address the question of price increases for fear of causing another popular uprising.<sup>424</sup> The immediacy with which customers interpreted *Kaffee-Mix* as an indirect price increase was a matter of great concern at all levels of industry and government.

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<sup>422</sup> BArchB, DY 30/9069, Berta Müller, "Betrifft Kaffee!" (*Eingabe*), 23 Sept 1977. Emphasis added.

<sup>423</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Sektor Bezirksgeleitete Industrie und Lebensmittelindustrie, "Information für Genossen Hoffmann." Berlin, den. 3.8.1977, 7.

<sup>424</sup> Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 7.

Yet complaints about an indirect price increase could be misleading, and most often invoked pricing to express concerns about quality. At 6 Marks per package, *Kaffee-Mix* cost nearly as much as the brand it replaced, *Kosta*, but offered a taste that “in no way relates to quality.”<sup>425</sup> Quality, not pricing, led Germans to reject *Kaffee-Mix*. In Löbau, workers at the local advertising firm decided to boycott *Kaffee-Mix* because “it possess[ed] neither the beloved smell nor taste of real coffee [*echte Kaffee*].”<sup>426</sup> These ad workers were not alone; rejecting *Kaffee-Mix* on account of its poor taste, many East Germans resolved to purchase *Rondo* and *Mona* instead, despite their higher costs.<sup>427</sup> Although purchasing more expensive coffees constituted a conscious decision on the part of East Germans, citizens spoke of their choices as their only genuine option: *Kaffee-Mix* was an intolerable substitute, but sacrificing coffee altogether was entirely unacceptable. In her memoirs of life and food culture in the GDR, Jutta Voigt spoke of the coffee crisis as a rupture, explaining that despite citizens’ being accustomed to gaps in supply, their “patience came to an end over this issue. It raged like never before. To this point, and no further. Enough. The coffee became a bastion.” One family emphasized how central coffee was to their everyday life, writing “as a working- class family drinking coffee has for us become a personal bright spot. Under no circumstances can we go without this ‘small

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<sup>425</sup> BArchB, DY 20/25310, Gisela Uhlig, Erla, *Eingaben* (August 1977).

<sup>426</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, *Eingabe*, Kollegen der HO- Werbung, Löbau. August 1977.

<sup>427</sup> BStU MfS BVfS Cottbus, AKG Nr. 10176. “Information über Reaktion der Bevölkerung zu Problemen der Versorgung mit Kaffee- Erzeugnissen entsprechend dem Beschluss des Ministerrates,” 11.08.1977; BArchB, DY 30/25310, Bericht an Genossen Hermann Pöschel: Leicht-, Lebensmittel- und Bez. Gel. Industrie. 19.8.77, 2. The district branch of the MfS for Cottbus reported “vehement reactions” to the austerity measures, including a workers’ strike that necessitated the reversal of the measures in RAW Cottbus. See BStU MfS BVfS Cottbus, AKG 4158. Bezirksverwaltung Cottbus, “Information über weitere Reaktionen unter der Bevölkerung des Bezirkes Cottbus zur Versorgung mit Bohnenkaffee,” 25.08.1977, 3. On a national level, several districts reported that customers refused to purchase the new brand, to the extent that in Karl-Marx-Stadt, retailers faced a stockpile of over 11.6 t of *Kaffee-Mix* by August 15. See BArchBL-SAPMO, DY30- IV B 2- 5- 999, SED- District leadership Karl Marx Stadt, “Information über Meinungen und Äußerungen der Bevölkerung über *Kaffee- Mix*,” Aug 3 1977, 3.

luxury.”<sup>428</sup> Despite being a ‘small luxury’ in official parlance, to East Germans, coffee represented not an indulgence, but a daily necessity.<sup>429</sup>

Rüscher’s language by month’s end reflected his growing frustration at the ongoing crisis and continued popular dissatisfaction as “the complaints from the population increase[d] by leaps and bounds.” He was particularly concerned with the boycott, writing “the tone of the letters ranges from objections [and] indignation to provocative utterances about the policy of the party and government [...] this mixed coffee is [being] rejected for its price and bad taste.”<sup>430</sup> Rüscher understood the boycott as a symptom of public dissatisfaction in quality, finding its origin in people’s distaste for *Kaffee-Mix*. Pointing out that the public’s dissatisfaction with *Kaffee-Mix* was also reflected in their refusal to purchase it, and that sales of mixed coffee were in fact declining rapidly throughout the country despite increased distribution, Rüscher expressed his concern that the negative reaction was “solidifying more and more,” and that this phenomenon placed the success of the Party’s 28 July resolution “at serious risk.”<sup>431</sup>

#### *Damage Control: Regime Responses to Public Backlash*

While direct responses to individual *Eingaben* would not come until late September, the regime did take some immediate measures to address specific public concerns, from improving the quality of *Kaffee-Mix* to eventually addressing the lack of information about the measures. Planners formed a working group in mid-August that was tasked with investigating the possibilities of improving the taste and filter capabilities of the mixed coffee. The easiest way to

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<sup>428</sup> BArchB, DL 1- VA, 22954b, Familie M. Kaina, “*Eingabe*,” Cottbus, 22.9.77.

<sup>429</sup> Framing their decisions in this way allowed consumers like Frau S. to blame the regime, saying “quality at the expense of the consumer I reject entirely. This is also the opinion of my socialist worker collective.” BArchB, DY 30/25310, Birgit Kiunke, *Eingaben*, 11.8.1977.

<sup>430</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, Memo from Rüscher to Mittag, 25.8.1977.

<sup>431</sup> BArchBL-SAPMO, DY 30/25310, Memo from Rüscher to Mittag, 25.8.1977.

improve taste – increasing the content of raw coffee in *Kaffee-Mix* – was not an option: the state was unwilling to pay additional costs to increase imports at current world prices, and the remaining coffee reserves were only sufficient to cover demand until the end of that year. Instead, planners turned to the chemical industry in the hopes of finding alternatives. First, scientists attempted to reduce the bitter taste of *Kaffee-Mix*, which produced some limited results by 19 August, though Rüscher's report was unspecific as to what these results were.<sup>432</sup> Next, planners hoped that the mixture could be infused with flavour through aromatization. Having no experience in applying this process to coffee, East German specialists turned to West German firms for advice. The response was less than encouraging; Helmut Stavenhagen, director of the West German institute for luxury goods research, provided some feedback on these ideas, and seemed somewhat skeptical of the probability of success. He had no experience with spray-dried instant coffee and aromatization, but pointing to previous success with ice cream and similar products, Stavenhagen warned that aromatization only afforded the products “a slight and temporary smell, and provided no impact on taste whatsoever.”<sup>433</sup> Finding a solution to the filtering capabilities of *Kaffee-Mix* proved equally as frustrating. First, specialists re-examined the coffee machines themselves, hoping a change in filter paper thickness could help. Despite trying a wide range of papers, however, nothing had any effect. Experiments revealed that grinding both the roasted and surrogate portions more finely prior to packaging produced the best filtration possible, though the brewing process was still quite slow.<sup>434</sup> A week later, Rüscher told Hermann Pöschel, division leader of the research and technological development office of the Central Committee, that although specialists remained hopeful, laboratory trials could not

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<sup>432</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Bericht an Genossen Hermann Pöschel: Leicht-, Lebensmittel- und Bezirksgeleitete Industrie, 19.8.77.

<sup>433</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Rüscher to Mittag, 19.9.1977.

<sup>434</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Folgeinformation über Probleme bei der Einführung der Mischkaffeesorte “*Kaffee-Mix*,” Berlin, den 11.8.1977.

confirm that changes in ground would guarantee results.<sup>435</sup> By mid-September, the only efforts in which specialists achieved a degree of success was with the older K104 coffee machines, which did not use a drip method, but only by reducing the portion of coffee per serving from 6.5 to 5 grams. When it came to the ‘modern’ and ‘more advanced’ drip-based *Kaffeeboy*, experts simply could not solve the filter issue.<sup>436</sup>

Meanwhile, East Germans continued to encounter a dearth of information regarding coffee supply, and what little news they could find did little to illuminate the situation, instead merely reiterating accusations of western speculation. On 19 August *Neues Deutschland* ran an article addressing the “rising monopoly profits through high raw coffee prices.” The article lambasted the “manipulation” that had resulted in a fivefold increase in price for raw coffee over the previous two years. *Neues Deutschland* went further, noting that such large profits hardly benefited coffee producers of developing countries, who “continually receive[d] little more than starvation wages, while the coffee profiteers dissolve into a negligible part of the balance sheets of American and European multitis.”<sup>437</sup> By blaming world market speculation, the SED hoped to shelter the planned economy from overt criticism and keep citizens’ frustrations aimed at external forces. Furthermore, the emphasis on the negligible impact such high profits would have on coffee farmers in the developing world framed these farmers as the true victims of the coffee crisis, in effect associating East Germans’ struggles with those of the farmers. Given the continued complaints about a lack of adequate explanation for the measures taken in the GDR, however, this lone article did virtually nothing to mitigate public outrage.

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<sup>435</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Bericht an Genossen Hermann Pöschel: Leicht-, Lebensmittel- und Bez. Gel. Industrie. 19.8.77.

<sup>436</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25310, Mittag from Rüscher, 19.9.77.

<sup>437</sup> “Riesige Monopolprofite durch hohe Rohkaffeepreise,” *Neues Deutschland*, 19 August 1977, 7.

Something had to be done to inform the public about the rationale behind the coffee measures as citizens were tying the coffee situation to questions of Party policy and authority. Industry leaders did try to reply to a number of individual *Eingaben* in late August and early September, though their explanations tended to be quite general and externalized the coffee problem as merely a rational response to an impossible world market situation. For example, when replying to Frau O.'s complaints, the district director of the trade ministry informed her that it was "no longer possible" to produce *Kosta*, and reminded her that *Rondo* and *Mona* remained available. Amazingly, despite the vehement complaints and rejection of *Kaffee-Mix*, he claimed that the "differentiated assortment [in stores] still lets the consumer choose according to their individual taste."<sup>438</sup> Instead of responding directly to individual letters (as was customary), the Politburo immediately lifted the restrictions on gift packages which limited the volume of coffee to 500g, and published a nation-wide press release regarding coffee.<sup>439</sup> Secretary of the Magdeburg SED Alois Pisnik wrote privately to Honecker on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and spoke of the press release in relation to his growing concern over discontent among both the public and his district's party secretaries. Pisnik reminded Honecker of the party's own public declarations that its political work "carrie[d] the character of a trustworthy dialogue with the people; who we have not correctly served with our practice in this case." He praised the Politburo decision to publish a press release, saying he believed it would serve as "a visible sign that the regime was responding directly to workers' criticisms in an open manner" and would "bring clarity to the discussion about coffee and understanding from the people."<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> BArchB, DL 1- VA, 22954, Bermhardt to Frau Leni Oschütz (response to *Eingabe*), 9.9.1977.

<sup>439</sup> Christian Härtel, "Ostdeutsche Bestimmungen für den Paketverkehr im Spiegel westdeutscher Merkblätter," in: *Das Westpaket. Geschenksendung, keine Handelsware*, edited by Christian Härtel, Petra Kabus (Berlin: 2000), 45-53, here 48. Cited in Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum*, 187.

<sup>440</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25042, Memo from the First secretary of the Regional Directorate of the SED Magdeburg, Alois Pisnik, to General Secretary SED, Erich Honecker, 22 Sept 1977, 2.

In reality the press release merely externalized the crisis in another attempt to divert citizens' frustrations away from the SED. Published in all three of the national East German state-run newspapers, it claimed the Ministry for Trade and Supply had tried "to guarantee the provisioning of coffee into the future despite the extraordinary price increases on the world market." The release provided specific figures about the price increases since 1975 and the annual import volumes for the GDR. East Germans were not alone in their frustrations over coffee, claimed the release, as the unusual price increases were "forcing all countries that do not cultivate their own coffee to take appropriate measures. In many countries, the consumption of coffee has declined considerably as a result of the increase in retail prices."<sup>441</sup> The implication, therefore, was that East Germans were actually being better served than their counterparts elsewhere, because they still had access to coffee: after all, the release pointed out, *Rondo* and *Mona* were still available "at their previous prices."<sup>442</sup> Having relativized the crisis, the release only indirectly admitted to the shortcomings of the state measures, promising an improvement in the quality of *Kaffee-Mix* and a reduction in its price to 4 Marks per package; the only genuine admission of failure was in mentioning that *Kaffee-Mix* could still not filter through household coffee machines.<sup>443</sup> But lowering the retail price also introduced two additional problems. First, if the reduced price enticed more sales of *Kaffee-Mix*, the step would undermine the state's hidden aim of reducing coffee consumption. Second, reducing the price by a third affirmed the

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<sup>441</sup> "Weltmarktpreise und Kaffeeversorgung," *Berliner Zeitung*, 23. September 1977, 2; "Preisregulierung bei Kaffee," *Neue Zeit*, 23 September 1977, 2; "Mitteilung des Ministeriums für Handel und Versorgung," *Neues Deutschland*, 23 September 1977, 2.

<sup>442</sup> "Weltmarktpreise und Kaffeeversorgung"; "Preisregulierung bei Kaffee,"; "Mitteilung des Ministeriums für Handel und Versorgung."

<sup>443</sup> "Weltmarktpreise und Kaffeeversorgung"; "Preisregulierung bei Kaffee,"; "Mitteilung des Ministeriums für Handel und Versorgung." At the same time, coffee found mention in other news articles, sometimes in contexts which added to the regime's woes. In an interview with *Neues Deutschland*, Günter Mittag also commented that the GDR relied on non-socialist countries for certain goods like coffee, but went further, to say "we can only be successful in these dealings if we offer the highest quality in every sphere." Mittag was referring to GDR goods traded for agricultural goods, but his emphasis on producing 'highest quality' goods likely ruffled a few feathers. See "Unser Weg – das ist der Weg der Hauptaufgabe," *Neues Deutschland*, 24 November 1977, 4.

public's outrage about an 'illegal price hike', and in doing so, provided tacit admission of *Kaffee-Mix*'s inferior quality and, therefore, its perceived value.

While officials reported a generally positive reception of the press release among the population, the article failed to produce the desired result of enticing Germans to purchase *Kaffee-Mix*. Furthermore, the release did not assuage East Germans or convince them of the State's supposed benevolence. Only four days after the press release, Erich Honecker spoke at a mass party rally in Dresden, and mentioned the coffee situation explicitly:

Last Friday, you read our press release concerning the coffee supply. I only wish to mention once more that our raw coffee imports alone cost about 300 million dollars this year. Spending this much is not easy for us. This was possible through the great efforts of workers in the export sector. Our calculations estimated that in light of the world market prices – which we cannot influence – this was the best solution for our consumers.<sup>444</sup>

In almost any other context, the Party Chairman mentioning the supply situation of a seemingly mundane commodity at such a major Party event would seem trivial and misplaced. The fact that Honecker felt the need to raise this matter here, and to emphasize the necessity of the government's actions, strongly suggests both the Party's continued uncertainty of public opinion, and how carefully the leadership tried to tread on this issue. His figure of US 300 million is interesting, because it suggests he was using a foreign denomination to emphasize the broader economic ramifications of the coffee crisis: American dollars was an accessible figure most East Germans could understand in global terms. The figure is also most likely an exaggeration – but not by much: based on world coffee price indexes from 1977 (US \$2.29/lb), the GDR's total import volume for 1977 (51,457 t) cost the country at least USD \$250 million, most of which relied on West German loans.<sup>445</sup> Furthermore, his words also remind us of the

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<sup>444</sup> Erich Honecker, "nekesozialistische Revolution in der DDR und ihre Perspektiven für Handel und Versorgung," *Neue Zeit*, 27 September 1977, 5.

<sup>445</sup> For figures on world prices, see "Comparative analysis of world coffee prices and manufactured goods" (Annex II: Complete data on prices.) International Coffee Organization, 17 February 2014; for data on total coffee imports,



nature of the GDR dictatorship: the government had made a decision regarding coffee, and expected the public to understand its necessity. Nonetheless, his words aptly demonstrate the importance placed on coffee: in the view of both the public and the state leadership, coffee may have been a ‘little luxury,’ but this seemingly humble commodity could not be less mundane.

Stasi observances revealed that East Germans understood the necessity for taking some action with coffee supply, but disapproved of how long it had taken the regime to provide any clear information to the public, especially in light of the newspaper articles about price hikes in Czechoslovakia.<sup>446</sup> Antipathy toward *Kaffee-Mix* continued through the autumn; the flow of petitions and other complaints slowed only moderately. In October, Stasi officials in Karl- Marx- Stadt reported the circulation of a few ‘poems’ containing negative views on the current coffee situation, one of which the Stasi transcribed in its entirety:

*Alle Bürger schreien ach und weh, ab heute gibt es Mischkaffee.  
Kaffee-Mix du schönes Wort, wer ihn trinkt, der stirbt sofort.  
Der Staat füllt sehr schnell seine Taschen, wenn wir den Kaffee-Mix vernaschen.  
Die Pille wird nun abgeschafft, Kaffee-Mix hat die gleiche Kraft.  
Kaffee-Mix ganz superfrisch, versaut Dir jeden Kaffeetisch.  
Wer morden will, hats heute leicht, Kaffee-Mix ist darauf geeicht.  
Kaffee-Mix zum Export - alle Nachbarn rücken fort.  
Soll ein Völkerstamm verenden, muß Du Kaffee-Mix verwenden.  
Du siehst es bald mit sanftem Schauer, im Kaffee-Mix die Milch wird sauer.  
Hast Du 'ne Frau, die gar nicht will, nach Kaffee- Mix, da liegt sie still.  
Der Herzinfarkt der kommt ganz fix, genießt Du oft den Kaffee- Mix.  
Der Kaffee-Mix ist wirklich gut, er füllt den Sack, verdünnt das Blut.<sup>447</sup>*

Although the author of this poem is unknown, the Stasi indicated that it had been “widely circulated” in their district, which suggests the poem developed a certain degree of popular

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see “Einfuhr ausgewählter Erzeugnisse,” *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*. Zeitschriftenband (1980), Log 74. 230-248, here 236.

<sup>446</sup> BStU MfS ZAIG, Nr 4120, “Hinweise auf erste Reaktionen der Bevölkerung der DDR zur Mitteilung des Ministeriums für Handel und Versorgung am 23.9.1977 zur Kaffeesituation.”

<sup>447</sup> BStU MfS KMS, AKG Nr. 10055, “Information über die Verbreitung von Gedichten mit negative Inhalt zur gegenwärtigen Kaffeesituation im Kreis Karl- Marx- Stadt/Land,” 3.10.1977.

traction.<sup>448</sup> Additionally, given its format of single line and grammatically unrelated stanzas, the poem may also have been a collaborative effort, with local citizens adding their own jokes to the piece as they passed it along to friends and colleagues. The poem clearly targeted *Kaffee-Mix* for its quality; from suggesting its use as a form of birth control, to warning against its potential lethality, over half the stanzas launched a vicious assault against the product's taste, smell, or utility. While the overall tone of the piece was humorous, the poem also contained some overtly political messages, such as the claim that the state 'filled its coffers with each purchase of *Kaffee-Mix*.' Although the use of '*Völkerstamm*' (a group of tribes) likely had more to do with poetic rhythm, in this context, the poem could also suggest that supplying *Kaffee-Mix* was sufficient to 'kill a nation.' The Stasi did not indicate whether any action had been taken against those caught circulating this or other poems, nor did they provide any interpretation of the messages – political or otherwise. Nonetheless, for officials reading these poems, the jokes clearly demonstrated the public's outrage.

Customers still rejected *Kaffee-Mix* even after the universal price reduction to 4 marks per package because, even at the lower price of 4 marks per package, "the quality was still no better."<sup>449</sup> Germans' continued boycott sparked shortages in *Rondo* in late September and early October, as customers scrambled to buy up limited supplies of the better brands. Customers also blamed these shortages on the state's actions, particularly those workers whose schedules did not correspond to the ideal shopping hours. Hoarding meant that *Rondo* was typically only available on the day it arrived in stores, explained Herr P., who complained that "because I have the late shift, I am punished and can only buy *Mona*. I don't find my money on the street, [...] I am

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<sup>448</sup> BStU MfS KMS, AKG Nr. 10055, "Information über die Verbreitung von Gedichten mit negative Inhalt zur gegenwärtigen Kaffeesituation im Kreis Karl- Marx- Stadt/Land," 3.10.1977.

<sup>449</sup> BStU MfS ZAIG, Nr 4120, "Hinweise auf erste Reaktionen der Bevölkerung der DDR zur Mitteilung des Ministeriums für Handel und Versorgung am 23.9.1977 zur Kaffeesituation."

outraged that the workers were misinformed. This affects mostly the retirees and the workers, because the people with large salaries always drink *Mona*.<sup>450</sup> In a last bid to win over consumers, planners launched an altered form of *Kaffee-Mix* in November, based on recommendations from Drs. Wange and Briksa. Scientists' earlier attempts at aromatization had failed, and so to improve its taste, *Kaffee-Mix* would now be produced with a slightly higher roasted coffee content (66 per cent). Increasing the volume of real coffee in each batch required a reduction elsewhere, so the measures simultaneously called for a general reduction in the volume of coffee from 6 g to 5 g per single cup serving in all restaurants, cafes and factory cafeterias.<sup>451</sup> In reality, the modifications in recipe and price came too late, and represented too small an effort, to significantly affect the public mood. Customers still refused to purchase *Kaffee-Mix* and, unable to push the new product on the population, retailers sent the remaining 134 t of *Kaffee-Mix* back to the roasters, after which Rüscher told Mittag that the issue of selling mixed coffee "should be discussed again."<sup>452</sup>

*Coffee according to demand: the end of Kaffee- Mix, the search for new coffee*

As 1977 drew to a close, Erich Honecker presented his annual New Year's address to the population, reflecting on the events of the past twelve months. His outlook was quite positive, characterizing the year as one of "economic upturn" and claiming "on the threshold of the new year we can say that the hard work of all has paid off. [...] The economic successes have been turned into social policy measures, in accordance with our socialist principles."<sup>453</sup> In some ways,

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<sup>450</sup> BArchB, DL 1- VA, 22954b, *Eingabe* from Manfred Popp, Naunhof, 3.10.77.

<sup>451</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25044, Rüscher to Mittag, 6 December 1977, 1.

<sup>452</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25044, Rüscher to Mittag, 8.12.1977, 2; see also Wunderlich, "Die 'Kaffeekrise' von 1977," 258.

<sup>453</sup> "Viel Glück und Erfolg allen Bürgern unserer Republik für das Jahr 1978," in Erich Honecker, *Reden und Aufsätze, Band 6*. Berlin: Dietz, 1980, 7-14, here 7; also cited in Mark Allinson, "1977: The GDR's Most Normal Year?," in Mary Fulbrook. *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961- 1979: The Normalization of Rule?* New York: Berghahn, 2013, 255.

Honecker's words rang true: household incomes had increased, affording East Germans greater purchasing power.<sup>454</sup> Despite the party's public attitude of 'business as usual,' however, the experiences with coffee that year left a bitter taste among the population. The dramatic fourfold increase in the international price for coffee shattered planners' faith in the safety nets on which they had relied, precipitating a genuine sense of crisis through the ranks of industry, state and party officials from March onward. That a consumer good officially designated as a luxury could cause such widespread panic illustrates the degree to which coffee occupied a politicized cultural space in the minds of both state officials and citizens. Two decades of sustained coffee drinking had woven together citizens' expectations of modern living and their cherished cup of coffee. East Germans further internalized these expectations when the regime explicitly tied rising living standards to political legitimacy with both the Unity of Social and Economic Policy in 1971 and Honecker's annual declarations of economic success.

The State's efforts to guarantee supply by stretching raw materials as far as possible ultimately failed, because planners' understanding of coffee's cultural significance neglected the role played by quality. Simply providing sufficient volumes of coffee could not stabilize the regime if that coffee possessed an inferior taste, a realization to which planners arrived too late. In their petition letters and verbal complaints, citizens prioritized matters of taste and quality over other considerations, a sentiment reinforced by their sustained willingness to reallocate limited income to more expensive coffee brands. Even citizens' accusations of an indirect price hike were motivated by the fact that *Kaffee-Mix* did not possess a quality comparable to the brand it replaced, despite being offered at the same price. Planners failed to make this connection, literally categorizing petitions based on "price" and "quality" – distinctions that were inseparable in the minds of East Germans. By the time the regime lowered *Kaffee-Mix*'s price in

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<sup>454</sup> Steiner. *The Plans that Failed*, 158.

September, and changed its recipe to include a higher roasted coffee content in November, the public had already cemented its firm rejection of the brand.

There was a certain irony – or even a paradox – in the results of the coffee crisis. Quite contrary to their assumptions that keeping the coffee flowing would satisfy demand and avoid rising costs, planners' decisions were not only economically ineffective, but also wasted millions of Marks. The very product introduced to provide East Germans with their daily cup of coffee was the single source of widespread scorn, and as stock of unused *Kaffee-Mix* piled up, the product originally intended to replace all that country's roasted coffee became both an economic and political liability.

While coffee was but one shortage of many in 1977, the coffee crisis illuminates broader complexities of consumer socialism and the shaky ground upon which the SED sat by the late 1970s. The coffee crisis was not a failure of planning: despite its delayed response to the Brazil frost, the GDR proved capable of quickly mass producing a substitute coffee in sufficient quantities to supply the entire population for both 1977 and 1978. Rather, the crisis centered on notions of quality: for East Germans, coffee's value came from one's ability to enjoy it, a conviction based in tradition as much as in the state's own portrayal of coffee over the previous two decades. Thus, the very messages inserting coffee drinking into modern socialist life also inadvertently perpetuated some of the cultural mindsets the regime sought to eliminate, in particular the public's conceptualization of value. Prices in the GDR never reflected genuine value, because they were determined centrally and arbitrarily, without consideration of production costs, supply or demand. This disconnect between prices and a product's value exemplifies what Jonathan Zatin refers to as the SED's 'intellectual debt' - an obsessive

antipathy towards money as the primary means of exploitation of those without capital.<sup>455</sup>

Wealth created social division through an unequal distribution of access to goods. In the eyes of the party, desire for goods was an expression of that social division, “a socially mediated wish to acquire status via material objectives.”<sup>456</sup> In this view, value should not be determined by desire, but rather by social needs. By eliminating money from the system of exchange, the East German communists surmised that the planned economy “removed the grounds for desire by creating social conditions in which only real needs exist.”<sup>457</sup> Planners and party officials certainly viewed coffee as a real social need, and since money meant nothing, planners saw no issue with swapping one coffee for another without regard for price. East Germans’ outrage that *Kaffee-Mix*’s price did not reflect its quality shows clearly that the regime’s attempts to create socialist-minded consumers were failing. While citizens had certainly internalized the language of socialist consumption (‘speaking SED’ in their petitions), and had learnt strategies for coping with constant goods shortages, they had not detached themselves from the idea that consumer prices reflected or should reflect a good’s value.

By failing to provide an adequate solution to the population’s demands of a quality cup of coffee, the state contributed to growing public concern about the viability of the socialist project. Volker Wunderlich called the public’s boycott of *Kaffee-Mix* a form of “social protest” – and he maintains the coffee crisis “cannot be counted in the history of political opposition” because the protest was neither organized nor unified, and its “dynamic hardly reach[ed] the level of 1989.” Petitioners “only wanted to develop their consumer logic [...] with at least as much chance of success as the housewives of the Federal Republic, who pressured coffee companies a great

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<sup>455</sup> Zatlin, *Currency of Socialism*, 5.

<sup>456</sup> Zatlin, *Currency of Socialism*, 240.

<sup>457</sup> Zatlin, *Currency of Socialism*, 6.

deal.”<sup>458</sup> Comparing the coffee crisis to 1989, however, creates a false dichotomy: the coffee crisis was obviously not an instance of revolt against the state; however, his comparison diminishes the extent to which citizens and politicians recognized the symbolic importance of coffee. The lack of a unified or organized protest does not diminish the political nature of the coffee crisis; in fact, the boycott reflected citizens’ internalization of the regime’s own presentation of coffee drinking as a means of participation in not only the modern socialist state, but in modern society writ large. If the regime could not provide so basic an item as coffee, how could it claim to uphold, much less speak of improving, living standards for its people—which formed the primary basis upon which the success of the socialist project rested? The coffee crisis exemplifies a paradox of the East German economy: tension existed between the regime’s attempts to portray itself to its citizens as self-sufficient, on the one hand, and its actual dependence on non-socialist countries and economies, on the other.<sup>459</sup> Citizens expressed a clear consciousness of the connections between coffee and the general economic woes of their country, worrying “yesterday it was the coffee, tomorrow it’ll be oil and the day after that, something else.”<sup>460</sup> The coffee crisis demonstrates both the increasing cynicism and growing exhaustion with which East Germans encountered the SED’s failed promises in their daily lives. One petitioner asked, “We’re told over and over that the [COMECON] countries are the most dynamic economic region in the world. But how stable are we really if we have to make compromises to the capitalist world even to get goods like coffee?”<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Wunderlich, “Die ‘Kaffeekrise’ von 1977,” 261.

<sup>459</sup> Mark Allinson argues this paradox meant that the coffee crisis “appeared exemplary for the fundamental problems of the socialist bloc, buffeted by fluctuations in world prices, and the misleading nature of the party line.” See Mark Allinson, “1977: The GDR’s Most Normal Year?,” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961- 1979: The Normalization of Rule?*, edited by Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 274.

<sup>460</sup> BArchB, DY 30/25042, Memo from the First secretary of the Regional Directorate of the SED Magdeburg, A. Pisnik, to General Secretary SED, Erich Honecker, 22 Sept 1977, 1.

<sup>461</sup> BArchB, DY 30/21550, DBD Abt. Parteiorgane, “Information Nr.20/77”, 17 August 1977, 2, cited in Mark Allinson, “1977: The GDR’s Most Normal Year?”, 274.

Planners also faced two additional problems: first, East Germans' choice to purchase more expensive brands confirmed planners' assumptions that regardless of the world price situation, East Germans expected to be able to drink their coffee as usual. If East Germans had reacted so vehemently to a change in just one brand, a more general reduction of supply would likely lead to precisely the widespread unrest officials like Norden or even Honecker had feared during the spring. Second, since *Rondo* and *Mona* still contained relatively high volumes of real bean coffee, their continued consumption would surely deplete the roasting industry's nearly exhausted stocks of raw materials. The trade deals with Angola and Ethiopia had provided a sufficient infusion of raw coffee to meet production demands for 1977 and most of 1978, but only through the continued production of a mixed brand. World market prices had not declined in any meaningful way by December, leaving planners with few options to replenish stocks, let alone guarantee supply into the future. If planners were going to meet the public's demand for *quality* coffee, they were going to have to find alternative sources for beans that would not incur additional expenses: sources they would find in the de-colonizing countries of the developing world in the coming years.



### **Chapter Three: Brewing Relations: East Germany, Coffee and the Developing World**

Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, coffee had come to form an integral component in the SED's construction of socialist society. Both the regime's struggles to maintain supply and the surge of public backlash during the coffee crisis re-affirmed coffee's association with life in real existing socialism. Part of the regime's strategy to overcome this problem involved stretching raw materials by introducing *Kaffee-Mix*; but reducing quality in this way did not free the GDR of its dependence on the world coffee market. German traders needed to find sources of coffee without increasing hard currency expenditures, which posed a significant challenge as the standard practice in coffee trade involved purchases against currency – not barter.

In this chapter, I trace the GDR's attempts to secure coffee beans from the spring and summer of 1977 and throughout the 1980s, through barter with coffee producing countries in the developing world. I argue that these deals reveal as much about the GDR's engagement with the global South as they do about its own self-image as a modern state in a divided, yet globalizing world. Its pursuit of coffee led East Germany's leaders to conclude trade deals with several countries in Central America, Africa and Asia, several of whom East Germany had rarely, if ever, obtained coffee from before. This chapter focuses on the four most significant of these 'coffee projects' – those in Angola, Ethiopia, Laos and Vietnam, and I discuss these projects in two pairs. First, I examine the somewhat hastily negotiated trade deals with Angola and Ethiopia during the midst of the coffee crisis in the summer and fall of 1977, to highlight the anxiety East German planners and traders felt with regard to public outrage over the adulteration of coffee. In both of these agreements, GDR representatives struggled to find terms agreeable to their partners, which hampered negotiations and ultimately contributed to the collapse of both projects. In Laos and Vietnam, the trade deals took a fundamentally different form: rather than

directly trading East German finished goods for coffee, East Germany entered long-term development projects with both countries in order to expand their coffee industries. Unlike Angola and Ethiopia, each of whom had existing coffee export industries at the time the GDR approached them, neither Laos nor Vietnam produced large volumes of the commodity. Furthermore, Laos and Vietnam both proved more agreeable to much longer term cooperative endeavours, which appealed to the GDR's desire to find stable sources of coffee, as well as continuous avenues to export its own finished goods into the future. At first glance, these exchanges appear to be little more than minor trade deals, a simple exchange of finished goods for a particular foodstuff. In fact, these case studies illustrate a number of important points about the GDR's economic and political position world-wide; the SED's commitment to ideology and its relationship with its people, as well as the importance of this commodity, which caused the dictatorship a surprising degree of consternation by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Having decided to fulfill its population's expectations of decent coffee in March 1977, leaders within East Germany's foreign trade ministry became obsessed with finding new sources of raw beans. The demand for coffee was so acute that negotiations with producing countries often took place in a hasty, rushed manner, as in the case of Angola and Ethiopia. The introduction of new policy initiatives – such as targeting coffee producing countries – shows the continued importance of this commodity long after the initial crisis years had passed. This is not to say that this particular need dominated East Germany's foreign policy after 1977; the GDR's engagement with the developing world certainly involved far more than the pursuit of coffee, after all. Nonetheless, this single commodity came to hold a powerful place in the machinations of state planners and trade officials. In those countries where the GDR hoped to procure beans, German officials prioritized the GDR's material interests, and sought to tie assistance directly to

coffee deliveries. In some cases, coffee even formed the premise for entirely new trade relationships, which the GDR hoped would flourish into broader economic partnerships. In others, the need for coffee drove East German leaders to consider jeopardizing diplomatic relations with one country to obtain coffee from another. In other words, the GDR's pursuit of coffee involved more than passively tacking raw coffee onto a general list of aims its representatives should seek. Obtaining raw beans constituted an *active* engagement with potential partners, and represented a significant expense of time, effort and resources in the decade following the crisis.

In their obsession with locating cheap sources of beans, German trade officials initially prioritized coffee producing countries with socialist leanings. However, a common ideological worldview was not necessarily sufficient grounds for developing trade relationships in the Global South. The GDR's lack of hard currency meant its representatives were also forced to approach these agreements with a considerable amount of pragmatism and self-interest. And yet, it would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that ideology played a mere rhetorical role. The GDR attempted to use the coffee deals to showcase its own achievements as a modern state, and thereby assume a leading role in guiding developing nations in their own constructions of socialism. This strategy relied on the assumption that its position as a modern, industrially developed state gave the GDR not only the ability, but also the ideological, moral and political imperative to provide this guidance. This assumption in turn relied on a presupposed cultural difference that privileged the Germans' understandings of socialist development. Thus, German representatives saw the coffee deals as part of the GDR's broader engagement with the developing world, and as part of an East German 'civilizing mission' to the global South.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Scholarly work on the Soviet Union and Eastern European states has recently begun exploring the ways in which Socialist states used concepts of race, ethnicity, nationalisms, and identities to expand their power and authority. See

German leaders' visions of bringing socialist civilization to the global South failed to live up to their own – or indeed, their partners' – expectations. Despite their eager attempts to sign long-term contracts for coffee, these agreements were tied to the GDR's ability to produce the finished goods, chemicals and farming equipment stipulated by those contracts. Particularly in the cases of Angola and Ethiopia, German goods deliveries frequently fell behind, or failed to meet the required specifications or needs of trading partners, leading to a breakdown in these projects. The GDR's failure to live up to its bargains proved enormously frustrating for German officials who found it impossible to convince their counterparts to renew or expand existing coffee deals. During the 1980s, while the GDR managed to provide Laos and Vietnam with the goods promised, problems arose at the local level, often in the form of disputes between German representatives and local managers. These breakdowns in both production and cooperation exacerbated the GDR's relations with coffee producing nations, and contributed to East Germany's return to traditional coffee sources by the late 1980s.

### *I. Political origins of East Germany's 'alternative' foreign policy*

Since gaining official autonomy from the Soviet Union in 1955, East German foreign policymakers sought to establish the GDR as a viable alternative to the “revival of imperialism” of which it accused West Germany.<sup>463</sup> In contrast to the West's alleged continuity with the

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Tracy McDonald, *Face to the Village: The Riazan Countryside under Soviet Rule, 1921-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Cornell University Press, 2001); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Cornell University Press, 2005); Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn, 2015).

<sup>463</sup> Ingrid Muth, *Die DDR-Außenpolitik 1949-1972: Inhalte, Strukturen, Mechanismen* (Berlin: Ch links Verlag, 2000), 17. East German autonomy was nonetheless always limited, and the country remained heavily influenced by Soviet trajectories throughout its existence. The GDR followed the Soviet Union's commitment to 'peaceful coexistence' in the 1950s and 1960s. Wherever Soviet and East German interests collided, primacy fell to Soviet considerations. Nonetheless, in many respects, the GDR practised its foreign policy independently – including in its humanitarian projects in the Third World. See Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German*

National Socialist past, the SED's legitimacy stemmed in large part from a founding myth of anti-fascism, rooted in the SED's ability to characterize communism as the first and principal victim of National Socialist aggression.<sup>464</sup> Establishing the GDR as a principled alternative to West Germany became all the more important after the Federal Republic proclaimed the Hallstein Doctrine in 1955, by which West Germany claimed sole right to represent Germans on German soil. According to Hallstein, any nation (save the Soviet Union) that granted East Germany official recognition risked punitive measures from the Federal Republic, up to and including cessation of relations with the offending country.<sup>465</sup> Until the two German states signed the Basic Treaty at the height of *Ostpolitik* in 1972, which nullified Hallstein by granting East Germany official recognition, the GDR's foreign policy was directed toward one overall aim: to seek recognition by any means available to overcome its international isolation.<sup>466</sup>

Hallstein imposed particularly strong limits on East German attempts to insert itself into the international community. In spite of these limits, East Germany found ways to circumvent Hallstein. For instance, by turning to cultural exchanges and tourism programs, argues Michael Scholtz, the GDR managed to foster meaningful, albeit largely unofficial, relations with the Scandinavian countries during the 1960s. These programs proved so successful that the Scandinavian countries were among the very first to grant East Germany recognition after the

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*Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Michael Scholz, "East Germany's North European Policy Prior to International Recognition of the German Democratic Republic," *Contemporary European History* 15, no.4 (Nov.2006): 553-571.

<sup>464</sup> Because the Social Democratic Party of Germany had not actively supported the German Communists during the Weimar Republic, the Communists could claim they alone possessed 'antifascist roots'. SED official policy also distinguished between 'active resistance' of communist 'fighters' and the 'passive victimhood' of the Nazis' racial targets, which allowed the East German leadership to couch its legitimacy in terms of privileged victimhood. See Jeffrey Herf, *Divided memory: the Nazi past in the two Germanys* (Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>465</sup> Helga Haftendorn, *Coming of Age: German Foreign Policy Since 1945* (Rowman & Littlefield, Toronto: 2006), 126. William Glenn Gray, *Germany's Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949-1969* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>466</sup> Scholtz, "East Germany's North European Policy," 553.

Basic Treaty.<sup>467</sup> In a similar vein, the GDR's early and unwavering support of North Vietnam provided East Germany with considerable international clout, particularly as worldwide public opinion turned against American intervention. East German investigations into the war unearthed evidence of the use of chemical weapons, findings which earned the GDR a seat on the Executive Committee of the Stockholm Vietnam Conference in the early 1970s. Choosing the 'right side' of the Vietnam conflict also contributed to the GDR's domestic stability: as public opinion shifted against the war, the SED's anti-war stance appeared to bolster the party's legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens, something Gerd Horten has called the GDR's "Vietnam bonus."<sup>468</sup>

East Germany's commitment to Vietnam represents a particularly successful example of the GDR's attempts to fashion itself as an alternative to the West by demonstrating its solidarity with the global South. Central to this strategy was the GDR's attempt to differentiate its own forms of humanitarian and development aid from those offered by the West. Western humanitarian aid, according to GDR spokesmen, targeted only select industries or regions of specific economic value to the imperialist powers. In its report on the 1964 United Nations conference for trade and development, the SED's party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, argued that development aid was most often used "to exert political pressure" and to secure "new cheaper sources of raw materials for Western European and North American companies."<sup>469</sup> According to the East German women's magazine *Für Dich*, Western aid did nothing to "help against hunger, but rather against 'Revolution from hunger.'"<sup>470</sup> Thus, these "neo-colonial

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<sup>467</sup> Scholtz, "East Germany's North European Policy," 554.

<sup>468</sup> Gerd Horten, "Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR Government and the 'Vietnam Bonus' of the Early 1970s," in *German Studies Review* 36, no.3 (2013): 557-578.

<sup>469</sup> Rolf Gutermuth, "Freier Welthandel setzt friedliche Koexistenz voraus," *Neues Deutschland*, 22 March 1964, 7.

<sup>470</sup> "Hat die Erde Brote für Alle?," *Für Dich* 41, no.2 (October 1968), 26-27. Emphasis added.

programs” worked against social change in the developing world, and provided the capitalist nations with large profits.<sup>471</sup>

By contrast, the SED claimed to support the demands of developing nations for “equal trade, not aid [*Handel statt Hilfe*].”<sup>472</sup> Through establishing direct and open trade relations with developing countries, the SED argued that “socialist aid” concentrated on building up “the young nations’ own modern industry and agriculture.”<sup>473</sup> At the core of “socialist aid” lay the principle of mutually beneficial cooperation in the economic and political spheres.<sup>474</sup> Through its solidarity with the developing world, the GDR would assist developing countries in their struggle for independence, as well as their economic and social development.<sup>475</sup> Though its packaging presented an egalitarian portrayal of European socialism’s engagement with the global South, socialist aid nonetheless retained a vocabulary that reduced “young” developing countries to a subordinate position in a global development hierarchy.

Its history as a colonial good made coffee a perfect example of precisely the kind of disparate trade practices the GDR sought to decry, and this message found its way into the cultural milieu of East German society. Product advice books, or *Warenkunde*, aided East German shoppers with technical details on the origins, contents and health effects of consumer goods, particularly food. One *Warenkunde* handbook about coffee and tea published in 1963 provided a grand narrative of the history of coffee as a colonial good. The account bemoaned the practices of the world coffee market, accusing plantation owners of exploiting their workers, and

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<sup>471</sup> “Hat die Erde Brote für Alle?,” *Für Dich* 41, no.2 (October 1968), 26-27.

<sup>472</sup> Rolf Gutermuth, “Freier Welthandel setzt friedliche Koexistenz voraus,” *Neues Deutschland*, 22 March 1964, 7. Hans Joachim Döring also discusses the GDR’s conceptualization of ‘Handel statt Hilfe’ in his *Es geht um unser Existenz: Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien* (Berlin: Ch links Verlag, 1999). Also, at the 1955 Bandung conference, a range of third world countries founded the ‘Third World Movement’, which sought to create a united front against the exploitation of colonial and neo-colonial forces, to level the terms of trade. See Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany*, chapter 1.

<sup>473</sup> “Hat die Erde Brote für Alle?,” *Für Dich* 41, no.2 (October 1968), 26-27.

<sup>474</sup> “Hat die Erde Brote für Alle?,” *Für Dich* 41, no.2 (October 1968), 26-27.

<sup>475</sup> Döring, “*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*”, 41.

suggesting that American influence in South America compounded the problem by supporting local abusive regimes. According to the text, millions of people in Central and South America had to live “in chronic malnourishment” and “thirty per cent of children do not survive their first six years” because of the coffee trade.<sup>476</sup> Although the International Coffee Organization had been formed for the ostensible purpose of stabilizing the economic and political situation in Central America, the booklet’s authors argued its real motive lay in preventing liberation movements in these countries from gaining momentum.<sup>477</sup> Meanwhile, trade with socialist countries would put an end to this exploitation. *Warenkunde* informed readers that, through trade with socialist countries, “these economically under developed regions are able to rebuild their industry, without being bound by adverse agreements, because the socialist countries run a trade policy of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit.”<sup>478</sup>

Coffee thus fit nicely into the SED’s existing narrative for development policy; framing the coffee trade in terms of demonstrating East Germany’s solidarity with the global South also allowed the GDR to use trade, development, and humanitarian assistance as “advertisements” for socialism. Yet in treating coffee producing countries as either passive victims of capitalism or as potential benefactors of socialism, *Warenkunde* established a clear hierarchy between the developed and “under developed” world. Despite the regime’s rhetoric of equality, mutual respect and benefit, its public message in fact sought to position the GDR as an economically developed state with the capacity – and moral obligation – to provide coffee producing countries with the means to industrialize.

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<sup>476</sup> Günter Bürgin, Vinzenz Ulbrich, Kurt Wolf. *Warenkunde Kaffee und Tee* (Leipzig: VEB Fachbuchverlag Leipzig, 1963), 14.

<sup>477</sup> Bürgin et al. *Warenkunde Kaffee und Tee*, 14.

<sup>478</sup> Bürgin et al. *Warenkunde Kaffee und Tee*, 15.



## *II. Reluctance and Secrecy: Coffee from Angola and Ethiopia, 1977*

In December 1976, East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer travelled to Africa in hopes of strengthening economic ties, and while there he discussed the possibility of obtaining coffee from a number of countries, most notably Angola and Ethiopia.<sup>479</sup> In February 1977, Werner Lamberz, a representative of the Politburo's department of commercial coordination [*Bereich Kommerzielle Koordinierung*, or KoKo], led a delegation to follow up on Fischer's initial probes. In his report, Lamberz estimated that both countries presented favourable conditions for coffee export to Germany. Ethiopia produced approximately 150,000 t of coffee per year, of which it exported 90,000 t; Angola produced 90,000 t annually, though the outbreak of civil war had drastically affected production, and this figure was a drop of nearly half compared with previous years, according to the Foreign Ministry's calculations.<sup>480</sup> For the Germans, some skepticism remained regarding whether Angola and Ethiopia would accept coffee trade in return for finished goods.<sup>481</sup>

If negotiations were successful, the coffee deals would represent East Germany's first significant trade relationship with either Angola or Ethiopia, but through these negotiations, the GDR also risked blundering into delicate political and strategic situations. Since the beginning of the decade, the Soviet Union had increased its involvement in Africa in an attempt to buttress its influence in the area and counteract perceived American and Chinese interests. At first, as Odd Arne Westad explains, Soviet involvement in Africa "was slow in coming," but experienced

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<sup>479</sup> Anne Dietrich, "Kaffee in der DDR – 'Ein Politikum ersten Ranges'" in *Kaffeewelten: Historische Perspektiven auf eine globale Ware im 20. Jahrhundert*, edited by Christiane Berth, Dorothee Wierling, and Volker Wunderlich (V&R Unipress, 2015), 225-247, ere 230.

<sup>480</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/IV/2/2033/87, "Notiz über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Clausnitzer und Baum (MfA)," no date, 1.

<sup>481</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/IV/2/2033/87, "Notiz über ein Gespräch mit Genossen Clausnitzer und Baum (MfA)," no date, 3.

a considerable “ramping up” by the latter half of the decade.<sup>482</sup> In fact, it was precisely in Angola and Ethiopia – the two countries capable of providing coffee to East Germany – where Soviet efforts saw their most direct and significant impacts. Almost immediately after Angola gained independence through the signing of the Alvar Agreement in January 1975, power struggles between the former liberation movements, the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), erupted into a civil war. Eager to show its reach “even after the Vietnam debacle,” the United States threw its support behind UNITA and a third liberation movement, the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) by summer 1975.<sup>483</sup> The Chinese, as well as the South African apartheid government, also provided some support for the anti-MPLA forces.<sup>484</sup> The Soviets and Cubans supported the MPLA, the highlight of which was a joint-military operation from December 1975 to March 1976 in which the Cubans – with logistical support from the Soviets-captured Huambo.<sup>485</sup> For the Soviet leadership, the operation “became a benchmark for ‘active solidarity with the peoples of Africa and Asia’ and evidence that the Soviet Union could advance socialism in the Third World during a period of détente with the United States.”<sup>486</sup> Moreover, Soviet observers in Angola felt confident about the relationship, and were encouraged that “internationalists” like Lopo de Nascimento were rising in power.<sup>487</sup>

For Ethiopia, securing military equipment and arming its citizens’ militias held the highest priority in its negotiations with the socialist bloc countries. Indeed, the Provisional Military Committee of Ethiopia (Derg) had been trying to secure Soviet military support for its conflicts

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<sup>482</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 218.

<sup>483</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 222.

<sup>484</sup> Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2009), 366.

<sup>485</sup> Cuba supplied roughly 4000 ground troops in support of the MPLA. David C. Engerman, “The Second World's Third World,” *Kritika* 12, no.1 (Winter 2011): 183-211; here 193.

<sup>486</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 237.

<sup>487</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 239.

in Eritrea and the Ogaden region since taking power in 1974, with little success. Despite the Derg's adoption of communism as its guiding principle in 1975, Moscow worried that any official support for the Derg would jeopardize the Soviet Union's relations with both Somalia, whose strategic location the Soviets needed for naval bases, and the "avowedly Marxist" separatist leaders in Eritrea, on whom Moscow relied for access to the Red Sea.<sup>488</sup> East Germany shared these concerns, especially in light of its own support for Siad Barre's regime in Somalia.<sup>489</sup> Meanwhile, the United States provided nominal support for the Derg, concerned that growing Soviet influence in Africa was part of a larger strategy to deny the West access to raw materials – in particular oil. The entire situation reversed in 1977: first, Mengistu Haile Mariam violently put down opposition within the government in a "Red Terror" in February, which severed US support, but encouraged Soviet officials that the Derg was taking a more serious approach to its revolution. Meanwhile, the US threw its support behind Siad Barre, who began taking an increasingly hard lined approach toward Ethiopia. The Soviets were frustrated by Siad Barre's radicalism. Moscow received word from its embassies in Addis Ababa and Mogadishu that Somali troops were now actively supporting the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) in the Ogaden region, a signal that Barre was neither willing to take direction from Moscow, nor did he seem genuinely committed to the international movement. Somali support for the WSLF justified Ethiopian claims of being attacked, and provided Moscow with a new perspective on its relationships in the Horn: increasingly, Moscow perceived Somalia – and Siad Barre – as a liability.<sup>490</sup>

In short, East Germany was in position to approach both Angola and Ethiopia in the spring of 1977, because both countries now had at least nominal support from the Soviet Union, and

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<sup>488</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 281.

<sup>489</sup> Döring, "*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*", 56.

<sup>490</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 273.

because both of these countries were actively seeking relations with the socialist world.<sup>491</sup> But East Germany was still reluctant to provide Ethiopia with the weapons the Derg desired, because the Soviets had not yet committed to military support of Mengistu's regime.<sup>492</sup> Yet while Berlin could not break with Soviet policy, neither was it prepared to abandon its coffee needs in light of this particular barrier. Thus, traders argued the GDR's efforts should focus on a few "key areas" of economic cooperation "in the interests of securing raw materials, and mutual benefit."<sup>493</sup> The Germans suggested a list of consumer and industrial goods that would help develop Ethiopia's economy after the war, including harbour cranes, machines for textile factories, plastic bottles, small pharmaceutical laboratories, and radio equipment.<sup>494</sup> Not only would this list avoid political fallout; it also sought to create a long-term export line for East German finished goods, goods the GDR struggled to find a market for elsewhere.<sup>495</sup>

Additionally, East Germany's emphasis on consumer and industrial goods reflected its interest in using the coffee agreements as a step toward to broader long-term economic relationships. Unwilling to fulfill the Derg's wishes by arming Ethiopian militias, the Germans instead tried to define "mutual benefit" according to their own perceptions of what constituted – or ought to constitute – priorities for Ethiopia's economic development. Since 1976, the Derg had requested political assistance in its negotiations for military aid from the socialist bloc

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<sup>491</sup> It should also be noted that Czechoslovakia also pursued coffee in Africa during the crisis, but it tended to focus its efforts in central African countries. See Pavel Szobi, "Konsumsozialismus in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren am Beispiel der DDR und der ČSSR," in *Die ČSSR und die DDR im historischen Vergleich: Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zweier staatssozialistischer Systeme in Mitteleuropa*, edited by Miloš Řezník & Katja Rosenbaum, 49-62. Leipzig and Berlin: Kirchhof & Franke, 2013, 59.

<sup>492</sup> Döring, "Es geht um unserer Existenz!", 56.

<sup>493</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/IV/2/2033/87, "Bericht über die Reise der Delegation der SPK der DDR zur Zentralen Plankommission Äthiopiens in der Zeit vom 21 bis 26.2.1977," 7.

<sup>494</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/IV/2/2033/87, "Bericht über die Reise der Delegation der SPK der DDR zur Zentralen Plankommission Äthiopiens in der Zeit vom 21 bis 26.2.1977," 7.

<sup>495</sup> In particular, the State Planning Commission (SPK) saw a large need for trucks in light of the Derg's collectivization of agriculture, adding that with good planning and preparation, "our trucks can penetrate the market." SAPMO- BArchB, DY 30/IV/2/2033/87, "Bericht über die Reise der Delegation der SPK der DDR zur Zentralen Plankommission Äthiopiens in der Zeit vom 21 bis 26.2.1977," 7.

countries. Specifically, Ethiopia claimed it wanted to “build socialism” along Marxist Leninist lines, and asked for education programs and political training for youth.<sup>496</sup> The European socialist countries had already provided some assistance; East German ambassador Helmut Gürke, for example, presented Ethiopian schools with a gift of socialist texts in November 1976.<sup>497</sup> Yet the Germans remained somewhat skeptical of the course of socialism in Ethiopia. In their summary of the general political and economic situation, Lamberz’s delegation claimed a great deal of work remained in building mass support for the revolution, in particular among the youth:

Currently, no youth organizations yet exist in Ethiopia. Due to the strong influence of Trotskyites and Leftist extremists, a large portion of the youth and students remain opposed to the PMRV [DERG]. Because the youth is not a homogenous group, a fierce class struggle is taking place within it. An expression of this was the lengthy university-boycott of students as well as the destruction of libraries which had been established after the revolution. [...] The forming of a revolutionary youth organization has been necessary for a long time.<sup>498</sup>

Inadequate ideological training contributed to wider political disunity and, in the case of the youth, social unrest. The Germans blamed this ideological deficiency for much of the Derg’s struggles, claiming to have reportedly encountered “dangerous leftist exaggerations” in their encounters with local party leaders.<sup>499</sup> In the East Germans’ assessment, helping to correct these “mistakes” was a necessary step to continued cooperation. While the Derg’s military coup had successfully overthrown the crown, a great deal of work remained in the cultural and social *process* of revolution. East German officials presupposed their country possessed the consumer

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<sup>496</sup> Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 269.

<sup>497</sup> “Yekalit 66 Political School gets books on Philosophy handed over by Ambassador Helmut Gürke of DDR on behalf of his government and the governments of six other countries,” in *Ethiopian Herald*, 23.11.1976, cited in Haile Gabriel Dagne, *The Commitment of the German Democratic Republic in Ethiopia: A study based on Ethiopian sources*. Sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG) (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 13.

<sup>498</sup> SAPMO-BArchB DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77, Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, 122.

<sup>499</sup> SAPMO-BArchB DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77, Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, 122.

and industrial goods, as well as the ideological sophistication, to guide the Ethiopians through that process, paying little thought to the possibility that the Ethiopians may well have known best what they needed in this regard.

Nonetheless, Ethiopia remained steadfast in its preference for military goods. On 9 March, Mengistu Haile Mariam wrote directly to Erich Honecker for military support, claiming Ethiopia was beset by “multiple enemies,” and that despite the Ethiopian people’s willingness “to fight to the last,” they were “unarmed, and must fight with clubs and knives against powers armed to the teeth by imperialists and reactionary Arab countries.”<sup>500</sup> The Germans had little desire to disrupt their diplomatic relations in the Horn of Africa, nor did they have much other choice so long as Moscow maintained a status quo between Ethiopia and Somalia. The GDR still preferred to concentrate its trade with Ethiopia in finished goods and political assistance, rather than weapons, but relented in light of the lack of better options. Nonetheless, as we will see later, the Germans intended to change the terms of the trade deal when the opportunity arose.

From 11 to 25 June, Lamberz and his delegation visited Angola and Ethiopia, carrying final proposals for coffee agreements. The Derg agreed in principle to deliver 5000 t of raw coffee each year between 1977 and 1982 and to accept payment in finished goods for the deliveries in 1977 and 1978.<sup>501</sup> The preliminary agreement, signed on the 15<sup>th</sup>, included political cooperation, such as setting aside five spots at East German Party Schools for Ethiopian candidates, and the printing and delivery of a few “fundamental works” by Marx and Engels.<sup>502</sup> The agreement also called for the delivery to Ethiopia of 550 W50 trucks, as well as military goods (“equipment of special foreign trade” [*Ausrüstungen des speziellen Außenhandels*]) worth

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<sup>500</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/IV/2/2033/87, “Bericht über die Reise der Delegation der SPK der DDR zur Zentralen Plankommission Äthiopiens in der Zeit vom 21 bis 26.2.1977,” p.24.

<sup>501</sup> Döring, “*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*”, 116; BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, 122.

<sup>502</sup> Döring, “*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*”, 117.

53 million *Valutamark*, which together would account for 4000 t of raw coffee.<sup>503</sup> On 29 June, a ship carrying military equipment and arms left Rostock Harbour, destined for the Ethiopian port of Assab. The ship, the MS “Wismar”, carried a range of arms and ammunition:

**Table 3.1:** East German Munitions to Ethiopia, 29 June 1977

Item	Number of units
AKM Assault Rifles	64,500 pcs
M-43 ammunition	23,953,000 pcs
PKM Submachine gun	100 pcs
PKM ammunition	350,000 pcs
PKS Submachine gun	100 pcs
PKS ammunition	700,000 pcs
RPG-7	27 pcs
Grenades PG-7	540 pcs
7.65mm pistols	1040 pcs
7.65mm ammunition	120,000 pcs
Steel helmets	6000 pcs

**Source:** BStU, MfS Abt. BCD nr.3292, “Information zum Stand der Lieferungen von militärischer Technik und Ausrüstung an das Ministerium für Verteidigung Äthiopiens,” signed by Colonel Metzler, no date. Pp.46-48; here 46.

Further deliveries were also scheduled for the coming weeks, including a shipment of 5000 submachine guns and 2,250,000 rounds of ammunition; 320 cubic meters of medical bandages; additional ammunition for all small arms, and additional helmets.<sup>504</sup> In production since 1965, the W50 was an established and recognized truck line, both within the GDR and internationally.<sup>505</sup> With applications for both civilian and military transport, it is not surprising that the Ethiopian military leadership responded positively to the first shipments. The W50s were also simple and inexpensive to produce, and could be delivered with ease. Lamberz could not

<sup>503</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, 123-24.

<sup>504</sup> BStU, MfS Abt. BCD nr.3292, “Information zum Stand der Lieferungen von militärischer Technik und Ausrüstung an das Ministerium für Verteidigung Äthiopiens,” signed by Colonel Metzler, no date, 46-48, here 47-48.

<sup>505</sup> For more on the LKW W-50 and its production, exportation, etc., see Günther Wappler, *Der gebremste Lastkraftwagen Die LKW W50 und L60 aus Ludwigsfelde* (Verlag Bergstrasse Aue, 2003).

contain his enthusiasm at the prospect of establishing a long-term line for export of these vehicles.<sup>506</sup> Providing this military equipment, he hoped, could help lay the foundation for broader, more comprehensive trade between the two countries, thus securing a future export market for East German goods.

Confident that they had guaranteed a reasonable contract with Ethiopia, Lamberz's delegation rushed south to Angola on 17 June to present their proposal to the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Negotiations here proved difficult due mostly to Angola's insistence on accepting payment only in hard currency. In exchange for coffee, the East Germans offered an extensive list of goods and services, from sending 200 experts to aid in the expansion of the textile and fishing industries, to 2800 trucks, 3000 t of pork, 500 t of broilers, machines and consumer goods.<sup>507</sup> The Angolan side countered that, based on Angola's domestic economic situation, and its international payment obligations, the GDR could receive 5000 t of coffee annually, but only against the immediate payment of hard currency.<sup>508</sup> The outbreak of civil war between the ruling MPLA and UNITA put enormous and ongoing strain on the Angolan economy, and trade officials were disinclined to sell their coffee at a loss. East Germany was hesitant to sell arms and military equipment to Angola, lest it be perceived as taking a side in the conflict. Far more attractive was a potential market for finished goods and industrial equipment, goods East Germany had been unable to sell elsewhere. According to an informant of the East German Secret Police (Stasi), while socialist countries had provided a great deal of aide in previous years, this aide had been largely limited to weapons rather than a meaningful, long-term

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<sup>506</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, 123-24.

<sup>507</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77 Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, 144.

<sup>508</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77 Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, 145.



commitment to helping the Angolans build socialism.<sup>509</sup> Continued lack of assistance contributed to “growing skepticism among other African countries regarding the socialist countries,” because “the example of Angola demonstrates that promises alone are useless.”<sup>510</sup>

After three days of what Lamberz called “complicated negotiations,” the Angolan and East German delegates agreed to two different proposals, pending approval from their respective governments. First, Angola would supply the GDR with 5000 t of raw coffee annually from 1977-1982, payable in hard currency. In addition to this arrangement, however, the two parties wrote a separate contract for 1977-1978, in which Angola pledged to accept payment for the coffee delivered in those two years through direct barter – not currency – and also promised to deliver 2000 t of raw coffee to East German ports within six to eight weeks.<sup>511</sup> Clearly, these two contracts stipulated entirely different and seemingly contradictory terms for the coffee trade. In reality, only the first document would be acknowledged publicly and thus form the “official” conditions of the Angolan – East German cooperation. The second agreement stipulated that both parties would keep its contents “absolutely secret,” a clause no doubt added by the Angolans, because “similar proposals from other socialist countries (Bulgaria, Yemen, Czechoslovakia, Cuba) ha[d] been rejected by the Angolan side.”<sup>512</sup> Finally, Angola also requested favourable credit conditions for the repayment of machines, trucks etc., including the “lowest possible interest rate.”<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603 Teil 1, Bericht von IM “Peter Reimann,” von 15.Juni 1977 (20 Juni 1977), 12.

<sup>510</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603 Teil 1, Bericht von IM “Peter Reimann,” von 15.Juni 1977 (20 Juni 1977), 12.

<sup>511</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77, Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, “report on the results of the activities of the party and government delegation to Luanda, from 17-20 June and 23rd of June 1977,” 136.

<sup>512</sup> SAPMO-BArchB DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77 Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, “report on the results of the activities of the party and government delegation to Luanda, from 17-20 June and 23rd of June 1977,” 151.

<sup>513</sup> SAPMO-BArchB DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77 Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, “report on the results of the activities of the party and government delegation to Luanda, from 17-20 June and 23rd of June 1977,” 151.

As in the case with Ethiopia, the coffee deal with Angola required considerable collaboration with and concession to Angolan interests. With an estimated annual production of 90,000 t, Angola did not produce enough coffee to afford losing the precious hard currency it could earn on international markets, especially in light of the current high prices. While it was willing to assist the GDR with its great need for coffee by accepting non-traditional forms of payment, Angola clearly had no desire to extend this arrangement beyond its German partner or a limited period of time. What had motivated Angola to show such preference for East Germany at the expense of the other socialist countries? Certainly, part of the answer lay in economics: President Neto bemoaned the current situation in Angola, telling the Germans that his country struggled to maintain, let alone expand, its economic capacities. Production in industry and agriculture was “significantly lower than before independence and currently sinks further,” he claimed, and said “In the cities there is unemployment and provisioning of the population has deteriorated in recent months.”<sup>514</sup> East Germany needed to tread carefully here if it wanted to avoid becoming too embroiled in the ongoing civil war. Another motive may have been political. It is likely that, encouraged by the support from the Soviets and Cubans, the Angolans were willing to cooperate with the East Germans as a show of good faith, but the fact remained that Angola was giving more in these coffee deals than it was getting. At the same time, East Germany had little desire to become embroiled in a civil war by supplying weapons. Keeping the true deal secret accomplished two things; first, by presenting a “standard” purchase of coffee, the “official” trade deal allowed East Germany to claim it had no direct involvement in the civil war. Second, hiding the details of a bartered deal avoided the perception of favouritism towards East Germany – particularly among those socialist countries whom Angola had turned down, like

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<sup>514</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77, Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, “report on the results of the activities of the party and government delegation to Luanda, from 17-20 June and 23rd of June 1977,” 137.

Cuba. The East German – Angolan coffee deal could be perceived as belying each country's supposed commitment to international socialism, a sin that could likely have seriously jeopardized their relations with other European socialist countries, and, obviously, the Soviet Union.

In its 28 June session, the SED Politburo approved the domestic measures to stretch coffee supply through *Kaffee-Mix*, as well as the trade agreements with Angola and Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, a Joint Council was formed comprised of representatives from both countries, tasked with overseeing the fulfillment of the coffee contract. Free German Youth (FDJ) brigades were to be dispatched to Angola immediately to help organize shipping procedures.<sup>515</sup> Trips abroad, like that to Angola, formed an important part of the FDJ's contributions to East Germany's demonstrations of solidarity with "brother socialist nations." Hopes were high among the SED leadership that these contracts could solve the coffee supply problem, and contain the crisis. In the Politburo's estimation, the contracts not only helped secure emergency infusions of raw coffee to satisfy public demand into the future, but also offered East Germany a potential long-term market for their trucks and other heavy equipment.<sup>516</sup> The specific mention of industrial goods here reinforced the Germans' view that the concessions they made in these contracts – most importantly supplying Ethiopia with weapons – represented a necessary and temporary setback, one the GDR hoped and intended to overcome in time.

### *III. Early frustrations and problems, July-September 1977*

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<sup>515</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77, Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, "report on the results of the activities of the party and government delegation to Luanda, from 17-20 June and 23rd of June 1977," 137. For more on the social and political importance of youth brigades to East German socialization, see Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement 1946-1968* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 6.

<sup>516</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Anlage zur Protokoll no.26/77, Der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED vom 28. Juni 1977, 114

Anticipating a viable solution to the crisis, the responsible ministries acted immediately to implement the new measures. Werner Lamberz and Günter Mittag's confidential letter reached Erich Honecker on 6 July, informing him of the coming price hikes for coffee in Poland and Czechoslovakia.<sup>517</sup> The same letter also included a detailed update on the first deliveries of GDR goods to Ethiopia, which, aside from a few logistical issues, proceeded "without particular problems."<sup>518</sup> The first convoy of ships were currently en route, carrying trucks and non-civilian goods, while those goods travelling by air, including steel helmets and ammunition, had already arrived at their destinations.<sup>519</sup> A small group of technicians and specialists was also en route to Angola to make the necessary preparations for the arrival of two hundred FDJ brigades who would assist in the coffee deliveries from Luanda. In a surprising move, Ethiopia had apparently also offered to deliver an additional 7000 t of raw coffee immediately, over and above the contracted 5000 t. Lamberz and Mittag could barely contain their excitement, exclaiming "this is a magnificent concession and shows the unmistakable bond of trust towards the SED."<sup>520</sup> Here too, Lamberz and Mittag reminded Honecker of the potential to expand the terms of the existing contracts, saying if the GDR pursued "flexible trade measures," it would be possible to secure further coffee imports and save more hard currency.<sup>521</sup>

Yet while Lamberz and Mittag celebrated these successes, they also warned that expanding trade with Ethiopia required "immediate decisions" on several pressing matters. A backlog in

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<sup>517</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>518</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Memo from Günter Mittag and Werner Lamberz to Erich Honecker, 6 July 1977, 151.

<sup>519</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Memo from Günter Mittag and Werner Lamberz to Erich Honecker, 6 July 1977, 151.

<sup>520</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Memo from Günter Mittag and Werner Lamberz to Erich Honecker, 6 July 1977, 152.

<sup>521</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Memo from Günter Mittag and Werner Lamberz to Erich Honecker, 6 July 1977, 153.

production on the German end resulted in a shortage of 20 trucks in the first delivery.<sup>522</sup> Of the forty thousand steel helmets owed to Ethiopia, only nine thousand had been delivered by July. Finally, despite Honecker’s orders, the Minister for National Defense had not yet indicated the availability of additional military goods requested by Ethiopia. The list, approved by Honecker, included:

**Table 3.1:** East German Munitions to Ethiopia, 6 July 1977

<b>Ammunition Type</b>	<b>Total amount</b>
7.62 mm ammunition for automatic carbines	22,500,000 cartridges
tracer rounds	4,500,000
light machine gun ammunition	720,000 rounds
sub machine gun ammunition	3,000,000 rounds
RPG-7 ammo	9,000 grenades
60 mm Grenade launcher ammunition	12,000 high explosive grenade; 900 smoke grenades; 200 flash bangs
82 mm Grenade Launcher ammunition	15,000 high explosive grenade; 900 smoke grenades; 200 flash bangs

*Source:* SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/IV/2/2033/87, Werner Lamberz, “Entscheidungsvorschläge für die Sicherung der getroffenen Vereinbarung Äthiopien – DDR,” 6 Juli 1977, 86.

Meanwhile, the Ethiopians also made a few requests of East Germany – perhaps in exchange for their offer of additional coffee, though the memo made no explicit reference to the supplement. The most significant of these requests was that the GDR transport fuel from Addis Ababa to the Derg’s military base in Assad. After discussing the matter with Stasi chief Erich Mielke, Lamberz and Mittag warned Honecker against granting the assistance, recommending that he inform the Soviets about the request, and tell the Ethiopians “that we have absolutely no aircraft of this kind.”<sup>523</sup> For East Germany, the political risks were unacceptable, because “such forms of aid could be equated to direct and open military assistance, and could exacerbate

<sup>522</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/IV/2/2033/87, Werner Lamberz, “Entscheidungsvorschläge für die Sicherung der getroffenen Vereinbarung Äthiopien – DDR,” 6 Juli 1977, 85.

<sup>523</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Memo from Günter Mittag and Werner Lamberz to Erich Honecker, 6 July 1977, 152.

tensions with Somalia and other Arab countries.”<sup>524</sup> Though it would not transport fuel, the GDR agreed to accept an Ethiopian delegation to negotiate the terms of the additional coffee deliveries.

During their visit to Berlin between 12 and 16 July, the Ethiopian delegates requested additional support for the Ethiopian militias. To maintain the supply of daily rations to front line soldiers, the Ethiopian side requested a large volume of double-baked bread.<sup>525</sup> In exchange, the delegation expressed Ethiopia’s willingness to double the volume of coffee in its 1977 and 1978 deliveries to a total of 10,000 t per year. East Germany agreed to supply the bread, but its bakeries lacked the ability to produce the required 7000 t. To make up the difference, the foreign trade ministry planned to sign contracts with West German firms, and re-export this bread.<sup>526</sup>

Though the terms of the new Ethiopian contract doubled the volume of raw coffee, it also increased costs to East Germany. The total value of coffee coming from Ethiopia in 1977 and 1978 now totaled over 131 million VM per year, while the total value of GDR exports only reached 53 million VM, leaving a payment imbalance of approximately 78 million VM in Ethiopia’s favour.<sup>527</sup> To make up the difference, further substantial contracts for East German goods would have to be concluded in 1978. German traders held an export trade fair that fall in Addis Ababa, hoping to use the fair as a means to showcase potential goods, and entice the

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<sup>524</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1680, Memo from Günter Mittag and Werner Lamberz to Erich Honecker, 6 July 1977, 152.

<sup>525</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1685, Anlage 1 zum protokoll 30/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED ab 26 Juli 1977, “Bericht über den Aufenthalt einer Delegation des Provisorischen Militarischen Verwaltungsrates Äthiopiens (PMVR) vom 12. Bis 16 Juli 1977 in der DDR,” 16.; see also Trade protocol, in: MOFA (Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs), GDR folder, cited in Haile Gabriel Dagne, *The Commitment of the German Democratic Republic in Ethiopia: A study based on Ethiopian sources*. Sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG) (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 68.

<sup>526</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1685, Anlage 1 zum protokoll 30/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED ab 26 Juli 1977, “Bericht über den Aufenthalt einer Delegation des Provisorischen Militarischen Verwaltungsrates Äthiopiens (PMVR) vom 12. Bis 16 Juli 1977 in der DDR,” 16. See also Döring, “*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*”, 119, and Dietrich, “Kaffee in der DDR,” 234. On tractors and cement, see Dagne, *The Commitment of the German Democratic Republic in Ethiopia*, 68.

<sup>527</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1685, Anlage 3 zum protokoll 30/77 der Sitzung des Politbüros des ZK der SED ab 26 Juli 1977, “Ökonomische Ergebnisse seit dem 15. Juni 1977,” 19-20.

Ethiopians to purchase.<sup>528</sup> Planning for the fair was hasty at best, and the exhibition ultimately failed to fulfill its mandate. Each of the twenty three firms assigned to the fair had contracts and presentations prepared for other countries, but their representatives were suddenly flown to Addis Ababa instead, potentially damaging these firms' – and East Germany's – existing relations.<sup>529</sup> Such a risk further exemplifies East Germany's prioritization of coffee during the crisis years. Yet despite these efforts, the payment imbalance continued to harry the trade relationship between Ethiopia and East Germany into the New Year.

In Angola, responsibility for carrying out the trade deals fell to Free German Youth (FDJ) brigades, which were sent to assist in the coffee deliveries over the summer and fall of 1977. FDJ brigades maintained the German trucks delivered as part of the contract, and assisted in the loading and unloading of the coffee in Angola's ports. The SPK's original recommendations in July included a total of 29 brigades comprising approximately 290 Germans, assigned according to their skillsets, from vehicle repair, to drivers, logistics experts, and electricians. A German export delegation travelled to Luanda from 29 July to 9 September to inspect the current progress.<sup>530</sup> In the hopes of enticing the Angolans to import additional German goods, the delegation hosted a trade exhibition there, too, showcasing East German consumer goods and technical equipment. The East German Stasi monitored the delegation's activities, and noted the visit of high profile Angolan representatives, including Prime Minister Nascimento, as well as President Neto's wife.<sup>531</sup> Though the visitors were generally "satisfied and impressed" by the exhibition as a whole, the event failed to deliver satisfying results. In

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<sup>528</sup> Döring, "*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*", 124.

<sup>529</sup> Döring, "*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*", 124.

<sup>530</sup> While the delegation comprised twelve representatives, most members often travelled between Angola and East Germany. The main portion of the group was present in Luanda from 29 July until 25 August. MfS HA XVIII 7603 Teil 1, Report from IM "Weber," 22 Sept 1977, on the Export Delegation Ausstellung in Luanda from 27 July to 9 Sept 1977, 14.

<sup>531</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603 Teil 1, Report from IM "Weber," 22 Sept 1977, on the Export Delegation Ausstellung in Luanda from 27 July to 9 Sept 1977, 17.

frustration, the Stasi informant remarked that “the exhibit was not being sufficiently utilized for purchasing activities.”<sup>532</sup> Even when the Germans finally managed to secure a set of meetings with the deputy minister for foreign trade, Erera, and the director of the new firm Importang, Antonio do Santos, the Germans complained that the Angolan side “conducted these discussions in an extraordinarily sluggish [*schleppend*] manner, and in any event did not give the impression of a larger interest.” IM “Weber” accused Erera and do Santos of derailing the negotiations, saying “their behaviour often appeared inconsistent and ambiguous. They frequently declared their readiness to settle a contract ‘the next day’, but it took many days, and several complaints were necessary on our part to effect even a partial fulfillment of the given commitments.”<sup>533</sup> Despite their best efforts, the Germans seemed unable to receive a guaranteed audience, let alone secure additional contracts.

Angola’s foot-dragging fed growing frustrations among East German delegates who took for granted both the practical and ideological desirability of this deal. Since Angola was taking steps towards modernizing its economy, the German delegates assumed the country would be eager for assistance, in particular for heavy industrial and agricultural goods. As well, the GDR could hardly afford to miss this opportunity to foster strong economic ties with Angola as both a long-term source of raw materials and a market for GDR goods. Angola’s reluctance to engage in long-term goods exchange also baffled the Germans because it did not fit in their ideological view of socialist trade as a superior form of exchange. The SED’s fixation on goods for goods exchange stemmed from their conviction that it was an ethical and superior alternative to capitalist exchange, an attitude which in turn derived from the party’s ideological antipathy

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<sup>532</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603 Teil 1, Report from IM “Weber,” 22 Sept 1977, on the Export Delegation Ausstellung in Luanda from 27 July to 9 Sept 1977, 17.

<sup>533</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603 Teil 1, Report from IM “Weber,” 22 Sept 1977, on the Export Delegation Ausstellung in Luanda from 27 July to 9 Sept 1977, 18.



toward money as the root of inequality and exploitation.<sup>534</sup> To the Germans, it appeared as if Angola did not share these views on trade, and thus they were frustrated when the “young independent state” sought to sell their goods for hard currency, because it suggested a lack of commitment to Soviet-inspired communism and relations on Angola’s part.

From 17 to 25 August, General Secretary of the MfAA (East German Ministry for Foreign Affairs) A.B. Neumann met with the heads of various Angolan Ministries, as well as with MPLA committees in the coffee regions in which the FDJ were active.<sup>535</sup> Neumann praised the progress he saw in Angola, saying the MPLA had “considerably strengthened” its position since suppressing the counter revolution of May.<sup>536</sup> In particular, he was captivated by Angola’s cities, citing their “modern new buildings” and hygienic water supplies, as well as their extensive networks of public transit, well paved roads, and 3200 km of rail lines.<sup>537</sup> Reflecting on both his meetings with leaders and encounters with the general population, Neumann was “astonished” by the Angolans’ degree of political knowledge about the GDR. He seemed surprised that farmers, coffee workers and militias “all knew of the GDR and greeted us in a friendly manner.”<sup>538</sup> Angolans’ attitudes towards the Federal Republic were, by contrast, quite negative. The same farmers and militiamen juxtaposed the two Germanys, telling Neumann “there are also

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<sup>534</sup> See my discussion of the SED’s views on money in Chapter Two, as well as Jonathan Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany*. (Washington: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>535</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1463, “Information über die Reise einer Delegation des MfAA [Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten] in die Volksrepublik Angola,” 1.9.1977, Oskar Fischer to Honecker and Hermann Axen, 31-51, here 32.

<sup>536</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1463, “Information über die Reise einer Delegation des MfAA in die Volksrepublik Angola,” 32.

<sup>537</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1463, “Information über die Reise einer Delegation des MfAA in die Volksrepublik Angola,” 33.

<sup>538</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1463, “Information über die Reise einer Delegation des MfAA in die Volksrepublik Angola,” 33.

other Germans, [from] the Federal Republic, who are our enemies, because they helped Mobuto and gave him rockets.”<sup>539</sup>

Nonetheless, Neumann construed Angola’s accomplishments in terms of how they might benefit East German interests and fit into an East German civilizing mission in the global South. With great enthusiasm, Neumann informed the foreign ministry that “for the first time, there is a developing country with the basics of a modern economy on our side.”<sup>540</sup> Far from extolling the Angolans’ own achievements, Neumann tempered his praise by reducing these accomplishments to the mere “basics” of modern development. To truly establish socialist modernity, Neumann argued, Angola needed the GDR’s guiding hand. “Under the current power relations,” he wrote, “a socialist state can be created as a role model for the whole of Africa. Integration into the economic community of socialist states in a relatively short period of time appears possible.”<sup>541</sup> For Neumann, Angola represented the perfect stage on which to showcase the pre-eminence of European socialism, and through which East Germany could lead and direct the progress of African countries. Neumann certainly did not dictate East German policy in Africa; nonetheless, his voice informed the views of officials in the Foreign Ministry. It is unlikely Neumann (or indeed, other German officials) thought they saw a genuine “socialist modernity” taking shape in Angola. Rather, like his colleagues, Neumann subscribed to a political mindset which assumed everyone ought to be pursuing socialist modernity as some sort of ideal. Thus, he interpreted

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<sup>539</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1463, “Information über die Reise einer Delegation des MfAA in die Volksrepublik Angola,” 33. As Young Sun Hong writes, during the 1950s and 60s, East Germany struggled to distinguish itself from West Germany through its humanitarian efforts. For example, Egyptians regarded a 1955 East German hygiene exhibit “as an example of ‘German’ industry [...] Such failures to distinguish between the two German states were quite common in the Third World.” See Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 189. Seeing everyday Angolans make such clear distinctions between East and West Germany no doubt served as a sense of pride for both Neumann and the SED more generally.

<sup>540</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1463, “Information über die Reise einer Delegation des MfAA in die Volksrepublik Angola,” 33.

<sup>541</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1463, “Information über die Reise einer Delegation des MfAA in die Volksrepublik Angola,” 33.

Angola's apparent desire to develop along socialist lines as an opportunity to step in and guide this "junior partner" towards a socialist model of progress.

#### *IV Coffee for goods, 1978-1979*

The contracts with Angola and Ethiopia secured an emergency influx of raw coffee, covering East German coffee production for the remainder of the year. On a trip through Asia in December, Erich Honecker took some of his own steps to investigate potential coffee sources. In a personal meeting with leaders in Vietnam, Honecker signed a general "friendship" agreement for economic cooperation, and discussed possibilities for cooperation in developing the Vietnamese coffee industry. On the same trip, Honecker also visited the Philippines, where he negotiated the delivery of 5000 t of Robusta beans for 1978, payable in GDR goods.<sup>542</sup> On paper, the GDR appeared to have secured coffee for 1978 without incurring further debt or reducing other necessary goods. Yet, these figures still only reflected current contracts and extended plans; they did not provide guarantees, and at any rate would only provide a solution for the next year as Angola and Ethiopia had only agreed to accept direct barter until 1979, and under terms that involved considerable concessions in goods (e.g. weapons). Despite how important these two contracts had been for 1977 and 1978 (providing about 40% of the GDR's coffee for 1978), they were hardly long-term solutions. The GDR needed to expand its coffee sources if it hoped to maintain constant supply levels beyond 1978. Compounding the matter further, as traders took comfort in these import figures, officials within the MBL, MHV and Politburo faced quite a different set of figures: roughly fourteen thousand *Eingaben* had reached

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<sup>542</sup> Döring, "*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*", 61.

state leaders by the end of 1977, complaining about the poor quality of *Kaffee-Mix*.<sup>543</sup> Worse yet were the growing stockpiles of *Kaffee-Mix* in stores and warehouses, as East Germans refused to purchase the mixture. East Germans rejected the coffee measures on which Schalk's carefully balanced hard currency savings rested, forcing the regime to make some difficult decisions – and changes – to the way it approached the coffee trade.

Public rejection of *Kaffee-Mix* in the fall of 1977 astonished planners who had assumed that maintaining sufficient supply of coffee would solve the crisis. Finding a solution to even the supply problem had involved enormous effort, from the complete conversion of many roasting plants, extensive scientific trials to determine the most efficient recipe, and of course great expense. The state's efforts to provide coffee generated harsh criticism from the public, but far more frustrating – and financially dangerous – was the sustained “boycott” of the new mixture, preventing the state from earning back its expenses, threatening inflation and the party's political legitimacy.<sup>544</sup> The boycott also jeopardized the state's original plan to replace the majority of roasted coffee with the new mixture by 1978. In November 1977, Alexander Schalk submitted his draft of an import structure for 1978 that called for 49,609 t of coffee, and expressed his pride at the fact that East Germany had secured its coffee needs for the first half of the year despite the international pricing situation.<sup>545</sup> Despite Schalk's jubilation, the proposed import volume of 49kt reflected a drop from the previous few years, precisely because planners had intended to

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<sup>543</sup> Dr. Uto Dietrich Wange provided Günter Mittag with this figure a year after the initial coffee crisis. See SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Wange to Mittag, “Entwicklung der Improbe von Rohkaffee und der Qualität der Röstkaffeemischungen,” 10.8.1978, 480-481, here 481. The TGL was the East German equivalent of the West German DIN.

<sup>544</sup> I have placed the term ‘boycott’ in quotes here because this is the term applied to citizens' refusal to purchase *Kaffee-Mix* by state officials, Stasi officers, and even some *Eingaben* throughout the crisis. In reality, there is little evidence to suggest any organized consumer boycott, though the vast majority of East Germans made the individual choice to not purchase the product. It should also be noted that the MfS' use of the term ‘boycott’ could also indicate their interpretation of this rejection as a potentially political provocation on the part of consumers.

<sup>545</sup> BArchB DY 3023/1218, Alexander Schalk, “Information über die Realisierung der Beschlüsse zur Kaffeeverorgung,” 25.11.1977, 388.

replace 80 per cent of total coffee supply with *Kaffee-Mix*.<sup>546</sup> By January 1978, this plan was no longer possible, because planners faced the unavoidable reality that East Germans based their consumer choices on their belief that a product's price ought to reflect its value. Despite the state's genuine attempts to provide East Germans with a replacement product that could satisfy both the consumers' desire for coffee and the budget constraints, East German coffee drinkers refused to purchase a product whose quality failed to match their taste preferences. The boycott revealed a considerable chasm between what consumers expected and what state officials believed to be the public's tolerance for adulteration. So long as East Germans rejected *Kaffee-Mix* and continued to purchase *Rondo* and *Mona*, they projected their personal preferences for a decent tasting coffee.

These preferences directly affected changes to the overall coffee provisions by the first week of the New Year. On 9 January, Gerhard Schürer wrote to Mittag regarding the proposed supply lines for 1978 and seeking approval for some alterations. Under the new plans, he explained, the roasted brands *Mona*, *Rondo*, *Mocca-Fix Gold* and *Kaffee-Mix* would all remain in circulation, but the ratios of each were to be dramatically altered along the following lines:

Spitzenklasse	1.0 kt
Mona	0.4 kt
Rondo	37.85 kt (of which 14 kt would be Mocca Fix Gold)
Kaffee-Mix	6.0 kt
Tschibo/Jacobs	1.25 kt <sup>547</sup>

Clearly, planners had abandoned their original plans of a ratio of 80 per cent *Kaffee-Mix* and 20 per cent *Mona*, but this change represented no mere reversal of the ratios. *Kaffee-Mix* accounted for only 13 per cent of total provisions, and it was *Rondo*, not *Mona*, which would account for

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<sup>546</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>547</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Gerhard Schürer to Günter Mittag, "Information über die Kaffee-Versorgung," 9.1.1978, 415.

the majority of coffee supply, which was significant because of *Rondo*'s higher content of roasted coffee (and therefore higher production costs). Furthermore, planners fundamentally altered the conditions for producing *Kaffee-Mix*. A Politburo decision on 24 January 1978 declared “the production and provisioning of *Kaffee-Mix* for the population must be made according to demand. If there is no demand, the production of *Kaffee-Mix* is to cease.”<sup>548</sup> Thus, public pressure not only caused the regime to change its measures during the coffee crisis itself, but it also led to the application of market principles to the production of *Kaffee-Mix*.

These figures in fact reflect a complete abandonment of *Kaffee-Mix* as a priority and project, a reversal that acknowledged the coffee crisis as a matter of trust in the SED's political authority. Planners understood that East German customers expected to be able to make purchasing choices based on personal taste preferences. In their *Eingaben*, citizens also concluded that replacing *Kosta* with *Kaffee-Mix* robbed them of what they perceived as “genuine” choice, if the state could simply switch out a good coffee and charge as much for an inferior product. Abandoning *Kaffee-Mix* acknowledged these public expectations, and committed the regime to finding a replacement for East German consumers. Yet, in choosing the better tasting brands, East Germans exacerbated the state's raw supply problem. The regime was left with one option: to find countries willing to accept payment for beans in kind, rather than with hard currency. Pursuing this strategy would not only limit the GDR's potential trade partners, as noted above; it would also affect the quality of bean East Germans could obtain.

On 26 Jan 1978 the Council of Ministers made sweeping changes to the way the GDR would seek coffee on the world market. Henceforth, the GDR's coffee interests would be pursued on a strict “goods for goods” [*Ware gegen Ware*] basis, and contracts for raw coffee

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<sup>548</sup> BArchB, DY 30/J IV 2/2/1709, Protokoll der Sitzung des Politburos am 24.1.1978, Anlage Nr. 9, 113; also quoted in Volker Wunderlich, “Die ‘Kaffeekrise’ von 1977. Genußmittel und Verbraucherprotest in der DDR.” *Historische Anthropologie* 11 (2003): 240–261, here 258.

in the non-socialist economy would only be concluded “with those nations and firms with which full payment can be guaranteed through goods deliveries by the GDR.”<sup>549</sup> Under the ruling, East German trade officials were to prioritize procurement from “progressive developing countries [...] which meet the commercial interests of the GDR,” specifically listing Ethiopia, Angola, Mexico, Madagascar and Tanzania as examples, and were also supposed to investigate the options for procuring coffee in other socialist countries like Laos and Vietnam.<sup>550</sup> Whereas in the previous year, the two coffee contracts with Angola and Ethiopia had been written quickly during an emergency, *Ware gegen Ware* now formed the GDR’s official trade policy with regard to coffee.

Coordination of the GDR’s projects in developing countries fell to the Commission for Developing Countries (*Kommission Entwicklungsländer*), a department of the Economic Ministry’s Office for Commercial Coordination (*Bereich Kommerzielle Koordinierung*, KoKo). The Commission was formed on 20 December 1977 to oversee fulfillment of the initial coffee agreements, but its responsibilities reflected the GDR’s intent to use those agreements to foster long-term trade relations, including supervising trade exchanges, managing formal relations between state officials and experts, as well as securing further trade contracts.<sup>551</sup> Some challenges remained, including outstanding balances in both Angola and Ethiopia. The Ethiopians had still not submitted a list of desired East German goods, without which the GDR could not fulfill its payment for the coffee deliveries of 1977 and 1978. Meanwhile, despite having received Angolan coffee shipments, the GDR had only partially fulfilled its goods

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<sup>549</sup> BArchB DC 20/I/4/3990 “Beschuß über die Versorgung der Bevölkerung mit Röstkaffee, 26 Januar 1978,” 111; see also MfS HA/XVIII/8379 Teil 2, “Maßnahmen zur durchsetzung des Prinzips Ware gegen Ware beim Rohkaffeeimport auf der Basis von Weltmarktpreisen.” 10 Feb 1978.

<sup>550</sup> BArchB, DC 20/I3/1468, Ministerrat der DDR, “Maßnahmen zur Durchsetzung des Prinzips Ware gegen Ware beim Rohkaffeeimport auf der Basis von Weltmarktpreisen,” 16 Februar 1978, 157.

<sup>551</sup> For more details about KoKo and the Commission of Developing Countries’ roles, see Döring, “*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*”, 30-100.

deliveries, and according to Schalk, the Angolans were unwilling to discuss deliveries for 1978 until those accounts were balanced.<sup>552</sup>

Implementing *Ware gegen Ware* proved no less challenging than the GDR's first attempts to secure coffee the previous summer. Several problems continued to plague their efforts, from lack of interest in GDR finished goods, disputes over trade negotiations, and friction between trade representatives. In June 1978, an East German delegation under Wolfgang Rauchfuß travelled to Luanda to discuss possibilities for payment. The negotiations did not proceed without their fair share of complications, as Rauchfuß noted "it was necessary to clarify that the [coffee] deliveries in the coming years will be paid through GDR deliveries [of goods] and not in convertible currency."<sup>553</sup> The Angolans expressed misgivings about expanding the coffee trade along a goods for goods basis, but Rauchfuß wrote – somewhat triumphantly – that "through intensive negotiations, in our opinion, existing misunderstandings and reservations were largely dismantled [...] the agreement represents a doubling of deliveries. There is considerable certainty as well for the sale of our export goods and for the purchase of coffee."<sup>554</sup>

Satisfied for now that East Germany would make good on its payment imbalance, Angola reluctantly agreed to additional export contracts, including an additional 2000 t of raw coffee above the 5000 t already delivered for 1978.<sup>555</sup> Given their earlier misgivings, and their apparent disinterest in East German products, it seems plausible that Angola's decision to continue the coffee deal was influenced by their ongoing reliance on Soviet military aid. In order

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<sup>552</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1218, Alexander Schalk, "Information über die Sicherung der Rohkaffeimporte," 25.1.1978, 421-424, here 422.

<sup>553</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603, "Information über die 2. Tagung des Gemeinsamen Wirtschaftsausschusses (GWA) Deutsche Demokratische Republik/Volksrepublik Angola in der Zeit vom 21. bis 24.06.1978," 26.6.1978, 41-48, here 44.

<sup>554</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603, "Information über die 2. Tagung des Gemeinsamen Wirtschaftsausschusses (GWA) Deutsche Demokratische Republik/Volksrepublik Angola in der Zeit vom 21. bis 24.06.1978," 45.

<sup>555</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603, "Information über die 2. Tagung des Gemeinsamen Wirtschaftsausschusses (GWA) Deutsche Demokratische Republik/Volksrepublik Angola in der Zeit vom 21. bis 24.06.1978," 42.



to placate the Soviets, Luanda likely saw an advantage in maintaining the arrangement with the GDR. Rauchfuß informed his superiors that the Angolans were willing to expand the existing contracts into 1979 and 1980, and seemed confident that the GDR could pay for these deliveries, citing new contracts and the expansion of several existing bilateral agreements.<sup>556</sup> The final agreement of 23 June was to be kept secret, just as the first contract a year earlier, though despite the Germans' apparent success in overcoming Angola's reservations, Rauchfuß warned the MPLA was not as yet prepared to extend goods for goods trade beyond 1980.<sup>557</sup>

East Germany's efforts to secure new export contracts in Ethiopia proved even more frustrating, as a dramatic shift in the local military situation fundamentally changed the conditions of the original arrangement. From September 1977 onward, the Soviet Union had fully committed to supporting Ethiopia in the Ogaden War, sending nearly one thousand soldiers and over 1 billion US dollars' worth of military equipment, effectively taking over the supply of such goods to Ethiopia.<sup>558</sup> By March 1978, Soviet-led forces (including Ethiopian, Cuban and South Yemeni troops) defeated the pro-Somalia Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and secured the Ogaden region. In one sense, the war's end no doubt seemed to present an opportunity for the GDR to change the form of its trade vis-à-vis Ethiopia. Far more preferable would have been a long-term trade agreement involving East German consumer or industrial goods. However, it had been precisely its urgent need for military supplies that had motivated

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<sup>556</sup> These existing contracts included the expansion of transportation networks, geology and mining, sending over two hundred East German specialists, and cultural-scientific cooperation in 1978. MfS HA XVIII 7603, "Information über die 2. Tagung des Gemeinsamen Wirtschaftsausschusses (GWA) Deutsche Demokratische Republik/Volksrepublik Angola in der Zeit vom 21. bis 24.06.1978," 43.

<sup>557</sup> MfS HA XVIII 7603, "Information über die 2. Tagung des Gemeinsamen Wirtschaftsausschusses (GWA) Deutsche Demokratische Republik/Volksrepublik Angola in der Zeit vom 21. bis 24.06.1978," 45. On Angola's unwillingness to expand trade beyond 1980, see BArchB, DL2/17255 Bd.2, "Abkommen zwischen der Volksrepublik Angola und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über die regelmäßige Lieferung von angolanischem Kaffee im Zeitraum 1979-1980," 23 Juni 1978.

<sup>558</sup> Westad provides the financial and personnel figures. See Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 276; Döring argues the Soviets "took over the military supply of Ethiopia." Döring, "Es geht um unserer Existenz!", 125.

Ethiopia to accept direct barter for its coffee in the first place. With Soviet support secure, and the war over, Ethiopia's need for East German munitions ground to a halt, leaving German traders the unenviable task of finding alternative goods with which to fill outstanding balances on coffee.

Even before victory in Ogaden removed most of Ethiopia's motivation for goods based trade, German mistakes caused considerable problems. During the first set of deliveries in 1977, instruction manuals for East German equipment arrived in insufficient numbers, and in a few cases, manuals were supplied in German, not English.<sup>559</sup> Herbert Graf, who had replaced Werner Lamberz as head of the SED Central Committee Working Group in Ethiopia following the latter's fatal helicopter crash in March 1978, warned that the GDR's failure to fulfill its payment obligations threatened to jeopardize potential future contracts.<sup>560</sup>

To Graf's mind, the greatest danger in not rectifying the payment imbalance lay in the threat of Ethiopia taking its coffee westward. Coffee represented Ethiopia's primary source of hard currency, accounting for roughly 50 to 75 per cent of the country's total annual earnings.<sup>561</sup> Considering these figures, even the 10,000 t Ethiopia agreed to send East Germany represented a significant loss of potential cash earnings, a prospect that sparked some dissent among Ethiopian officials.<sup>562</sup> According to Graf, in May 1978, the European Community offered Mengistu over 200 million US dollars in aid, while the World Bank and International Monetary Fund had also extended their own offers. Given Ethiopia's financial difficulties, argued Graf, the DERG was

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<sup>559</sup> Haile Dagne, *The Commitment of the German Democratic Republic in Ethiopia*, 72-73.

<sup>560</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1466, Herbert Graf, "Zu einigen Fragen der ökonomischen Situation in Äthiopien," 28.6.1978, 110-112, here 111.

<sup>561</sup> SAPMO-BArch, DY 3023/1218, "Analyse Rohkaffee Import 2. Halbjahr 1977, 1. Halbjahr 1978," 28.6.1978, 493. Coffee exports earned over 300 million Birr from the sale of 69, 838 tonnes of coffee in 1976 and 540 million Birr for 50,000 tonnes the following year. See *Ethiopian Herald*, Wednesday 19 January 1977, 1 and *Ethiopian Herald*, Sunday 1 January 1978, 1, cited in Anne Dietrich, "Kaffeetrinken", 236.

<sup>562</sup> The Ethiopian ministries for Foreign Trade and Industry, as well as the national bank, objected to the "political decision to regard coffee as a barter commodity." See Haile Gabriel Dagne, *The Commitment of the German Democratic Republic in Ethiopia*, 68.

likely to accept these “and other offers.”<sup>563</sup> Graf complained that “it is increasingly clear that the imperialists develop long-term economic politics with Ethiopia under the mantle of humanitarian aid in order to regain lost ground.”<sup>564</sup> Evidently, Graf saw no irony in his observation.

Warnings that Ethiopia could turn its coffee trade westward gained traction among East German officials who assumed Ethiopia was already predisposed against the barter based trade with the GDR. In an unforgiving analysis from late June, the East German export firm (*Aussenhandelsbetrieb*, AHB) *Genussmittel* complained at length about the problems the firm encountered in Ethiopia, and with the Ethiopian state Coffee Marketing Corporation (CMC). *Genussmittel*'s general director blamed production delays on an allegedly inefficient local industry, saying that as an organization, the CMC was “unable to cope with substantially higher volumes of coffee exports.”<sup>565</sup> Transportation posed the largest problem, as only a third of the harvest made it to Addis Abeba on time for delivery; in addition, since the fall of Djibouti, the harbor at Assab (the only viable harbor in Ethiopia at the time) was inundated with heavy traffic, causing delays. *Genussmittel* noted a “surtax system” in Ethiopia, a tax levied on all shipments in and out of the country that was collected before any ship was permitted to depart Assab. This tax was calculated on the “average price of the previous month,” but “despite changes in price on the world market” there was no adjustment to this surtax, which remained fixed on the average.<sup>566</sup>

Furthermore, the CMC, despite being the state organization responsible for coffee production, did not control the entire coffee industry. Five “large export firms control half of the

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<sup>563</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1466, Herbert Graf, “Zu einigen Fragen der ökonomischen Situation in Äthiopien,” 28.6.1978, 110-112, here 112.

<sup>564</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1466, Herbert Graf, “Zu einigen Fragen der ökonomischen Situation in Äthiopien,” 28.6.1978, 110-112, here 112.

<sup>565</sup> SAPMO-BArch, DY 3023/1218, Büro der Generaldirektor, AHB Genussmittel, “Analyse Rohkaffee Import 2. Halbjahr 1977, 1. Halbjahr 1978,” 28.6.1978, 493-509, here 496.

<sup>566</sup> SAPMO-BArch, DY 3023/1218, Büro der Generaldirektor, AHB Genussmittel, “Analyse Rohkaffee Import 2. Halbjahr 1977, 1. Halbjahr 1978,” 495.

Ethiopian coffee exports – and therefore one third of [the country’s] total exports.”<sup>567</sup> He suspected those in charge of these private firms were not interested in the trade contract with East Germany, and sought to profit from coffee sales.<sup>568</sup> *Genussmittel* even encountered these attitudes within the state CMC, such as Fikre Menker, general manager of the CMC, who repeatedly complained that his firm’s – and therefore his country’s – deliveries to the GDR “would greatly limit the sales opportunities to capitalist countries.”<sup>569</sup>

*Genussmittel* remained optimistic that the current problems could be solved, providing the Germans were willing to change the parameters of their relationship with Ethiopia. “In the interests of improving the market and price,” *Genussmittel* recommended that the GDR should “no longer agree to any fixed price” in terms of coffee, and should also “examine the inclusion of powerful private export firms,” to improve East Germany’s negotiating position “while maintaining the primacy of the state enterprise CMC.”<sup>570</sup> Though *Genussmittel* made no specific references to any specific firms, it is likely they spoke here of shipping firms, as a means to improve deliveries. Anne Dietrich has suggested that *Genussmittel*’s analysis “was very sober” and reflected the GDR’s willingness to “apply capitalist competitive principles so as to maximize its own position.” She argues these recommendations were “were very practical; ideological considerations had no place here [...] the example of coffee demonstrates that the GDR

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<sup>567</sup> SAPMO-BArch, DY 3023/1218, Büro der Generaldirektor, AHB Genussmittel, “Analyse Rohkaffee Import 2. Halbjahr 1977, 1. Halbjahr 1978,” 496.

<sup>568</sup> *Genussmittel* also suspected many coffee growers in Ethiopia still had large stocks of coffee, but lacked sufficient interest in selling because they were “negatively influenced by counterrevolutionaries.” Citing testimony from the Ethiopian Coffee Board’s General Manager, the Director also suggested coffee smuggling to neighbouring countries had increased dramatically over the past two years, to 233 per cent. See SAPMO-BArch, DY 3023/1218, Büro der Generaldirektor, AHB Genussmittel, “Analyse Rohkaffee Import 2. Halbjahr 1977, 1. Halbjahr 1978,” 28.6.1978, 493-509, here 494.

<sup>569</sup> SAPMO-BArch, DY 3023/1218, Büro der Generaldirektor, AHB Genussmittel, “Analyse Rohkaffee Import 2. Halbjahr 1977, 1. Halbjahr 1978,” 497.

<sup>570</sup> SAPMO-BArch, DY 3023/1218, Büro der Generaldirektor, AHB Genussmittel, “Analyse Rohkaffee Import 2. Halbjahr 1977, 1. Halbjahr 1978,” 504.

prioritized the provisioning of its own population over its solidarity with the global South.”<sup>571</sup>

While pragmatism greatly influenced these recommendations, leading East Germany to adopt practices resembling capitalism and prioritize its own interests, the situation requires a subtler understanding of “ideological considerations.” East German traders understood that new sources of coffee were needed to keep the population from rising up (which seemed to be a genuine fear in the spring and summer of 1977). Prioritizing domestic stability in this case *was* ideological, because of the underlying reasons behind these decisions: the workers were entitled to their coffee, an entitlement encouraged by the regime through the Main Economic Task. Providing coffee was about more than simple political stability: it was about demonstrating the SED’s commitment to the ideology it hoped to infuse upon the nation. Additionally, the GDR sought to showcase its achievements as a modern socialist state, proving its superior approach to building socialism. In turn, the East Germans felt they possessed a better understanding of socialism, and could bring these “lessons” to the developing world – in effect, demonstrating their supposed superior “command” of socialism.

Coffee was far too valuable a crop for Ethiopia to trade at a disadvantage, a fact on which Mengistu drew in a personal letter to Erich Honecker in mid-June. Mengistu declared Ethiopia’s readiness to continue trading coffee with the GDR, but insisted on a more equitable relationship, suggesting both countries form a group of representatives who would conduct a thorough investigation of the current agreements.<sup>572</sup> Mengistu effectively deployed the GDR’s own rhetoric regarding development aid to express his country’s displeasure, saying that continued

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<sup>571</sup> Anne Dietrich, “Kaffeetrinken,” 234. The original memo only refers to “considering the inclusion” of “privaten Exportfirmen”, which most likely refers to large export/shipping firms. Exercising this option would not threaten to approach alternative *sources* of coffee within Ethiopia, but rather to alternative *delivery methods*, which would still help bypass some of the issues, but these are mostly logistical, and even the memo makes it clear the state firms will retain priority.

<sup>572</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1466, Letter from Mengistu Haile Mariam to Erich Honecker, no date (sent to Honecker from East German Embassy in Addis Ababa 27.6.1978), 108.

cooperation “required that trade relations must develop [...] in such a way that they will be mutually beneficial.”<sup>573</sup> Between the continued payment imbalance, Ethiopia’s persistent unwillingness to entertain additional export contracts for East German consumer goods, and growing mutual frustrations on the ground, the conflict of interest between the two countries proved irreconcilable. Experts from both sides met from 21 to 25 August to discuss the extension of the current trade program. After months of delays in payment, German promises that the GDR would “fulfill its obligations through goods deliveries and services in full,” no longer inspired any confidence among Ethiopian delegates.<sup>574</sup> Despite Ethiopia’s faithful coffee deliveries, there remained an outstanding balance of 82 million Birr (60 million VM) in its favour. The country could no longer accept delays in payment, as its domestic circumstances “no longer reflected” the conditions of the original agreement, and the country now needed to grow its currency reserves.<sup>575</sup> Consequently, Ethiopia expected payment in full of the outstanding balance – in convertible currency – by the end of the year. Honecker managed to gain an extension until 30 June 1979 by appealing directly to Mengistu, who also allowed the final payments to continue in goods deliveries. While the GDR would be permitted to purchase coffee in the future, Ethiopia imposed an annual limit of 2000 t.<sup>576</sup> Thus, “only fourteen months after its signing, the long-term coffee agreement had failed.”<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1466, Letter from Mengistu Haile Mariam to Erich Honecker, no date (sent to Honecker from East German Embassy in Addis Ababa 27.6.1978), 108.

<sup>574</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1466, „Information zum Ergebnis der Expertenverhandlungen zur weiteren Gestaltung der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen DDR-Sozialistisch Äthiopien,“ 30.8.1978, 117-125, here 122-123.

<sup>575</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1466, „Information zum Ergebnis der Expertenverhandlungen zur weiteren Gestaltung der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen DDR-Sozialistisch Äthiopien,“ 30.8.1978, 117-125 here 123-124.

<sup>576</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 3023/1466, „Information über die 2.Tagung des Gemeinsamen Wirtschaftsausschusses DDR/Sozialistischen Äthiopien vom 16-19.10.1978 in Addis Abeba,“ 21.10.1978, 139-142; here 141.

<sup>577</sup> Döring, “*Es geht um unserer Existenz!*”, 128. It should be noted that the archival record does not make it clear whether or not East Germany ever fulfilled its financial obligations through this agreement.

GDR state media celebrated relations with Angola and Ethiopia, but also downplayed any implication of a paternalistic relationship between East German and the global South. By framing Angolan and Ethiopian achievements as mere signs of each country's *potential* development along socialist lines, East German state media encouraged a patronizing characterization of both countries as under developed states which needed guidance – guidance that East Germany was perfectly suited to provide. Thus, state portrayals of the GDR's coffee partners found their basis in a fundamental Eurocentric worldview that fit the GDR's "civilizing mission."

The coffee agreement with Ethiopia was hailed as "a demonstration of friendship between the GDR and Ethiopia" by the SED daily *Neues Deutschland* in December 1977. The article interviewed Werner Lamberz, who said the growing relationship between their two nations was "a reflection of the close friendship" and the GDR's "strong sympathy for Ethiopia."<sup>578</sup> In 1978, while praising Angola's MPLA for nationalizing industry and agriculture – including the coffee industry – *Neues Deutschland* nonetheless reminded readers of the GDR's assistance, including a picture of GDR physiotherapists working with their Angolan counterparts to treat patients.<sup>579</sup>

During the 1978 Leipzig Trade fair in March, *Neues Deutschland* focused on exhibits from the developing world – many of which appeared at the Fair for the first time that year. The Leipzig Fair presented an opportunity to portray the GDR as a modern, developed state. By positioning the booths from developing countries together, apart from European booths, and by featuring the "traditional hand crafts" of these countries, *Neues Deutschland* also used the article to highlight elements of civilizational difference between the GDR and the global South. *Neues*

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<sup>578</sup> "Demonstration der tiefen Freundschaft mit Äthiopien," *Neues Deutschland*, 9 December 1977, 2.

<sup>579</sup> Dr Dieter Coburger, "Angola stärkt den staatlichen Sektor," *Neues Deutschland*, 22 March 1978, 6.

*Deutschland* dedicated a full two pages to the Fair, the majority of which discussed the relationship between the GDR and the developing world, claiming the GDR was “a good partner for young nation states.”<sup>580</sup> In September, *Neues Deutschland* wrote about Angola’s “course toward a stable economy,” telling East Germans “the young republic is in the first stages of ‘national rebuilding’” which laid “the basis for the later construction of socialism.”<sup>581</sup> The paper emphasized that the construction of socialism in Angola was a project still in the making, a goal not yet achieved despite taking important “first” steps. This language served to set Angola – and by extension the developing world – apart from the world of industrially and economically developed nations to which the GDR claimed to belong.

When it reviewed the implementation of *Ware gegen Ware* in December 1978, the SED Central Committee proclaimed the program a success, duly noting that the import plans for raw coffee that year had been “fully secured” – by which the Central Committee meant that “all purchases in 1978” had been made on the basis of goods for goods.<sup>582</sup> To some extent, this confidence seemed justified, though it blatantly ignored the experiences in Angola and Ethiopia. The GDR had, after all, managed to cover its coffee needs through contracts with nearly a dozen different countries over the past year:

**Table 3.2:** Status of Contracts for Raw Coffee Imports 1978

		Vol (kt)
Plan 1978	Socialist Economy	0.1
	Non socialist Economy	50.6
Contracts (total)		51.1
On principle of “Goods for Goods” via special trade agreements:		

<sup>580</sup> “DDR – leistungsstarker Partner im Welthandel,” *Neues Deutschland*, 13 March 1978, 3-4.

<sup>581</sup> “Angolas Kurs auf stabile Wirtschaft,” *Neues Deutschland*, 16 September 1978, 6.

<sup>582</sup> BArchB, DC 20 I4/4238, “Die Erfahrungen und Schlußfolgerungen bei der Durchsetzung des Prinzips Ware gegen Ware beim Import von Rohkaffee und Kakaobohnen,” 6.12.1978, 90-103, here 90.



	Angola	6.6
	Ethiopia	10.6
On Principle of “Goods for Goods” through Valuta bank credit:		
	Philippines	1.1
	Cameroon	0.5
	Ivory Coast	0.5
	Mexico	0.1
	Ecuador	0.6
On principle of “Goods for Goods” through clearing accounts:		
	Brazil	12.9
	Columbia	2.2
	India	0.8
Contracts signed prior to 26.1.1978 [introduction of <i>Ware gegen Ware</i> ], payable in hard currency:		15.1

*Source:* BArchB, DC 20 I4/4238, “Die Erfahrungen und Schlußfolgerungen bei der Durchsetzung des Prinzips *Ware gegen Ware* beim Import von Rohkaffee und Kakaobohnen,” 6.12.1978. 90-103, here 96. Note: “Socialist Economy” refers to COMECON member states, as well as non-aligned socialist states; “non-socialist economy” typically refers to Capitalist countries.

Confident not only that the GDR had managed to acquire the coffee it needed, the Central Committee also expressed its satisfaction regarding the new trade relationships formed as a result of the coffee contracts. Based on the past year’s experiences, the Committee concluded that developing countries shared the same motive as East Germany in concluding these kinds of agreements, because through them, these countries could “simultaneously guarantee a long-term sale of raw coffee and can pay for GDR imports through agricultural goods.”<sup>583</sup> Of course, this conclusion presupposed these countries’ desire to “sell” their coffee to the GDR, as well as their interest in securing East German finished goods. As both Ethiopian and Angolan reluctance had demonstrated, the Germans could rely on neither of these preconditions. Indeed, the report specifically mentioned traders’ struggles to obtain lists of desired GDR goods, noting the

<sup>583</sup> BArchB, DC 20 I4/4238, “Die Erfahrungen und Schlußfolgerungen bei der Durchsetzung des Prinzips *Ware gegen Ware* beim Import von Rohkaffee und Kakaobohnen,” 90.

repeated need to appeal to each country in pursuit of expanded trade deals.<sup>584</sup> On top of a lack of interest in East German wares, a number of countries had tried to force the East Germans to purchase additional goods of which they sought to dispose themselves. For instance, in their negotiations with Columbia, Mexico and Brazil, German traders faced repeated “demands” to accept processed coffee (sprayed coffee and freeze-dried coffee) in addition to the raw beans East Germany sought, a demand which German representatives estimated was increasing in frequency.<sup>585</sup>

While the Central Committee concluded that the international pricing situation and the domestic demand for coffee necessitated the continued adherence to *Ware gegen Ware*, a number of changes would be necessary to address the problems that arose as a result of this trade policy. The Central Committee decided that because coffee was so important a commodity, the state’s policies needed to be flexible, and certain “deviations from this principle [*Ware gegen Ware*]” were permissible in “exceptional” cases.<sup>586</sup> No specific detail was provided for what sort of “deviations” the committee had in mind, but this acknowledgement of the coffee market’s unreliability further illustrates the regime’s commitment to coffee and the pragmatism which this unreliability necessitated.

#### *Long-term development: Laos and Vietnam, 1979-1986*

The Coffee Crisis had demonstrated the dangers of relying too heavily on a small number of coffee producers, and the regime believed that by diversifying its sources, it could lessen the

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<sup>584</sup> BArchB, DC 20 I4/4238, “Die Erfahrungen und Schlußfolgerungen bei der Durchsetzung des Prinzips *Ware gegen Ware* beim Import von Rohkaffee und Kakaobohnen,” 92.

<sup>585</sup> BArchB, DC 20 I4/4238, “Die Erfahrungen und Schlußfolgerungen bei der Durchsetzung des Prinzips *Ware gegen Ware* beim Import von Rohkaffee und Kakaobohnen,” 92.

<sup>586</sup> BArchB, DC 20 I4/4238, “Die Erfahrungen und Schlußfolgerungen bei der Durchsetzung des Prinzips *Ware gegen Ware* beim Import von Rohkaffee und Kakaobohnen,” 92.

effects of future price increases. In 1978 world prices had declined, allowing the GDR to increase its coffee imports from its traditional sources, principally Brazil and Colombia, beginning in 1978 and 1979 respectively (see Table 3.3 and Table 3.4).

**Table 3.3** ICO composite indicator prices for coffee, 1976-1981 (US cents/lb)

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981
ICO composite indicator price	71.73	141.96	229.21	155.15	169.50	150.67	115.42

*Source:* Comparative analysis of world coffee prices and manufactured goods (Annex II: Complete data on prices.) International Coffee Organization, 17 February 2014.

**Table 3.4** GDR Coffee imports by country (in t), 1977-1981

Country	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981
Angola	5514	6549	9058	11351	8033
Ethiopia	9126	10,016	-	-	2998
Brazil	9896	15,101	17,520	18,723	24,710
Colombia	6271	2272	5952	9538	7202

*Source:* (figures for 1977-1978) "Ausfuhr und Einfuhr ausgewählter Erzeugnisse nach Ländern," Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Zeitschriftenband 1980). Log 74, 242-248, [http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514402644\\_1979|log74&physid=phys274#navi](http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514402644_1979|log74&physid=phys274#navi); accessed 21 July 2016; (figures for 1979-1981) "Ausfuhr und Einfuhr ausgewählter Erzeugnisse nach Ländern," Statistisches Jahrbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Zeitschriftenband 1983). Log 68, 235-246. [https://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514402644\\_1982|log68&physid=phys262#navi](https://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514402644_1982|log68&physid=phys262#navi); accessed on 21 July 2016.

Despite this shift, coffee still cost more than twice as much as it had 1975, making it only relatively more affordable than the immediate crisis years. Additionally, the GDR's hard currency debts continued to skyrocket, as the country imported DM 21 billion more than it exported between 1971 and 1980, and foreign debt sat at roughly DM 28 billion by 1980 (see Table 3.5).<sup>587</sup> Through the 1970s, Mittag had tried to slow the debt's climb by selling Russian oil and petro-chemical equipment, and converting as much of the economy as possible to be fueled by lignite. This plan relied on the price for oil remaining high in western markets, and proved disastrous when in 1980, Iraq and Iran went to war, and their overproduction of oil drove prices

<sup>587</sup> Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 70.

down to less than half their 1981 level by 1985.<sup>588</sup> If anything, the return to traditional coffee sources despite the continued high prices further demonstrates the state's genuine commitment to managing its coffee supply. But it was clear to planners and party leadership alike that these prices and the overwhelming debt necessitated not only a continuation, but an expansion, of the goods for goods trade policy enacted during the crisis. Yet, as the experience of 1978 had demonstrated, the policy had its limits. In particular, Ethiopia's unwillingness to accept goods for its coffee any longer, and the one thousand tonne limit it placed on East German coffee imports, meant that the planned import structure for 1979 and beyond could not be sustained by the existing trading partners.

State estimates of coffee consumption added to officials' fears that the GDR's capacity to provide this basic good were only going to further diminish. Official reports tracked increases in coffee drinking across the country, in both household and workplace consumption:

**Table 3.5:** Average weekly household coffee consumption, 1972 and 1978 (in g)

District	1972		1978	
	Per household	Per person	Per household	Per person
<b>DDR, Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Berlin</b>	155	89	160	91
<b>Cottbus</b>	143	73	144	77
<b>Dresden</b>	129	66	150	76
<b>Erfurt</b>	123	63	139	70
<b>Frankfurt</b>	161	87	136	61
<b>Gera</b>	119	58	146	79
<b>Halle</b>	132	63	161	84
<b>Karl-Marx-Stadt</b>	143	75	146	77
<b>Leipzig</b>	165	86	177	86
<b>Magdeburg</b>	142	78	163	88
<b>Neubrandenburg</b>	113	57	132	63
<b>Potsdam</b>	129	70	173	90
<b>Rostock</b>	145	67	149	71
<b>Schwerin</b>	142	74	137	74
<b>Suhl</b>	119	61	157	74

*Source:* BArchB, DL 102/1197, Knötzsch, Petra: "Die Bedarfsentwicklung bei Röstkaffee in der DDR und in den Bezirken im Jahr 1979" 30-Jun-78, Anlage 3.

<sup>588</sup> Zatin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 113.

**Table 3.6:** Average weekly household coffee consumption at the workplace, 1972 and 1978

District	households which drink coffee at work (in %)		Cups per person per week, in the workplace	
	1972	1978	1972	1978
<b>DDR, Total</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>6.6</b>
<b>Berlin</b>	56	47	6.5	6.7
<b>Cottbus</b>	46	52	6.1	6.3
<b>Dresden</b>	52	55	5.3	7.1
<b>Erfurt</b>	41	53	5.2	6.7
<b>Frankfurt</b>	46	43	7.0	6.6
<b>Gera</b>	38	60	6.5	5.3
<b>Halle</b>	37	44	5.7	6.9
<b>Karl-Marx-Stadt</b>	53	54	5.8	7.2
<b>Leipzig</b>	48	59	6.9	6.6
<b>Magdeburg</b>	38	44	6.8	6.1
<b>Neubrandenburg</b>	31	34	5.1	5.7
<b>Potsdam</b>	44	45	5.6	7.1
<b>Rostock</b>	26	38	5.4	5.3
<b>Schwerin</b>	20	49	4.9	6.1
<b>Suhl</b>	46	46	5.5	5.2

*Source:* BArchB, DL 102/1197, Knötzsch, Petra: “Die Bedarfsentwicklung bei Röstkaffee in der DDR und in den Bezirken im Jahr 1979” 30-Jun-78, Anlage 3.

While outlining options for maintaining supply from 1981-1985, the Institute for Market Research claimed “for the majority of the adult population, coffee has become an inseparable part of everyday life. As is the case with all basic products, a stable supply is expected as a given.”<sup>589</sup> The IfM’s prognosis warned there had been no decline in demand for coffee, which it attributed to increases to income. Its recommendations assumed that gift traffic, which represented 20-25 per cent of total consumer supply at the time, would increase, because official relations between the two Germanies had stabilized.<sup>590</sup> East Germany depended on these unofficial sources of coffee to keep supply levels up, but the same report noted that any number of factors – changes in diplomatic relations, price increases for coffee in West Germany, or other “changes to the international coffee trade” (such as another major frost) could easily disrupt the

<sup>589</sup> BArchB, DL 102/1276, Petra Knötzsch, “Die Bedarfsentwicklung bei Röstkaffee und echtem Tee in den Jahren 1980 bis 1985,” Institute für Marktforschung: Forschungsberichte, 15-Apr-79, 1.

<sup>590</sup> BArchB, DL 102/1276, Petra Knötzsch, “Die Bedarfsentwicklung bei Röstkaffee und echtem Tee in den Jahren 1980 bis 1985,” Institute für Marktforschung: Forschungsberichte, 15-Apr-79, 4 The legal limits on the volume of coffee permitted in gift packages had also doubled in 1972, from 250 g to 500 g per package. See BArchB, DL 102/1197, Petra Knötzsch, “Die Bedarfsentwicklung bei Röstkaffee in der DDR und in den Bezirken im Jahr 1979” 30-Jun-78, 3.

flow of “gift coffee.”<sup>591</sup> Still in need of new coffee partners, East German traders intensified their negotiations in East Asia, specifically in Laos and Vietnam, in the hopes of establishing long-term import lines for coffee.

**Table 3.7:** East German Trade Imbalances with the West, 1980-1986 (in billions of DM)

Year	Internal GDR figures		Western figures	
	Cumulative Debt to West	Annual Trade Surplus/(Deficit)	Annual Hard-Currency Surplus/(Deficit)	Cumulative Debt to West
1980	-27.9	-2.764	+3.582	-23.637
1981	-29.0	+0.372	+0.714	-23.134
1982	-27.3	+3.178	-2.866	-25.146
1983	-28.9	+2.447	-2.231	-22.339
1984	-27.2	+3.216	-5.634	-18.348
1985	-25.9	+3.026	-3.595	-15.480
1986	-28.7	+0.128	+1.072	-16.162

*Source:* Jonathan Zatin produced this chart based on archival sources available to him. See Jonathan Zatin. *The Currency of Socialism*, p.123.

### Laos

Trading for coffee with Laos had formed part of the GDR’s original *Ware gegen Ware* initiative in February 1978.<sup>592</sup> Negotiations with Laos that year led to a contract for 500 t of raw coffee, to be delivered in 1979. This volume was quite small, however, and negotiations took quite a bit longer, because obtaining coffee from Laos posed numerous challenges. Unlike Angola and Ethiopia, whose long-established coffee trade on the world market made each reluctant to accept consumer goods for their coffee, neither Laos nor Vietnam produced a great deal of coffee; Laos for instance harvested a mere 2000 t of raw coffee during the 1978-1979 season.<sup>593</sup> If the GDR hoped to import coffee in larger volumes over a longer period of time, Laos’ coffee industry would first need to be developed to the point where it could produce a

<sup>591</sup> BArchB, DL 102/1276, Petra Knötzsch, “Die Bedarfsentwicklung bei Röstkaffee und echtem Tee in den Jahren 1980 bis 1985,” Institute für Marktforschung: Forschungsberichte, 15-Apr-79, 12.

<sup>592</sup> BArchB, DC 20 I3/1468, “Maßnahme zur Durchsetzung des Prinzips Ware gegen Ware beim Rohkaffeeimport auf der Basis von Weltmarktpreisen,” 16 Februar 1978, 147-162, here 153.

<sup>593</sup> BArchB, DK1/24499, Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3. bis 3.5.1979 in die VDR Laos, 11.

viable export volume. As it happened, Laos expressed its desire to develop its own coffee industry as a means to expand its economy more generally. Thus, the GDR's need for coffee coincided with Laos' intentions, and the two states began a series of discussions to assess the potential for cooperation.

Given these somewhat different circumstances, the East German delegation that travelled to Laos from 25 March to 3 May 1979 differed considerably from those in Angola or Ethiopia in 1977. Rather than sending representatives of the Commission on Developing countries, or other officials of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the group consisted of technical and industrial experts, including Roland Leonhardt of the Agricultural Industry Association Jessen (*Agrar-Industrie-Vereinigung*, AIV), and Alfred Jankus of VEB Kaffee Halle. The group's directives were straightforward: first, the specialists were to provide recommendations for developing coffee firms, for the use of existing facilities, and for the development of "social coffee production" [*gesellschaftlichen Kaffeeproduktion*] or, in other words, a nationalization of the coffee industry. Secondly, the group was to advise local producers in the preparation, storage and loading of coffee, as well as establish the conditions for improvements to quality and quantity of Laotian coffee production, particularly for export to the GDR.<sup>594</sup>

Laos' coffee fields comprised 70,000 hectares in the province of Champasack, located in the southwest of the country, which shared borders with Thailand and Cambodia. Champasack's natural climate conditions met "all the requirements for the cultivation of coffee," according to the German specialists' report; humidity in the region fluctuated between 85 and 96 per cent, and the soil possessed both good water absorption and retention rates.<sup>595</sup> Laos possessed only one

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<sup>594</sup> BArchB, DK1/24499, "Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3. bis 3.5.1979 in die VDR Laos," 8 Mai 1979, 4.

<sup>595</sup> BArchB, DK1/24499, "Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3. bis 3.5.1979 in die VDR Laos," 8 Mai 1979, 5.

state farm, State Farm 08, founded in 1977. Since its founding, State Farm 08 had planted new coffee trees, including one hundred and eighty six hectares of Arabica coffee. Although these trees had not yet reached the stage of bearing sufficient fruit for harvest, let alone export, the prognosis seemed encouraging to the delegation, as the coffee plants were healthy, strong and growing well.<sup>596</sup> A number of private family farms also grew coffee, although the vast majority of trees on these farms were far too old to be reliable, some approaching thirty years. Laotian coffee growers cultivated both Robusta and Arabica, although Robusta represented a clear majority at 75 per cent of the total.<sup>597</sup>

Of particular concern were the lack of mechanization within Laos' coffee industry and the environmentally unsustainable practices of Laotian agriculture. All aspects of coffee cultivation – from plant breeding, planting, harvesting and drying of the grapes – occurred “exclusively through manual activity.”<sup>598</sup> Raw coffee had to be transported on an unpaved 700 kilometer road to the Laotian capital, Vientiane.<sup>599</sup> Further problems included unclean drying practices (beans dried directly on the ground, leading to contamination); mixing unripe and ripe fruit; a high degree of unpeeled fruit in the raw coffee; and drying harvests from multiple days together.<sup>600</sup> Laotian farmers did not use fertilizers or herbicides, and the long-practiced slash and burn agriculture of Champassak had destroyed most of the local natural vegetation.<sup>601</sup> By German assessments, Laos produced an extremely inconsistent raw coffee, which could hardly

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<sup>596</sup> BArchB, DK 1 24499, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3 bis 3.5 1979 in die VDR Laos,” 8 Mai 1979, 4.

<sup>597</sup> BArchB, DK1/24499, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3. bis 3.5.1979 in die VDR Laos,” 10.

<sup>598</sup> BArchB, DK1/24499, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3. bis 3.5.1979 in die VDR Laos,” 7. Peeling the fruits was the only procedure involving mechanization, but the state processing firm in the provincial capital Pakse possessed only one peeling and one cleaning machine, which were currently inoperable “because no spare parts [were] available for repairs.” The Germans’ report actually indicated that there were „unclear reasons“ for the inoperative state of the cleaning machine.

<sup>599</sup> Roughly 60km of this road was in fact paved, but this hardly represented an efficient route.

<sup>600</sup> BArchB, DK1/24499, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3. bis 3.5.1979 in die VDR Laos,” 11.

<sup>601</sup> BArchB, DK1/24499, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3. bis 3.5.1979 in die VDR Laos,” 8.



provide a reliable long-term supply line. The delegation listed these factors under the subheading “quality,” and although these findings certainly indicated sub-optimum conditions in Laos, the German specialists clearly conceptualized and framed their discussion of “quality” in terms of production standards – not in terms of the type of coffee being grown. In eyes of the German specialists, the answer to these problems was relatively simple: overcoming the limitations of Laos’ agricultural and coffee industries required the immediate introduction of modern technology and farming methods.<sup>602</sup>

On 18 December 1979, representatives from the GDR and Laos met to discuss terms for a coffee agreement, including the development of the Laotian coffee industry. The Laotian side requested East German agricultural machinery, technology, chemical products, transportation infrastructure, and technical experts. The Germans remarked on the negotiations with enthusiasm, saying “only in this way will Laos be in the position to increase its production of coffee and guarantee coffee exports to the GDR.”<sup>603</sup> The four year plan called for increases in exports of between 800 – 1000 t in 1981, so that total coffee exports would reach 2300 – 2500 t by 1985.<sup>604</sup> The GDR-Laos coffee project represented the first major cooperative effort between these two countries, and on the basis of its success, officials from both sides hoped it would lead to future collaboration and exchange.<sup>605</sup>

It took some time for Laos and the GDR to establish the parameters of their endeavour. The new trees planted on State Farm 08 in 1977 would take four to five years before they were ready for cultivation, and Laos’ industry continued to experience a number of production setbacks over the next two years. Laos proved unable to make its delivery of 500 t in 1980 and

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<sup>602</sup> BArchB, DK1/24499, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 25.3. bis 3.5.1979 in die VDR Laos,” 8-9.

<sup>603</sup> BArchB DK 1 24499, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 10-20 Dezember in der VDR Laos,” 1979, 2.

<sup>604</sup> BArchB DK 1 24499, “Konzeption zur langfristigen Sicherung von Kaffeeimporten aus der VDR Laos durch die Entwicklung geeigneter Formen der Zusammenarbeit,” 22.November 1979, 3.

<sup>605</sup> BArchB DK 1 24499, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 10-20 Dezember in der VDR Laos,” 1979, p.3.

the country's representatives estimated that under the current conditions, Laos would be unable to maintain coffee exports through 1985.<sup>606</sup> In August 1981, the East German Foreign Trade Ministry sent two experts to Laos; Bernd Stege served as an economist at a collective farm in Cottbus, and Alfred Jankus was director for research and manufacturing in VEB Kaffee Halle. Both "experts" were stationed in Laos until the end of the year, and their duties aimed at identifying appropriate areas for the expansion of coffee cultivation, as well as scrutinizing local processes.<sup>607</sup>

The Germans' prognosis levelled harsh criticism at the Laotian coffee industry, and assumed a patronizing tone in its recommendations. Jankus and Stege blamed locals for the very limited yields of the 1981-1982 harvest season – the first on State Farm 08 – saying the coffee fields "must be rearranged" because they "are so poorly organized that tractors cannot be used on them." Harvesting methods were deemed "primitive," as they relied heavily on manual labour and wasted a great deal of time.<sup>608</sup> "Without assistance," claimed Stege and Jankus, coffee production in the State Farm 08 could not be expanded. The Germans also lambasted the managers of State Farm 08 for being incompetent and under-prepared for the complexities of the tasks before them. In Stege and Jankus' assessment, "the technical qualification of all leaders is too limited to solve the existing problems. They are not in the position to make the necessary management decisions for an orderly workflow." Furthermore, the local Party leadership shared blame for the lack of organization, as there was "no clear and coordinated conception for the organization of the cooperative management of the coffee areas."<sup>609</sup> The East Germans' solution

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<sup>606</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/992, "Information über die Entwicklung der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VDR Laos," 19. June 1981, 104.

<sup>607</sup> BArchB, DK 1/24498, "Direktive für einen Spezialisteneinsatz in der VDR Laos," August 1981, 2.

<sup>608</sup> BArchB, DK1/24498, Bernd Stege, Alfred Jankus, "Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 13.9.81 bis 21.12.81 in die VDR Laos, Halle/S.," den 4.1.1982, 7.

<sup>609</sup> BArchB, DK1/24498, Bernd Stege, Alfred Jankus, "Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 13.9.81 bis 21.12.81 in die VDR Laos, Halle/S.," den 4.1.1982, 12; 15.

called for additional full time and part time specialists from the GDR who would train and supervise locals across the industry. Under this agreement, East German experts held both extensive responsibilities as well as considerable oversight. First, these experts would train locals in new technologies, such as tractors, chemicals, and chain saws. In addition to training duties, German specialists organized the clearing of old coffee fields and their conversion to collective use, and supervising the construction of a machine repair depot.<sup>610</sup>

Perhaps the most significant of these recommendations involved sending German experts to train the Laotians in “the usual international methods for ascertaining the quality of raw coffee.” In their trials of harvested coffee, Stege and Jankus indicated that “in comparison to raw coffee from other growing nations, the quality of Laotian raw coffee is one of the worst in the world.”<sup>611</sup> Blame for the poor quality of coffee, according to the Germans, lay solely with the Laotian people themselves, who “alone regard their coffee as good, because they lack the scale and the possibility of comparison outside their region.”<sup>612</sup> Yet the Germans’ own conceptualization of quality was based not on provenance, but on production methods. In Jankus and Stege’s own words, quality was “not a question of the origin of the coffee [...] High quality coffee is solely the result of the care, experience and determination in all stages of production.”<sup>613</sup> Genuine “quality” could only be guaranteed with “proper” production methods, achieved through the careful application of scientific socialism. In other words, because they were not following the principles of standardization, mechanization and rationalization, the Laotians had “no concept of good coffee quality,” and lacked the ability to produce a cup of

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<sup>610</sup> BArchB, DK1/24498, Bernd Stege, Alfred Jankus, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 13.9.81 bis 21.12.81 in die VDR Laos, Halle/S.,” den 4.1.1982, 17.

<sup>611</sup> BArchB, DK1/24498, Bernd Stege, Alfred Jankus, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 13.9.81 bis 21.12.81 in die VDR Laos, Halle/S.,” den 4.1.1982, 35.

<sup>612</sup> BArchB, DK1/24498, Bernd Stege, Alfred Jankus, “Analyse der Ausgangsbedingungen für den Aufbau der Kaffeegesellschaft Paksong.”

<sup>613</sup> BArchB, DK1/24498, Bernd Stege, Alfred Jankus, “Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 13.9.81 bis 21.12.81 in die VDR Laos, Halle/S.,” den 4.1.1982, 22.

coffee that could meet East Germany's expectations. Furthermore, the delegates argued that by not holding Laos to higher standards, socialist countries enabled the continued dearth of quality in Laos' coffee, because improving quality never became an "acute problem" for Laotian coffee farmers.<sup>614</sup>

On 5 May 1982, Laos and the GDR concluded their negotiations, agreeing to a cooperative project over the next twenty years.<sup>615</sup> One of the first priorities under the agreement was the complete overhaul of current coffee fields, which would be replanted "to ensure a quick increase in yield," while the harvesting process would become fully mechanized to improve quality. Meanwhile, Laos would complete the transportation routes to and from the coffee region, and agreed to use goods delivered by East Germany in the expansion of coffee fields, and to provide the fuel that would be needed for the coffee industry's mechanization.<sup>616</sup> Laos also committed to deliver coffee to the GDR in increasing volumes from 1982 to 2001.<sup>617</sup> In total, Laos agreed to deliver 39.2 kt of raw coffee over the twenty year period, which corresponded to *fifty per cent* of the country's total planned exports.<sup>618</sup>

The agreement established an elaborate training and education program for local farmers, which emphasized the assumed superiority of East German technical and scientific expertise. East Germany agreed to send a delegation of experts, most for a term of one year, with specialized experience ranging from agriculture, tropical agronomy and machine maintenance to

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<sup>614</sup> BArchB, DK1/24498, Bernd Stege, Alfred Jankus, "Reisebericht über die Dienstreise vom 13.9.81 bis 21.12.81 in die VDR Laos, Halle/S.," den 4.1.1982, 22.

<sup>615</sup> BArchB, DL 2/24489, "Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VDR Laos über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee und die Lieferung on Rohkaffee aus der VDR Laos in die DDR," 5 May 1982, 4.

<sup>616</sup> BArchB, DL 2/24489, "Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VDR Laos über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee und die Lieferung on Rohkaffee aus der VDR Laos in die DDR," 5 May 1982, 8.

<sup>617</sup> BArchB, DL 2/24489, "Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VDR Laos über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee und die Lieferung on Rohkaffee aus der VDR Laos in die DDR," 5 May 1982, 8.

<sup>618</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, "Standpunkt zu den Vorschlägen der Botschaft Vientiane zur Zusammenarbeit DDR/VDR Laos bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee," 2.11.1987, 1. Emphasis added.

the forest industry, quality assurance, and purchasing. As well, the agreement called for improvements in the general education level of local farmers.<sup>619</sup> Laos assumed twice as many responsibilities under the agreement as the GDR, including accommodating and provisioning German specialists and their families.<sup>620</sup> Even after their training, Laotian trainees would return to Laos for apprenticeships, serving as assistants to East German specialists. Although the agreement stipulated these apprenticeships were designed to ensure “an effective and successful cooperation with the goal of later taking over leadership functions,” the terms indicated no specific length for the time each candidate would serve as an “assistant.”<sup>621</sup> Furthermore, both parties agreed to “undertake all efforts to deliver so much raw coffee to the GDR that the amount agreed upon [in this agreement] will be surpassed” a stipulation that clearly benefited the GDR as it gave no indication that goods and services provided by the GDR would increase accordingly.<sup>622</sup>

East German experts’ characterization of Laos’ manual practices in agriculture and lack of industrialization as “primitive” revealed an ethnocentrism which presupposed the superiority not only of East German practices, but also of East German socio-cultural development. The only practical solution to this supposed backwardness was to “assist” Laos in re-ordering its entire coffee industry along the lines of Scientific Socialism – guided, naturally, by East Germany. The GDR’s position as an industrialized, European nation which had ostensibly

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<sup>619</sup> BArchB, DL 2/24489, “Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VDR Laos über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee und die Lieferung on Rohkaffee aus der VDR Laos in die DDR,” 5 May 1982, 4-6.

<sup>620</sup> BArchB, DL 2/24489, “Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VDR Laos über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee und die Lieferung on Rohkaffee aus der VDR Laos in die DDR,” 5 May 1982, 8.

<sup>621</sup> BArchB, DL 2/24489, “Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VDR Laos über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee und die Lieferung on Rohkaffee aus der VDR Laos in die DDR,” 5 May 1982, 7.

<sup>622</sup> BArchB, DL 2/24489, “Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der VDR Laos über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee und die Lieferung on Rohkaffee aus der VDR Laos in die DDR,” 5 May 1982, 10.

succeeded in building “real existing socialism” endowed East German traders with the belief that East Germany had both the capability and duty to guide “progressive developing nations” towards socialist development, in what could be characterized as a “civilizing mission.” Despite claims of socialist solidarity, East Germany consistently prioritized its desire for coffee in its dealings with Laos. Even criticism over slash and burn agriculture stemmed not from the GDR’s concern for environmental damage, but rather was motivated by the Germans’ concerns for how such methods affected Laos’ ability to cultivate more coffee over the long-term. Claiming the coffee project “emerged from the close and friendly relationship” between the countries and “in the interests of continued development and mutual economic benefit,” the preamble adopted the typical language of socialist trade agreements. Despite these claims, the terms placed the majority of responsibility on the shoulders of Laotian leaders and farmers, while establishing a clear leadership role for the GDR. Framed in the guise of mutual, long-term benefit, the coffee agreement with Laos in fact prioritized dramatic increases in the volume of annual coffee yields, for the express purpose of maximizing the potential deliveries to the GDR.

Laos and East Germany renewed their five year coffee project in 1986, agreeing to further cooperation in developing Laos’ industry.<sup>623</sup> Coffee deliveries to East Germany totaled 2749 t between 1982 and 1985, consistent with planned export volume for that period. For the most part, both sides viewed the deal as a general success – Laos benefited from East German inputs which had resulted in improved coffee yields and the strengthening of that industry, while East Germany obtained the agreed upon volume of coffee. Further collaboration would concentrate on expanding the acreage of Laotian coffee fields from 16,300 ha to 21,600 ha by

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<sup>623</sup> BArchB, DL 2 17442, Bd. 1. “Protokoll über die Ergebnisse der Koordinierung der Volkswirtschaftspläne der DDR und der VDR Laos für den Zeitraum 1986 -1990,” 7 January 1986.

1990, thereby increasing harvest yields from 4500 t to 10,100 t.<sup>624</sup> Nonetheless, problems arose in 1986 that indicated Laos' ability to live up to the terms of this long-term agreement was waning.<sup>625</sup> Deliveries from 1986 to 1990 were supposed to total 9000 t under the agreement, but Laos claimed it was only capable of delivering 5500 t in 1987. Despite improvements to industry and training during the 1986/87 growing season a significant drought that year reduced planned deliveries by half for 1987.

These delays and shortfalls incensed the East Germans, who complained that, despite “extensive assistance for years [...] the Laotian side has failed to fulfil their duties.”<sup>626</sup> Since Laos' decision in 1986 to assume responsibility for the collaboration in Champassak, claimed the East Germans, “the material situation has continued to worsen” and “necessary decisions” had not been made. Furthermore, deliveries to the GDR were “decidedly influenced” by requests from the Soviet Union and other socialist states to maintain and increase coffee deliveries to their own countries.<sup>627</sup> Coffee thus formed the main export good for Laos in its relations with socialist countries, which the East Germans suspected meant that Laos would “have no particular interest in keeping to the agreement with the GDR in its current form.”<sup>628</sup> It is unclear what trade deals other Socialist countries offered Laos in terms of coffee, but certainly, fears about this competition caused East Germany to become defensive and increasingly rigid in the late 1980s.

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<sup>624</sup> BArchB, DL 2 17442 Bd. 1. “Information über die Reise des DDR Botschafters in die Provinz Champassak und einige Schlussfolgerungen zur weiteren Zusammenarbeit DDR-VDR Laos bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee,” 21 December 1986, 1.

<sup>625</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, “Standpunkt zu den Vorschlägen der Botschaft Vientiane zur Zusammenarbeit DDR/VDR Laos bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee,” 2.11.1987, 1.

<sup>626</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, “Standpunkt zu den Vorschlägen der Botschaft Vientiane zur Zusammenarbeit DDR/VDR Laos bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee,” 2.11.1987, 2.

<sup>627</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, “Standpunkt zu den Vorschlägen der Botschaft Vientiane zur Zusammenarbeit DDR/VDR Laos bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee,” 2.11.1987, 2.

<sup>628</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, “Standpunkt zu den Vorschlägen der Botschaft Vientiane zur Zusammenarbeit DDR/VDR Laos bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee,” 2.11.1987, 2.

Frustrated with poor performance, the East Germans aimed to “increase the accountability” of their Laotian counterparts in future collaboration.<sup>629</sup>

While the situation continued to deteriorate through the late 1980s, East Germany refused to deviate from the existing parameters of collaboration, and remained determined to enforce the coffee agreement. In January 1988, deputy chairman of Laos' state planning commission Khamasi Souphanouvong met with East German ambassador Jarck, and asked for changes to the structure of collaboration in the coffee industry. Souphanouvong suggested shifting cultivation to private enterprises, rather than state owned farms. The existing coffee project, he offered, could remain responsible for the tasks of production and material supplies for the coffee region.<sup>630</sup> Jarck advised caution, and pointed out the deficiencies in Laos' coffee industry, including a lack of sufficient labour, fuel, and crop failure from a lack of effort to combat weeds. These factors, argued Jarck, showed that without the GDR's “active influence on the partner, a positive change to the collaboration in the spirit of the treaty is not expected.”<sup>631</sup> Later that year, when Laos expressed its desire to collaborate on the construction of a “model firm” [*Musterbetrieb*] in Paksong, the East Germans rejected the idea, saying “proposals to limit the collaboration to a single coffee growing firm cannot be accepted,” because “they would simultaneously lead to a reduction of coffee deliveries to the GDR.”<sup>632</sup> Laos approached the GDR in early 1988, hoping to “significantly reduce” the volume of raw coffee it delivered to the GDR, and make the size of each delivery dependent on production results, rather than having fixed volumes.<sup>633</sup> Completely tying coffee deliveries to relative production levels was an “unacceptable” solution to the East

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<sup>629</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, “Standpunkt zu den Vorschlägen der Botschaft Vientiane zur Zusammenarbeit DDR/VDR Laos bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee,” 2.11.1987, 5.

<sup>630</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, East German Ambassador to Laos to Udo-Dieter Wange, 29.1.1988, 3.

<sup>631</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, East German Ambassador to Laos to Udo-Dieter Wange, 29.1.1988, 4.

<sup>632</sup> BArchB, DL 2/17442 Bd.2, “Standpunkt zu den Vorschlägen der Botschaft Vientiane zur Zusammenarbeit DDR/VDR Laos bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee,” 2.11.1987, 5.

<sup>633</sup> BArchB, DL 2 17442 Bd. 1. “Standpunkt zur Fortsetzung der Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee,” 27.12.1988, 1.



Germans, who insisted on a minimal requirement for coffee purchases, “which should be between 5,500 - 6000 t for 1991-1995.” Thus, through the 1980s, the East German government continued to pursue its own economic trade interests, often at the expense of Laos’ requests for a more equal distribution of responsibility and tangible benefit. Although the trade agreement officially remained in place until the collapse of the GDR, neither side seemed particularly committed to reinvigorating the project, leading in essence to the maintenance of the status quo until 1990.

### *Vietnam*

By the time of the coffee crisis, relations between East Germany and the now unified Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) were well established, and went back as far as the 1950s.<sup>634</sup> The end of hostilities in North Vietnam in 1973 opened the door for more elaborate and extensive exchanges, and the countries entered into a number of large scale projects. East German technical and labour teams travelled to Vietnam to help build factories, canneries and breweries between 1973 and 1984.<sup>635</sup> One of the most significant projects was the cooperative effort to rebuild the Northern Vietnamese city of Vinh from 1973 to 1980, which saw the construction of East German-style apartments in its residential quarter. Scholarly studies regarding this project have pointed to its legacy as a successful enterprise that fostered meaningful and genuinely cooperative exchanges between the East Germans and Vietnamese.<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> See Gerd Horten, “Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR Government and the ‘Vietnam Bonus’ of the Early 1970s,” *German Studies Review* 36, no.3 (2013): 557-578.

<sup>635</sup> Bernd Schaefer, “Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: the East German approach, 1976-1989,” in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, edited by Quinn Slobodian. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015. 95-116.

<sup>636</sup> Indeed, though the project had a number of issues and problems that arose from the challenges of construction and logistics, Bernd Schaefer and Christina Schwenkel argue both sides managed to find adequate solutions to these issues that satisfied the needs of both countries. See Bernd Schaefer, “Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: the East German approach, 1976-1989,” in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, edited by Quinn

Although they had achieved victory over the American forces and unified the peninsula, by 1975 the Vietnamese communists faced a host of challenges. The war had exacted an enormous toll, including approximately 700,000 casualties and the destruction of 45 per cent of the country's towns.<sup>637</sup> The war had destroyed much of the country's industrial and agricultural infrastructure, and famine threatened to take hold in a number of regions. With the exception of rice, production had fallen well below pre-war levels.<sup>638</sup> Keenly aware of the need to provide employment, and the need to feed the population, the government launched a wide spread program of collectivization throughout the south, bringing farms and factories into the centrally planned economy. The country – now renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam – joined COMECON in 1978, seeking to alleviate some of its economic woes and secure lines of trade.<sup>639</sup> American-led embargos severely limited the SRV's ability to acquire finished goods or raw materials on the world market. Meanwhile, Hanoi's relationship with Beijing had deteriorated throughout the war as the Vietnamese drew closer to the Soviets, and only worsened after reunification.<sup>640</sup>

Faced with an acute need after the war for economic development, the Vietnamese communists recognized the potential of coffee as a cash crop, and began projects to rebuild the coffee industry. The French had introduced coffee to Vietnam during colonization, but the industry did not experience any large-scale growth before decolonization in the mid-twentieth century. The Vietnam War interrupted all coffee cultivation so that by 1973, the industry had sat

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Slobodian. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015, 101, and Christina Schwenkel, "Affective Solidarities and East German Reconstruction of Postwar Vietnam," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, edited by Quinn Slobodian. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015. 267-292.

<sup>637</sup> Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 345.

<sup>638</sup> Schaefer, "Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: The East German Approach, 1976-89," 96.

<sup>639</sup> Schaefer, "Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: The East German Approach, 1976-89," 100.

<sup>640</sup> Even here, Vietnam's relationship with the USSR was also "relatively distant and difficult," as Vietnam continuously proved its willingness to pursue its own policy initiatives. For more on this strained relationship, see Céline Marangé, "Alliance ou interdépendance inégale? Les relations politiques de l'Union soviétique avec le Vietnam de 1975 à 1991," *Outre-mers* 94, no.354 (2007); 147-171, here 148.

dormant for more than a decade. In 1975, Vietnam possessed approximately 20,000 ha of coffee fields, scattered throughout the country, and produced a meagre five to seven thousand t per year.<sup>641</sup> Doan Trieu Nhan, a young scientist and soil expert, led a team into the Vietnamese central highlands in 1975; the team found the region remarkably untouched by the war, and ideal for Robusta coffee cultivation.<sup>642</sup> During its Fourth Party Congress the following year, the Vietnamese Communist Party began an ambitious project to increase Vietnam's exports and trade relations with socialist countries. In particular, the regime's plan would focus on agricultural goods exports, including coffee.<sup>643</sup>

Almost two years later, the East Germans approached Vietnam in urgent need of large volumes of coffee. During Erich Honecker's state visit to Hanoi in December 1977, at a time when it was already clear East Germans were rejecting *Kaffee-Mix*, he spoke with Vietnamese leaders and signed a general treaty of friendship and economic cooperation. Both countries agreed to the goal of "intensify[ing] the export power of the socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) above all for such products in which the GDR is interested," which included tropical fruits, rubber, and of course, coffee.<sup>644</sup> A delegation to Vietnam in the first quarter of 1978 followed up on this agreement, and found an incredibly strained economic situation. The majority of Vietnamese coffee cultivation took place in the province of Dac Lac, with 11,200 hectares of fields, of which 8,000 belonged to state farms.<sup>645</sup> Saplings had to be painstakingly hand-picked

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<sup>641</sup> Doan Trieu Nhan, "Orientations of Vietnam Coffee Industry," Speech at International Coffee Conference May 17-19, 2001 in London, UK. [http://www.ico.org/event\\_pdfs/nhan.pdf](http://www.ico.org/event_pdfs/nhan.pdf); accessed 7 June 2017.

<sup>642</sup> Maja Wallengren, "The 'Mr. Coffee' of Vietnam," interview with Doan Trieu Nhan. *Tea & Coffee Trade Journal* (April 2013): 68-74, here 72.

<sup>643</sup> BStU MfS HA XVIII, Nr 8641, "Vietnam - Ökonomische Einschätzung zu den Beziehungen der SR Vietnam zur UdSSR und den anderen sozialistischen Ländern, den kapitalistischen Industrieländern und Entwicklungsländern." 1979.

<sup>644</sup> BArchB, DC 20/I/4/3998, "Beschluß über die Entwicklung der Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zwischen der DDR und Vietnam (Anlage: Konzeption für die Koordinierung der Volkswirtschaftspläne der DDR und der SRV für den Zeitraum 1981-1985)," 9 February 1978, 182-199, here 187.

<sup>645</sup> BArchB, DL 2 6113, "Wirtschaftsinformationen zur SR Vietnam," 24.03.1980, 123.

from the existing coffee trees to ensure the best growth potential. With no industrial infrastructure the work was labour intensive, and the province of Dac Lac was sparsely populated. The country had produced 12,500 t of coffee in the last harvest, which despite being 500 t above planned production, still represented quite a small volume overall. Yet the German delegation indicated that the soil in that province, containing basalt, “guaranteed a very high quality of coffee bean.”<sup>646</sup> Thus, while it was clear Vietnam could not provide immediate relief to East Germany’s coffee needs, developing the Vietnamese coffee industry revealed a potential long-term solution.

A number of issues prevented a start to any development projects in 1978. Especially difficult was the rising tension with Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge had been carrying out a bloody and devastating series of political purges, and ethnic cleansing – the latter targeting Vietnamese within Cambodia in particular. After two years of border skirmishes, Vietnamese forces invaded in December 1978, hoping to dislodge the Khmer Rouge, an action that, while successfully removing Pol Pot’s regime, nonetheless angered the Chinese. Immediately following the Vietnamese invasion, Chinese troops destroyed the rail connections between Northern Vietnam and China on 22 December 1978, which reduced Vietnam’s capacity to export goods.<sup>647</sup> The United States and many Western European countries also opposed the invasion, seeing it as a proxy for Soviet intervention.<sup>648</sup> These interventions also adversely affected Vietnam’s payment balance to its socialist allies. According to a report from the East German foreign ministry, by the end of 1978 Vietnam had only made goods deliveries totaling 92 million

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<sup>646</sup> BArchB, DL 2 6113, “Wirtschaftsinformationen zur SR Vietnam,” 24.03.1980, 123.

<sup>647</sup> BArchB, DL 2 MF 2790, “Einschätzung der Importbeziehungen der sozialistischen Länder zur sozialistischen Republic Vietnam,” 1979, 6.

<sup>648</sup> Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, 349.

marks of the 139 million Mark total deficit.<sup>649</sup> By the spring of 1979, Vietnam had fulfilled only 6.5 million Rubles worth of its outstanding 33.7 million Ruble contracts to the GDR.<sup>650</sup> To meet its export obligations, Vietnam required further assistance – and East Germany was willing to provide it, both to demonstrate continued solidarity with Vietnam amidst increasing animosity vis-à-vis China, and as a means to help secure a long-term supply of coffee.

Negotiations were renewed in 1980, and by August, the Council of Ministers (*Ministerrat*, MR) approved a final draft to be presented to the Vietnamese side in September. The MR also approved a credit to Vietnam totaling 45 million Marks from 1981-1985 to finance the development of an additional 10,000 ha, with repayment to take place over ten years beginning in 1986 according to the terms of the coffee agreement.<sup>651</sup> Traders adopted the language of socialist solidarity and East Germany's official development policy, writing that the coffee agreement served the interests of continued development and "strengthening of mutually beneficial economic cooperation."<sup>652</sup> Yet this language also masked East Germany's clear prioritization of its own coffee needs, and its subordination of Vietnamese interests. Even at this earliest stage, the draft outlined an extensive investment and development project in Vietnam. From 1981-1985, East Germany would provide equipment and materials for planting and fostering coffee plants, as well as fertilizers and pesticides to ensure a high yield of coffee plants

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<sup>649</sup> BArchB, DN1/23079, "Entwurf der Beschluß zum Ersuchen der Regierung der SR Vietnam zur Kreditierung des Passivsaldo der SR Vietnam im gegenseitigen Warenaustausch 1980 und zur Stundung der in den Jahren 1979 und 1980 fälligen Rückzahlungen für in Anspruch genommene Kredite," 7.5.1979, 1. The document uses the term "Mark" to discuss these amounts, but fails to indicate whether the authors meant Ostmark, Deutschmark, or Valutamark.

<sup>650</sup> BArchB, DL 2 MF 2790, "Einschätzung der Importbeziehungen der sozialistischen Länder zur sozialistischen Republic Vietnam," 1979, 6.

<sup>651</sup> BArchB, DC 20 I/4/4615 Bd.5, "Beschluss über den Entwurf des Abkommens zwischen der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Regierung der Sozialistischen Republik Vietnam über die Lieferung von Rohkaffee aus der Sozialistischen Republik Vietnam in die Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," 26 August 1980, 69.

<sup>652</sup> BArchB DE 1 56153, Memo from Lietz to Schürer, 10 March 1980. Appendix: "Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der SRV über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee, (Draft)" 1.

and a high quality of raw coffee.<sup>653</sup> The GDR would send specialists to train Vietnamese workers in the use of this equipment, as well as to help organize and supervise coffee cultivation. This investment represented a massive undertaking on the part of both countries. For the GDR, no less than eight different ministries and industries shared the various responsibilities of the project, including their subordinate departments and organizations. The chemical industry provided the fertilizers and pesticides that would help cultivate and safeguard Vietnamese and Laotian plantations; the ministry of science and technology coordinated training efforts for technical specialists, and the State Planning Commission and Foreign Trade Ministry coordinated the GDR's efforts.

In Vietnam, extensive measures would be necessary to carry out the expansion of the coffee industry. Planting new trees was not a simple process of planting seedlings. Due to the higher altitudes of Dac Lac, coffee tree seedlings had to be cultivated for at least seven months before they could be planted, in order to safeguard them against winds and other conditions after planting. Acquiring seeds from the world market was impossible due to existing trade embargoes against Vietnam, so seedlings had to be handpicked from those few trees that were still viable.<sup>654</sup> The Vietnamese also decided to concentrate on Robusta coffee, because it stood a greater chance of surviving the adverse climate conditions of the highlands. With a population density of 20 inhabitants per square kilometer, Dac Lac was a very thinly populated area. Although people began migrating to Dac Lac when the regime first initiated a coffee program after 1975, the regime also forcibly relocated a great number of families; by 1977, between

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<sup>653</sup> BArchB DE 1 56153, Memo from Lietz to Schürer, 10 March 1980. Appendix: "Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der SRV über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee, (Draft)" 2.

<sup>654</sup> Siegfried Kaulfuss, "Die Entwicklung des Kaffeeanbaus in Vietnam," in Schleicher, Ilona (Hg.) *Die DDR und Vietnam: Berichte, Erinnerungen, Fakten*. Berlin: Verband für Internationale Politik und Völkerrecht e.V., Schriften zur internationalen Politik. Band I u. II. 2011, 43.

60,000 and 75,000 people now lived in the region.<sup>655</sup> These new arrivals required housing, access to medicine, and educational materials. Coffee cultivation would also require the construction of irrigation systems, and because the region was not used for rice production, which was the main food crop of Vietnam, there was little industrial infrastructure in place. One of the largest aspects of this project was East German assistance in constructing a 12 megawatt power plant in the province to provide sufficient energy for production.<sup>656</sup> In short, the development project in Dac Lac required enormous investment, which the potential coffee deal with East Germany could provide.

In exchange for its assistance, the GDR placed specific expectations on Vietnam. First, Vietnam agreed to prepare and cultivate an additional 10,000 ha of fields by the end of the five-year plan. The agreement stipulated that as part of its commitment Vietnam would use the equipment and materials delivered under the agreement specifically for this field cultivation.<sup>657</sup> While it made practical sense to specify the use of GDR goods and services in the industry for which the agreement was signed, such specificity also meant Vietnam was not free to use East German support from the coffee agreement in other areas of its economy. By including this clause, East Germany asserted de facto control over its goods and machines for five years after delivery, to ensure a return on its investment in the form of increased coffee production (and delivery). Such concentration of its efforts in a single industry and region formed a trade practice not that dissimilar from those of western development aid during the 1960s, demonstrating that the urgent need for coffee could and did trump the GDR's commitment to its proclaimed

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<sup>655</sup> Siegfried Kaulfuss, "Die Entwicklung des Kaffeeanbaus in Vietnam," 43.

<sup>656</sup> Bernd Schaefer, "Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: the East German approach, 1976-1989," 108.

<sup>657</sup> BArchB, DC 20 I/4/4615 Bd.5, "Beschluss über den Entwurf des Abkommens zwischen der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Regierung der Sozialistischen Republik Vietnam über die Lieferung von Rohkaffee aus der Sozialistischen Republik Vietnam in die Deutschen Demokratischen Republik," 26 August 1980, 73.

ideological convictions regarding development policy. Vietnam was obliged to deliver coffee to East Germany in ten annual installments, beginning in 1986 and increasing by 700 t per year until 1991, after which payments would continue at 3000 t per year.

The agreement also defined the parameters for the delivered coffee, stipulating the minimum and preferred qualities for the finished product, as well as a specific bean size. Using words like “pure,” “tangy,” and “strong,” the Germans outlined the most essential, minimum qualities for coffee deliveries, establishing a baseline to which German experts would hold Vietnam in the years to come.<sup>658</sup> Despite defining quality based on categories of taste, the agreement also specifically indicated that the coffee imported from Vietnam would consist of Robusta, which possessed a bitterer, harsher taste than Arabica, regardless of the methods used in cultivation, harvesting, cleaning, roasting or brewing. Thus, German traders defined cup quality and taste independently of the type of bean cultivated, and focused more on production standards than on the quality of the raw material itself. Just as they had in Laos, German officials sought to implement socialist means of production which they believed ensured consistent and high-quality coffee yields.

Final negotiations for the coffee agreement took place in Hanoi starting in mid-September, concluding on 20 October 1980. Publicly, East German media sources praised the long-term agreement as a meaningful sign of continued mutual cooperation and solidarity between the two countries.<sup>659</sup> The *Berliner Zeitung* told readers that Vietnamese state farms hoped to triple existing coffee fields to 73,000 hectares – an exaggeration that anticipated the

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<sup>658</sup> BArchB DE 1 56153, Memo from Lietz to Schürer, 10 March 1980. Appendix: “Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der DDR und der Regierung der SRV über die Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee, (Draft)” 4.

<sup>659</sup> “DDR und Vietnam schließen langfristige Abkommen ab,” *Neues Deutschland*, 5 Nov 1980, 2; “Handelsabkommen DDR-SRV unterzeichnet,” *Neue Zeit*, 5 Nov 1980, 2.



potential of this agreement.<sup>660</sup> GDR journalists compared the coffee agreement to similar cooperation in Vietnam's textile industry to demonstrate the "mutual benefit" for both countries. Yet portrayals of the coffee agreement made it clear that the Germans were the driving force of modernization in Vietnam.<sup>661</sup> East German assistance allowed Vietnam to "productively utilize its large labour reserves," according to *Neues Deutschland*; the implication being that Vietnam lacked the ability to accomplish this task on its own.<sup>662</sup> This paternalism was no less present in the private correspondence of state officials. For instance, when ten thousand Vietnamese trainees arrived in Germany in March 1983, the state secretariat for vocational training lauded East German generosity and solidarity, saying all firms and enterprises of the GDR shared their "willingness to impart their experience and knowledge to the Vietnamese citizens."<sup>663</sup> However, their later claim that Vietnam's potential "depends on properly directing the use of these citizens" fit awkwardly with the spirit of mutual benefit and solidarity in the state's official messages. Hopes that providing this education would improve conditions and productivity in the coffee industry – thus increasing the volume of coffee exports to the GDR – was not incompatible with "mutual benefit:" after all, training Vietnamese workers formed part of the GDR's "payment" for Vietnamese coffee. Rather, it was German desire to control and define the parameters of cooperation that belied the GDR's commitment to the principles of mutual respect under which the coffee agreements had been signed. Indeed, the vocational official further

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<sup>660</sup> "Mehr Kaffee in Vietnam," *Berliner Zeitung*, 20 Jan 1981, 5.

<sup>661</sup> Young-Sun Hong argues the Germans used similar wording in their descriptions of construction projects in Zanzibar during the 1960s. Hong, *Cold War Germany*, 304.

<sup>662</sup> Hartmut Kohlmetz, "Von der Solidarität zum beiderseitigen Vorteil der Partner," *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 March 1981, 4.

<sup>663</sup> BArchB, DQ 4/3100, Staatssekretariat für Berufsbildung. Information über die Ausbildung 10.000 Bürger der SRV, März 1983, 1.

remarked that “it is in our interest that these cadres are primarily used for the objectives of our cooperation – such as in the coffee growing region.”<sup>664</sup>

East German investment was concentrated in the regions of Dac Lac and Gia Lai Cong Tum, where eighty to ninety per cent of export coffee was grown. Initial results did little to inspire East German confidence in the project, leading some officials to doubt Vietnam’s viability as a coffee producer. Despite climbing yields in the last years, wrote German observers in 1983, “Vietnam must still overcome large difficulties, because neither the yields per hectare, nor the quality of bean achieve the international standards of a coffee producer and exporter.”<sup>665</sup> The language with which East German officials expressed their dissatisfaction with Vietnamese performance mimicked the descriptions of Laos’ coffee industry. Though their report did not explicitly say it, these observers were almost certainly bemoaning the lack of mechanized forms of production in the industry, and the slow rate at which these methods were being introduced. Unless Vietnam fully adopted the principles of European socialist production methods, the country could never, in these Germans’ view, be considered a genuine coffee producing country – or more importantly, produce a coffee that met East German expectations. German planners called for the Vietnamese to “further increase their efforts to carry out their obligations toward the GDR.”<sup>666</sup>

By 1985, the coffee project finally witnessed some measurable success. Farmers on one state plantation, *Kaffeekombinat “Vietnam/DDR”*, doubled the annual rate at which they planted new fields, from 400 ha in 1981 to 900 ha in 1984, earning praise as “an exemplary farm for

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<sup>664</sup> BArchB, DQ 4/3100, Staatssekretariat für Berufsbildung. Information über die Ausbildung 10.000 Bürger der SRV, März 1983, 1.

<sup>665</sup> BArchB, DL 2/6405, Dokument 30976 MJ 490/84 (untitled report), 122-139, here 126.

<sup>666</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1003, “Information über den Stand der Realisierung mit der SRV getroffener Vereinbarungen zur Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Lebensmittelindustrie, insbesondere bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee, und Schlußfolgerungen für die weitere Arbeit,” Kommission des Politbüros des ZK der SED zur Koordinierung der ökonomischen, kulturellen und wissenschaftlich-technischen Beziehungen der DDR zu Ländern Asiens, Afrikas und des arabischen Raumes,” 4 Jan 1985, 22.

Vietnamese coffee growing.”<sup>667</sup> Yet German observers increasingly claimed responsibility for these developments. The use of German machines, fertilizers and pesticides was “increasingly better organized and controlled” by the end of the first five-year plan “with the assistance of GDR specialists.”<sup>668</sup> In another report from 1986, the Centre for Information and Documentation of Foreign Trade (*Zentrum für Information und Dokumentation der Außenwirtschaft*, ZIDA) claimed that assistance from the GDR over the previous years “puts Vietnam in the position to intensify production of important export goods” for socialist countries, especially the GDR.<sup>669</sup>

Providing aid for Vietnam’s coffee industry also served the SED’s goal of bolstering its domestic legitimacy. Since the 1960s, the SED had taken any and every opportunity it could to demonstrate political solidarity with the North Vietnamese communists, a tactic which provided dividends when western opinion turned against the war by the 1970s.<sup>670</sup> State media capitalized on the coffee agreement as the perfect opportunity to emphasize the GDR’s support for Vietnam. East German journalists couched the projects in the coffee regions in the language of progress and modernity, and privileged the GDR’s role in this process. In December 1986, *Berliner Zeitung* published an article about Vietnamese coffee under the unambiguous subtitle “Vietnam seeks to advance its underdeveloped regions with the help of socialist brother countries,” tying Vietnamese developments directly to aid from countries like the GDR. The article described Vietnam’s central highlands in romantic language, saying “a seemingly undeveloped, rolling

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<sup>667</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1003, “Information über den Stand der Realisierung mit der SRV getroffener Vereinbarungen zur Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Lebensmittelindustrie, insbesondere bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee, und Schlußfolgerungen für die weitere Arbeit,” 21.

<sup>668</sup> BArchB, DY 3023/1003, “Information über den Stand der Realisierung mit der SRV getroffener Vereinbarungen zur Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Lebensmittelindustrie, insbesondere bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee, und Schlußfolgerungen für die weitere Arbeit,” 21.

<sup>669</sup> BArchB, DL2/6424, “Information für den Außenhandel: SR Vietnam,” Zentrum für Information und Dokumentation der Außenwirtschaft (ZIDA), Nr.2/86. 1986, 414-429, here 419.

<sup>670</sup> As mentioned earlier, some of these dividends included some measure of domestic and international legitimacy for being “on the right side” of the Vietnam war. See Gerd Horten, “Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR Government and the ‘Vietnam Bonus’ of the Early 1970s,” 557-578.

forest landscape awaits visitors,” and small villages “emerge only after many kilometers down the few roads.” Over the previous five years, this “untouched” region had experienced “fundamental change” in the name of fulfilling “all goals of social development and economic construction.” In addition to the new fields and trees, the region also experienced a surge in population: 950,000 “former nomads” migrated to the highlands. The Provincial secretary of Vietnam’s communist party spoke of the changes as “revolutionary”, saying the “centuries-old traditions and customs of minorities are being turned inside out.” Yet the Vietnamese were “not capable of managing everything on their own,” claimed the newspaper, and “welcome assistance [...] was provided by the socialist brother nations,” such as the 1981 agreement and GDR assistance in founding a state coffee enterprise. “From almost nothing arose a company which now employs 7800 men and women,” wrote the *BZ* journalist, going on to forecast the planting of 5000 additional hectares of coffee fields by the middle of that year.<sup>671</sup> Thus, by framing the developments in Vietnam as part of a modernizing enterprise that relied on East German assistance, GDR state media adopted a language not at all dissimilar to the very colonial mindset its leaders so vehemently opposed.

The agreement with Vietnam was renewed in February 1986, and included an additional credit to Vietnam of 16 million Rubles, with a two per cent interest rate, in exchange for coffee deliveries totaling 48 kt over the next twenty years. East Germany would continue to send materials, machines and experts to train more Vietnamese farmers and managers, under the same conditions as the previous agreement. Between 1986 and 1990, Vietnam agreed to use GDR goods received through this additional credit to expand the coffee fields by another 5000

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<sup>671</sup> Bernd Findeis, “Kaffee aus dem Zentralen Hochland,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 12 December 1986, 4.

hectares.<sup>672</sup> Estimates for future production were promising, as German experts in Vietnam's central highlands reported improved yields on both state owned and private farms. Survival rates of newly planted trees had also reached 90 per cent in the previous year. Vietnamese officials also reportedly planned to increase acreage to 50,000 hectares by 1990.<sup>673</sup> Progress reports for the period 1986-1990 are scarce, but the protocol of a meeting in January 1988 on economic cooperation between both countries provides an overview of the progress made in Vietnam's coffee-growing regions.<sup>674</sup> Of the ten thousand hectares planned for the period, 7272 ha had been planted between 1986 and 1988, though less than half the planned volume of raw beans was delivered to the GDR in the same period.<sup>675</sup>

## *VI Conclusion*

East Germany's efforts to maintain coffee supply at home brought it into contact with the global South in ways it had not anticipated. The country's lack of hard currency did not preclude its ability to negotiate contracts despite the urgency with which it pursued coffee, but local interests often collided with German aims, necessitating a high degree of compromise and collaboration. To the extent that the search for coffee led to a number of trade agreements that did not reflect standard international practice, and to large scale development projects affecting

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<sup>672</sup> BArchB, DK1/28475, "Abkommen zwischen der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und der Regierung der Sozialistischen Republik Vietnam über die Fortführung der Zusammenarbeit bei der Produktion von Rohkaffee und die Lieferung von Rohkaffee aus der Sozialistischen Republik Vietnam in die Deutsche Demokratische Republik," 27 February 1986, 3.

<sup>673</sup> BArchB, DL 2/6220, "Information zur Wirtschaft der DDR im Monat April 1986," 64.

<sup>674</sup> BArchB, DQ 4/5303, "Protokoll der 14th Tagung des Ausschusses für wirtschaftliche und wissenschaftlich-technische Zusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und der SRV," 24 Januar 1988.

<sup>675</sup> BArchB, DQ 4/5303, "Protokoll der 14th Tagung des Ausschusses für wirtschaftliche und wissenschaftlich-technische Zusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und der SRV," 24 Januar 1988, 8.

thousands of lives, studying the coffee crisis supports recent calls for a transnational approach to historicizing the GDR.<sup>676</sup>

The coffee crisis and the trade deals to which it led illustrate the interconnectedness of consumer socialism, socialist modernity and GDR engagement in the developing world. Planners found themselves increasingly dependent on non-socialist producers, but also increasingly unable to pay for a commodity that had become a staple of East German diets. The regime's inability to provide coffee belied its claims of the supposed superiority of socialist modernity. On the other hand, demonstrating "Solidarity" with the global South could provide a counterweight to the incongruities of consumer supply, by showcasing the GDR's capacity to guide "young" nations and take a role in shaping the course of socialist development in the Global South. State portrayals of socialist aid and the coffee deals encouraged East Germans to take pride in the assistance the GDR provided developing countries. These messages encouraged Germans to internalize the idea that the GDR was in a position to offer this aid and guidance because it belonged to the modern industrial world. If the regime could not fully convince its population of Socialism's superiority over Capitalism in material prosperity, its humanitarian efforts could deliver this message another way.

In practice however, East Germany's attempts to gain coffee from developing countries were inundated with problems from the very outset. In Angola and Ethiopia, the GDR's urgent need for coffee led its officials to conclude hasty, ill-conceived trade deals before adequately calculating the GDR's ability to fulfill its end of the bargain. Consequently, when the GDR (predictably) proved unable to deliver its goods on time or according to the agreed specifications,

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<sup>676</sup> See Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany*; Michael Scholz, "East Germany's North European Policy Prior to International Recognition of the German Democratic Republic"; Gerd Horten, "Sailing in the Shadow of the Vietnam War"; Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism*; Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front*; Mike Dennis, "Working under Hammer and Sickle: Vietnamese Workers in the German Democratic Republic, 1980–89." *German Politics* 16, no.3 (2007): 339-357.

its partners grew tired of a deal which benefited their countries so little. For German officials who had envisioned these deals as a means to showcase the GDR's rightful place in the modern industrialized world, these failures proved enormously embarrassing, to say nothing of their shock that their modern state could find itself at the mercy of countries they deemed to be so underdeveloped.

In turn, the failures in Africa contributed to the form and scale of cooperation in Laos and Vietnam. While the agreements with Angola and Ethiopia collapsed, the GDR's need for coffee had not diminished, nor had its dependence on either the world market or on barter trade. Yet the Germans were not eager to find themselves in another situation in which the terms of trade could be so easily controlled by the coffee producing partner. Laos and Vietnam provided perfect opportunities: both countries had the potential to grow large volumes of coffee; both had socialist governments, and both were seeking to develop these industries to help rebuild their own economies. Simultaneously, both countries were still recovering from revolutions and war, and were largely isolated from the Western market due to American trade embargoes. Both were thus economically and politically weak enough to be more easily influenced than Angola or Ethiopia, and the GDR could use this situation to build a trade relationship that largely favoured its own interests and which afforded it a higher degree of control.

Ultimately, the East Germans prioritized their own interests in securing coffee, presuming to know how best to meet the needs of coffee growing nations. East German conceptions of the global South, though cast in the language of humanitarianism, mutual respect and mutual benefit, drew upon notions of civilizational difference, which relied on a fundamentally Eurocentric assumption of the superiority of European – and especially East German – socialism. In turn, these differences provided a language in which the GDR leadership

could privilege the GDR's relationship to the global South in terms of benevolent solidarity. For instance, state media may have presented a more hospitable and ostensibly humanitarian view of the Global South, but it nonetheless reinforced the idea of these nations being somehow proto-socialist, not quite as sophisticated as a supposedly more "pure" European socialism. three world paradigm. By characterizing each of its coffee partners as underdeveloped, junior nations struggling on the path to socialist development and progress, the GDR recast older European ideas about the "natural" division between the global North and South. Though far less overt, the resulting hierarchy reproduced a racial understanding of the division between East Germany and its coffee partners.



## **Conclusion: The Taste that Remained: Trade during the 1980s and German Reunification**

Throughout the 1980s, industry officials continued to explore more ways to save money and stretch supply. Planners adopted a new roasting method in 1982 (roasting beans in steam at temperatures of 230 to 360 degrees Celsius) that sped up the production process, and saved millions of Valutamark.<sup>677</sup> Overall however, most innovations produced poor to middling results in terms of improving the quality of East German coffee. Although adaptations within the industry did not meet with overwhelming success, one must remember that there was still enough coffee available, and the quality was at least acceptable to most.<sup>678</sup> This was especially true, of course, in the capital, where efforts to maintain supply always carried significant political weight. In preparation for the GDR's 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations in 1984, for instance, the Berlin Retailer Association reported sufficient volume of roasted coffee, Malzkaffee and other coffee products in August.<sup>679</sup> As well, by the 1980s, East German consumers had more options in terms of coffee varieties: specifically, after the regime made it legal to hold Western currency, East Germans were able to finally shop at specialty Intershop and Delikat stores, where they could purchase Western coffee brands.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum: Kaffeekonsum in beiden deutschen Staaten* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 283.

<sup>678</sup> Internal reports from the early 1980s indicate planned production and supply of coffee managed to meet its target levels. See for instance Hans Joachim Rüscher's remark that production for the first quarter of 1981 had met 105% of planned fulfillment, though he urged increases to materials in order to meet the demand during the season of Jugendweihe and Easter.

<sup>679</sup> BArchB, DY 30/17956, Verband der Konsumgenossenschaften, "Wesentliche Ergebnisse der Konsumgenossenschaften bei der Durchsetzung der Beschlüsse der 7. Tagung des ZK der SED in Vorbereitung des 35. Jahrestages der Gründung der DDR." 10 August 1984.

<sup>680</sup> The Intershop retail store was introduced in 1958 as a means to bring western currency into the GDR's control, these shops functioned similarly to 'duty free shops' in the West, and were primarily designed for western tourists. These stores only accepted western currency in exchange for goods. After 1974, the regime decriminalized the possession of western currency, allowing East Germans to shop for these goods. See Sigmund, *Genuss*, 273. Delikat stores opened in 1966, specifically aimed at offering specialty food items of East German production and some foreign products, all of which were difficult to find elsewhere. Peter Hübner, "Reformen in der DDR der Sechziger Jahre. Konsum- und Sozialpolitik." In: *Sozialistische Wirtschaftsreformen. Tschechoslowakei und DDR im Vergleich*, ed. Christoph Boyer. Studien zur europäischen Rechtsgeschichte, no. 210. (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006): 501–539, here 527.

Improved access to the products these stores offered, however, did not necessarily translate into increased purchases of Western brands. Monika Sigmund points out that for the most part, “the poor quality of the coffee in grocery stores did not drive consumers into the specialty shops.” The high prices in Delikat, argues Sigmund, drew few customers, and “primarily, East Germans consumed the most favourable coffee from the brands available in general retail.”<sup>681</sup> Customers did increase the volume of coffee they purchased at Delikat over the course of the decade, which reached 4.6 per cent of total coffee consumption by 1988. East Germans certainly felt Western Coffee brands offered a better taste experience, but they remained practical in their consumer choices until economic circumstances made their preferences more affordable.

Despite the disruption in coffee supply in the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, little changed in the way coffee drinking was promoted or discussed in official media or parlance. The November 1986 issue of the advice magazine *Guter Rat* included a piece on “Coffee Specialties,” which featured an image of a manual coffee grinder encased in a wooden box with decorated, porcelain drawers. Reminding readers of the first coffee houses in 16th Century Constantinople, the article suggested that the “beloved, spirit-stimulating effect” of the drink no doubt contributed to these establishments’ nickname “Schools of wisdom.” East Germans could create their own “schools of wisdom” in their very homes, as after a “sumptuous meal” their Christmas guests “would also be grateful” for a “pick me up. And perhaps it should be a special kind of coffee.” The article proceeded to list a number of international recipes, from Irish and Turkish coffees, to “Kaffee Kopenhagen” and “Café hollandaise.”

The article followed a pattern quite similar to coffee portrayals of previous decades, by depicting a romanticized version of the past – as well as the “Orient” – linking it with the present

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<sup>681</sup> Sigmund. *Genuss als Politikum*, 273.

day, and offering options for East Germans to enjoy their coffee in new, exciting and creative ways. By trying out these various coffee specialties, East Germans were in effect inviting the world into their dining rooms. When they offered these specialties to their guests, East Germans reinforced the traditions and customs of hosting and hospitality, partaking in – indeed, perpetuating – the old customs and traditions surrounding coffee drinking, in turn continuing the process of ‘democratizing coffee’ so apparent in GDR media during previous decades. Not only was the media still promoting the same themes and rhetoric about coffee, it still encouraged East Germans to enjoy coffee as part of their everyday experience.

In fact, planning officials noted that in general, coffee consumption was increasing in the early 1980s, and projected that coffee drinking would grow by 112 – 115 per cent by 1990.<sup>682</sup> Given these projections, trade officials also monitored world coffee prices, and sought new avenues to purchase raw beans. After the disastrous frost of 1975, world coffee prices only dropped in 1980, and remained around 120 – 140 US cents per pound for the early half of the decade.<sup>683</sup> During this period of relatively stable prices, East Germany once again established trade agreements with Brazil, Colombia, Cameroon, Uganda, Costa Rica and other producing nations for volumes of raw coffee totaling 63,077 t. In fact, this list of trading partners included both Angola and Ethiopia, though as discussed earlier, trade with these countries proceeded on the basis of hard currency payments, not goods exchange.

**Table 4.0:** Raw Coffee Imports 1986 (Volume = t, Value = Thousand Valutamark)

Country	Planned Import 1986		Contracts		Difference	
	Volume	Value	Volume	Value	Volume	Value
Contract Currency						

<sup>682</sup> SAPMO-BArchB, DY 30/17956, Verband der Konsumgenossenschaften, „Die Aufgaben der Konsumgenossenschaften der DDR im nächsten Perspektivzeitraum.“ Berlin, 1.Nov.1984.

<sup>683</sup> Pablo Dubois, “The International Coffee Organization 1963-2013: 50 Years Serving the World Coffee Community,” available at [http://www.ico.org/icohistory\\_e.asp](http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp); accessed 22 May 2017. 12.

Angola	7915	86,934	9300	90,065	+ 1385	+ 3130
Brazil	5243	45,823	5100	44,765	./ 143	./ 1058
Uganda	1915	10,853	950	9471	./ 965	./ 1382
Ethiopia	1000	17,247	1000	17,250	--	--
Nicaragua	500	15,186	500	15,196	--	--
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,573</b>	<b>176,053</b>	<b>16,850</b>	<b>176,747</b>	<b>+ 277</b>	<b>+ 694</b>
<b>Hard Currency</b>						
Mexico	2160	16,866	--	--	./ 2160	./ 16,866
Colombia	8000	115,883	12,000	169,403	+ 4000	+ 53,520
Brazil	13,800	186,512	15,104	202,644	+ 1469	+ 21,376
Costa Rica	5001	63,756	4451	57,220	./ 550	./ 6536
Indonesia	25	157	25	157	--	--
Kenya	330	2860	330	2860	--	--
Ivory Coast	2000	19,242	2000	19,242	--	--
Cameroon	4044	36,633	4044	41,189	--	+ 4556
Rest of America	2089	49,636	--	--	./ 2089	./ 49,636
Rest of Africa	947	7102	--	--	./ 947	./ 7102
<b>Total</b>	<b>38,396</b>	<b>498,647</b>	<b>38,119</b>	<b>497,955</b>	<b>./ 277</b>	<b>./ 692</b>
Fed. Rep. Germany	8108	56,100	8108	56,100	--	--
Non- Socialist Economy	63,077	730,800	63,077	730,802	--	--

*Source:* BArchB, DL 2/14853, Bd.3, Anlage zum Schreiben vom 11.11.1986.

Neither Laos nor Vietnam appeared on this list, because the coffee trees in each country were only beginning to mature and produce sufficient beans for export at the time. Under the terms of the respective contracts, Laos and Vietnam were only supposed to begin coffee deliveries to the GDR in 1986. Nonetheless, the existing contracts showed a clear dominance of western trading partners. In practical terms, the return to these sources was simply an effect of reduced prices, but East Germany did not ‘switch’ its coffee sources in 1986; it did not abandon the projects with either Laos or Vietnam when world coffee prices declined.

For East German planners and traders, supply remained a matter of maintaining a carefully measured balance between two priorities: domestic coffee provisioning, and the GDR’s reputation among its allies. Nonetheless, the East Germans kept close tabs on the progress of

their development projects in Laos and Vietnam, and were skeptical – if not concerned – about their partners’ abilities to fulfill the agreed upon deliveries of coffee. For instance, reports in June 1986 suggested that the planned imports of coffee from both Laos and Vietnam in 1987 were “endangered,” while another report in July indicated that Laos had only fulfilled 50 per cent of its deliveries that year.<sup>684</sup> Meanwhile, Angola experienced a particularly bad harvest in 1986, and harvested a total of only 20 kt of raw beans.<sup>685</sup> Adding to these troubles was an apparent reduction in Angola’s income that year from oil exports, necessitating a higher price for its cash crops.<sup>686</sup> In light of such challenges, East Germany’s continued observation of the world coffee market indicates its pragmatism in trade policy: while it remained committed to its trade and development contracts with coffee producing countries in the global South, it also balanced this loyalty with attempts to secure cheaper sources wherever it could. In effect, the GDR maintained its connections and partnerships with coffee producing countries in the developing world, but would not do so at the expense of missing opportunities to secure coffee more affordably elsewhere. Such behavior reveals the GDR’s capacity to act in rather enterprising ways in order to achieve its own ambitions in a global economy and community of nations.

One area of special focus in the 1980s was the GDR’s surveillance of trends at the International Coffee Organization (ICO), the international body responsible for determining world coffee prices, as well as global import/export quotas for member and non-member states.

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<sup>684</sup> On Vietnamese and Laotian deliveries being ‘endangered’, see BArchB, DL 2/14853, Bd.3, Brief von Albrecht an Stellvertreter des Ministers für Außenhandel Genossen Steyer, Berlin, den 4.Juni 1986; on Laos deliveries reaching only 50 percent fulfillment, see BArchB, DL 2/14853, Bd.3, „zu Rohkaffee SW 1986.“ hand written note dated 1.7.86, signature illegible. State officials also monitored production levels and prices in other developing countries such as Angola, Cambodia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Madagascar, etc., hoping to import more from countries, but seemed to have had limited success in this regard. See BArchB, DL 2/14853, Bd.3, Brief von Dr Fenske an Staatssekretär der SPK Dr Grabley, „betf. Import von Kaffee aus dem NSw – Plan 1986,“ 4 Sept 1986.

<sup>685</sup> BArchB, DL 2/14853, Bd.3, Vermerk für Genossen Minister Dr Beil, „Import von Rohkaffee aus der VR Angola,“ 27.11.1986.

<sup>686</sup> BArchB, DL 2/14853, Bd.3, Vermerk für Genossen Minister Dr Beil, „Import von Rohkaffee aus der VR Angola,“ 27.11.1986.

As discussed in the previous chapter, East Germany was not a signatory to the International Coffee Agreement – the principal document through which the ICO exercised its authority – and decisions about quotas for non-member states directly affected the GDR’s capacity to acquire raw beans. In fact, the quota system effectively created a two-tier coffee market, as non-member nations of the International Coffee Organization like the GDR paid considerably higher prices for coffee than member states, and faced limits on the volumes they could purchase.<sup>687</sup> For instance, one official from the East German import and export firm *Genussmittel* noted that the GDR had paid roughly 40 per cent higher prices for raw coffee than ICO member states since 1978.<sup>688</sup> In January 1986, world coffee prices climbed to \$2.50 USD per pound, which was alarmingly close to the prices of the crisis years – for instance \$3.56 USD per pound in 1977. The price remained high well into February, at which point the ICO suspended import and export quotas, because the price had remained above \$1.50 USD per pound for a period of more than 45 days, which was the official threshold for the quota system, introduced in the 1983 ICA.<sup>689</sup>

Despite the higher prices for coffee, the East Germans were actually excited about these developments, because they saw an opportunity they could exploit. Officials in the foreign trade ministry (MfA) observed in January that “this [probability of suspension] means that the member/nonmember price question is no longer important, and there is only one market and one selling price.”<sup>690</sup> Thus, even though prices were higher than the GDR would have preferred, the removal of the quotas means that there were no limits to the volume of coffee East Germany could purchase from ICO member nations. The suspension also meant the coffee market was

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<sup>687</sup> Pablo Dubois, “The International Coffee Organization 1963-2013: 50 Years Serving the World Coffee Community,” available at [http://www.ico.org/icohistory\\_e.asp](http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp); accessed 22 May 2017. 12.

<sup>688</sup> BArchB, DL 2/14853, Bd.3, Generaldirektor Baum, Genussmittel Import/Export, „Notiz zur Problematik Internationales Kaffee-Abkommen (ICO), 30. Dezember 1985. 2

<sup>689</sup> “History,” The International Coffee Organization. [http://www.ico.org/icohistory\\_e.asp](http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp); accessed 04/04/2017.

<sup>690</sup> BArchB, DL2/14853 Bd.3, Brief von Alexander Schalck an Mittag, 14.1.1986; BArchB, DL2/14853 Bd.3, Brief von Krolowski an Bastian, Schalck, AHB General director, DAF Naka, AHF Naka, 3 Jan 1986.

temporarily ‘levelled’ because everyone – member and nonmember states alike – all had to pay the higher price. The suspension remained in effect until the end of 1986, and during that time, East German officials were hopeful of potential structural changes to the global coffee market. In September for instance, the MfA reported on a new ICO resolution that encouraged non-member nations to join “this instrument of economic and political cooperation,” in consultation with the executive director of the ICO.<sup>691</sup> While the accuracy of the MfA’s claims remain uncertain, it is clear that East German officials recognized a potential opportunity for entry into this body.

During the renegotiations of the International Coffee Agreement in April 1988, East German trade officials monitored and reported on the proceedings, noting the importance of these negotiations, as the existing Agreement would expire in September 1989. The negotiations were plagued by disagreements between members of the ruling Coffee Council, specifically over the quota system, and market share between large and small producing countries. The largest producing countries, such as Brazil, wanted very little to change with regard to the price and quota system, and sought a simple extension of the 1983 agreement. Meanwhile, smaller producing nations – in particular those growing milder Arabicas which were gaining popularity, felt disadvantaged by the quota system because the quotas were adjusted too slowly to keep up with these shifts in demand.<sup>692</sup> The impasse between these producing nations led to the formation of a subcommittee to research the situation and provide recommendations over the rest of 1988 and 1989. From the records of the East Germans’ observations, it is clear the GDR sought to use the breakdowns in ICO negotiations to secure more – and better – coffee for its own people, at prices it could afford. East Germany had a unique opportunity, urged one trade representative, to

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<sup>691</sup> BArchB, DL 2/14853, Bd.3, Telegram von Min for Aussenhandel abt Internaintoal Organisations an Abt LLV Gen. Hoyer, 24 Sept. 1986.

<sup>692</sup> Pablo Dubois, “The International Coffee Organization 1963-2013: 50 Years Serving the World Coffee Community,” available at [http://www.ico.org/icohistory\\_e.asp](http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp); accessed 22 May 2017, 13.

take advantage of the delay in negotiations and perhaps even influence their outcome. Since membership on the newly formed subcommittee was to be open to all countries, he suggested, “it is possible that the GDR will be invited by the President of the Council to take part in the consultation, especially since the GDR is the largest non-member importer.”<sup>693</sup>

By July 1989, the ICO still had not settled on terms for a new agreement, and the council realized time had nearly run out to renew the agreement by the 1 October deadline. Under pressure, the council approved a resolution to extend the 1983 agreement until 1991, but its quota and control provisions were temporarily suspended.<sup>694</sup> In the GDR meanwhile, celebrating the council’s decision proved premature, for if time had run out for the ICO, by the fall of 1989 it was growing ever shorter for East Germany’s rulers. Despite gradual political reform throughout most of East Central Europe in the wake of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, the SED opted to tighten its grip, increasing political arrests and clamping down on travel. Political tensions at home surrounding living standards, housing shortages, a desire for political freedom and transparency, and freedom of travel outside the GDR’s borders, reached a peak over the summer and into the Fall of 1989, as thousands of East Germans left the GDR and travelled to neighbouring countries in the Eastern bloc. Adding to this dilemma was Moscow’s declaration that it would not continue to lend further military support to prop up the GDR so long as the SED refused to follow the political reforms taking place in the USSR and Eastern bloc.

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<sup>693</sup> BArchB, DL 2/14853, BD.3, Brief von Baum an Bastian, 16 Mai 1988.

<sup>694</sup> Additionally, all stock verification procedures were also suspended until further notice, and controls on production policies were loosened. “History,” The International Coffee Organization. [http://www.ico.org/icohistory\\_e.asp](http://www.ico.org/icohistory_e.asp); accessed 04/04/2017. Naturally, East Germany monitored these developments; the Stasi intercepted a memo from VEB NaKa Halle to the MBL July 6, 1989, which included a clipping from the West German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from July 3 1989 about the ICO negotiations and world coffee situation. In this article, SZ reported on the breakdown in negotiations in London, and wrote “the main problem is, from the consumers' point of view, the division of the market: while the 24 consumer countries, which are members of the International Coffee Organization ICO, are paying raw coffee prices, as the agreement provides, consumers outside the ICO, mainly in the Eastern bloc, receive raw coffee with price discounts up to 50 percent.” „Thema des Tages: Politischer Kaffee” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 Juli 1989. BStU MfS HA XVIII 18093 bd.1. „Brief von VEB NaKa Halle an MBL,” 6 Juli 1989.



Finally relenting, the SED announced a relaxation of its restrictions on travel to the West at a press conference on 9 November 1989. During the conference, Politburo spokesperson Günther Schabowski was asked when the changes would take place; unprepared for the question on live television, Schabowski flipped his cue card, but when he could find no more information, he hastily answered with the (now infamous) words, “immediately, without delay!” Rushing to the border crossings, thousands of Berliners confronted border guards with the news, and demanded access to the West. Without instruction or direction, the border guards astonishingly complied with the citizens’ demands, opening the wall and beginning the process of the GDR’s end.

Historians have noted that upon arriving in the West, East Germans tended to prioritize two things: visits to friends and family, and trips to Western stores, in particular grocery stores, finally free and able to obtain the consumer goods for which they had so longed.<sup>695</sup> Eight months later, after the currency union of 1 July 1990, East Germans queued up for hours, encircling state banks, to exchange their now defunct *Aluchips* (the derogatory name for East German marks, which were made of aluminum) for West German *Deutschmarks* (DM). Armed with this new currency, East Germans felt they had full and permanent access to a world of consumer opportunity. As Milena Veenis notes, for many East Germans, “the DM was their entrance ticket to the western world. [...] With the arrival of the DM, the East German material landscape changed at lightning speed.”<sup>696</sup> In other words, a great deal of euphoria surrounded this period,

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<sup>695</sup> See Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Kaminsky, *Kleine Konsumgeschichte*; Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1999); Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand: East Germany Between Productivism and Consumerism, 1948-1961* (Harvard University Press, 2005); Milena Veenis, *Material Fantasies: Expectations of the Western Consumer World among East Germans* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

<sup>696</sup> Veenis. *Material Fantasies*, 191.

and many East Germans raced to purchase goods previously inaccessible to them, coffee included.

From what we know about those first months, it appears there was an initial rejection by East Germans of their own brands. When the East and West German economies merged, East German consumer goods firms (not just the coffee roasters) found themselves at a considerable disadvantage, forced now to compete in an open market where consumer choice put them at odds with companies in the West with far more financial and material resources. After the currency union, Western brands appeared in East German stores at prices well below those of *Rondo*, *Mona* and other GDR brands, making it nearly impossible for East German products to compete with goods which the population deemed qualitatively ‘better.’<sup>697</sup>

East Germany’s political collapse, and subsequent absorption into West Germany, also sparked concerns within the global coffee market. From 1986 onward, Vietnam exported about five thousand tons of coffee beans to the GDR, and by 1989 the Kombinat Viet-Duc plantation had grown in size from 600 to 8000 hectares, becoming the largest coffee plantation in the country.<sup>698</sup> During the 1990s, Vietnam “surged from nowhere” to become the world’s second largest producer of Robusta coffee next to Brazil, jumping from 1.2 per cent of world production in 1989 to 12.4 per cent by the turn of the Century.<sup>699</sup> Many researchers trace this explosion back to the regime’s economic reforms of 1986, but Vietnam’s rise as a coffee producer can only be understood properly if one considers as well the cooperative projects between Vietnam and

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<sup>697</sup> Sigmund. *Genuss als Politikum*. 286.

<sup>698</sup> Bernd Schaefer, “Socialist Modernization in Vietnam: The East Germany Approach, 1976-89,” in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 108.

<sup>699</sup> Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee* (Basic Books, 2010), 363; Luong, Q. and L.W. Tauer. 2006. “A Real Options Analysis of Coffee Planting in Vietnam.” *Agricultural Economics* 35, no.49 (Nov 2006): 57. Cited in: Sylvie Doutriaux, Charles Geisler, and Gerald Shively, “Competing for Coffee Space: Development-Induced Displacement in the Central Highlands of Vietnam,” *Rural Sociology* 73, no.4 (2008): 528–554 (here 528).

socialist partners like the GDR.<sup>700</sup> According to the preamble of the 1991 coffee agreement, the ICO feared the impact on the world coffee market of East Germany's cooperative partnerships with the developing world – in particular the coffee project in Vietnam. These projects had introduced new competitors into the global coffee market, and the ICO felt the long-term implications of these developments were too uncertain. Vietnam, which was already showing signs of rapid growth in terms of coffee production, was not a member of the ICO, and thus lay outside the organization's purview (and therefore, control). In recent years, argued the council, Vietnamese coffee exports to the GDR had "been priced well above the average world market level," suggesting the ICO suspected inflationary pricing in Vietnam. Since the GDR's trade status with Vietnam as a preferred partner expired in 1990, and in any event was based on a barter system, the ICO argued "there is no real way to determine what the value of Vietnamese coffee beans really is as yet."<sup>701</sup> Thus, it would be difficult for the ICO to effectively formulate policy and strategies to cope with the emergence of these new coffee markets, especially if major producers like Brazil (which held a majority interest in the ICO) would now have to compete with new producing countries.

A second concern was the fact that the collapse of communism also meant the entry into the market of new consumers who had hitherto been excluded by ICO policies. East Germany's

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<sup>700</sup> Doutriaux et al, 536. Christina Schwenkel makes this same argument in an article about GDR-Vietnam worker exchange programs. See her "Rethinking Asian Mobilities: Socialist Migration and Post-Socialist Repatriation of Vietnamese Contract Workers in East Germany," *Critical Asian Studies* 46, no.2 (2014): 235-258. In 2011, the Federal Republic of Germany celebrated the "Year of Vietnam", commemorating 35 years of cooperation between their country and Vietnam. Yet this periodization ignored the fact that North Vietnam and East Germany had enjoyed close relations since the former's declaration of independence in 1945. Ilona Schleicher published a collection of essays that same year, which sought to challenge the "the Year of Vietnam" Schleicher argued that the periodization of Germany and Vietnam's relationship ignored the relationship that had existed between East Germany and North Vietnam as early as 1950. The publication's ostensible goal of historicizing the GDR remains an important task for students of East German history. Ilona Schleicher, *Die DDR und Vietnam: Berichte, Erinnerungen, Fakten* (Berlin: Verband für Internationale Politik und Völkerrecht e.V., Schriften zur internationalen Politik. Band I u. II. 2011).

<sup>701</sup> Brandt, Hartmut, *The formulation of a new international coffee agreement* (Berlin : German Development Institute (GDI), 1991), 97.

incorporation into the Federal Republic was particularly troubling because the GDR “[brought] with it 8 – 10% of the non-capitalist coffee trade into the market.”<sup>702</sup> Adding so many consumers to the market – as well as new member states to the ICO – would result in both increased demand for coffee and a potential imbalance within the ICO between producing and consuming members. In other words, the addition of millions of new consumers into the coffee market would place new pressures on the ICO, and potentially further destabilize negotiations over the quota system, which had already caused such grief over the previous three years.

Although East German products struggled to attract enough customers to survive in the years immediately following the regime’s collapse, the initial dominance of Western goods did not signal the permanent disappearance of Eastern brands. In the years following German reunification, observers noted the sudden reappearance in Germany of many East German cultural artifacts, specifically consumer goods like foodstuffs, toys, and some electronics. Combined, these artifacts constitute part of a phenomenon referred to as *Ostalgie*, a play on the concept of nostalgia and ‘Ost’, the German word for East.<sup>703</sup> Scholars from multiple disciplines have been fascinated by this occurrence, and in general, have come to understand the return of these products as a response to widespread feelings of political disenchantment and social isolation in the new Federal Republic – an emotional longing for identifying markers of a life many former East Germans now feel was stripped away.<sup>704</sup> Some critics, including historians, have suggested *Ostalgie* is an unfortunate misrepresentation and mismemory of the past, as it

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<sup>702</sup> Hartmut. *The formulation of a new international coffee agreement*, 97.

<sup>703</sup> Ulrich Becker, Horst Becker, and Walter Ruhland, *Zwischen Angst und Aufbruch: Das Lebensgefühl der Deutschen in Ost und West nach der Wiedervereinigung* (Düsseldorf, 1992); Christian von Ditfurth, *Ostalgie oder linke Alternative: Meine Reise durch die PDS* (Cologne, 1998). Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 228-230.

<sup>704</sup> Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Transition and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (Yale University Press, 2008); Milena Veenis, *Material Fantasies: Expectations of the Western Consumer World among East Germans* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

glosses over the oppressive nature of the regime in favour of kitschy plastic cutlery and outdated radios.<sup>705</sup> As Paul Betts notes however, these consumer goods act as “historical markers of socialist experience and identity” that point to “a new nostalgia among ex-GDR citizens for the relics of their lost socialist world, be they everyday utensils, home furnishings, or pop culture memorabilia.” *Ostalgie*, he argues, is “more than simply an escapist defense mechanism against the chaos and disenchantment of Reunification itself.” Rather, he sees it as “part and parcel of the changing nature of East German historical consciousness since that revolutionary autumn.”<sup>706</sup> In other words, *Ostalgie* is less a longing for a specific past, less a misremembered reality, and has more to do with understanding a post-socialist world. For many, *Ostalgie* also acts as defense against the condescending view of many West Germans that “Ossies” were poor, or needed rescuing from a form of imprisonment.<sup>707</sup>

Coffee is present in this phenomenon, as well. On Karl-Marx Allee lies a café with golden yellow signage, which offers, among other things, a window to the past. “Experience history first hand alongside coffee and cake,” reads the tagline of the Café’s website, “We invite you on a journey into the past, from the emergence of Karl-Marx Allee to our present day café.”<sup>708</sup> Opened in 1953 under the name “Milchtrinkhalle,” Café Sibylle was one of the first establishments among the newly constructed (and exclusive) apartment complexes on Stalinallee.<sup>709</sup> Today, the café celebrates this heritage, encouraging its guests not only to take a step into the past, but into the GDR, featuring a small museum, and even an original wall

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<sup>705</sup> Eli Rubin notes this trend among historians in the introduction to *Synthetic Socialism*.

<sup>706</sup> Paul Betts, “The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture,” *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 3 (September 2000): 731-765, here 734.

<sup>707</sup> “Ossie” is a slang term used by Western Germans to refer to Germans living in the former GDR territories. East Germans likewise use the slang “Wessies” to describe their western counterparts. Each of these terms carries with it a number of prejudices and misconceptions. For an engaging discussion of these divided identities, see Steve Crawshaw, *Easier Fatherland: Germany and the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004).

<sup>708</sup> Tagline, Homepage, Café-Sibylle. <http://www.cafe-sibylle.de/>; accessed 27 April 2017.

<sup>709</sup> It was also located close to Espresso Hungaria, mentioned in chapter one.

painting. Another example of this phenomenon appears in Wolfgang Becker's 2003 film *Good Bye, Lenin!*, in which protagonist Alex tries to save his mother from mental shock by re-producing the GDR through consumer goods like *Mocca-Fix* coffee. Indeed brands such as *Mona* and *Rondo* are still produced by the firm Rostfein, and remain available at grocery store chains throughout Germany to this day.<sup>710</sup> Rostfein even sells its products online.<sup>711</sup> Whether or not present day packages of GDR coffee labels offer an accurate approximation of the original brands, their continued presence on store shelves indicates they attract a sufficiently frequent patronage to justify their production. These nostalgic nods to coffee by no means suggest that East German brands overcame the odds of economic pressures during reunification to emerge vindicated. What they may represent, however, is the 'taste that remained' – the association between specific memories and the foods, aromas and tastes that conjure them. Further, they represent the lingering legacy of a bygone state, a reminder of more than merely its existence, but of its global reach and impact.

### *East German culture and the politics of globalization*

Originally, this project stemmed from a desire to understand how it was that coffee could have been at the center of a national economic and consumer crisis in the GDR in the late 1970s. At first, coffee seemed hardly worthy of such a dramatic episode. While one could easily understand customer dissatisfaction about changes to the coffee supply, given the other struggles facing the regime at the time, from the second oil crisis to increasing indebtedness to the west,

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<sup>710</sup> Roger Cook, "25 August 1992: Ostalgic Provides Pushback against Western Views on the East German Collapse," in *A New History of German Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Kapczynski and Michael D. Richardson (Camden House, 2014), 524-529, here 525. Also, see Rostfein's product listings on its website: <https://www.roestfein.de/unsere-produkte/#3>; accessed 2 May 2017.

<sup>711</sup> For instance, global customers can place an order for full bags of Rondo and Mona on amazon. See <https://www.amazon.de/gp/huc/view.html?ie=UTF8&newItems=C11D7BA53RRD9%2C1>; accessed 2 May 2017.

coffee would seem an unlikely topic for intense discussion at the highest levels of government. In searching for the antecedents of this event, by examining how coffee came to mean so much to so many people, I came to realize that in the GDR, coffee was anything but mundane, and that the crisis in fact reflected the broader frustration of many East Germans with tired rhetoric of achieving a better life under socialism, when the GDR's material culture continued to lag behind the regime's own vision of a modern socialist utopia. It was precisely because coffee was one of life's 'little everyday pleasures' that both the substance and the act of its consumption held such cultural and political meaning for East Germans – and in turn, that cultural resonance made coffee supply a highly contentious political issue with which the regime had to grapple. I have argued that coffee's cultural resonance stemmed from the culmination of a number of factors. Germans' existing coffee drinking habits stretched back to the eighteenth century, and for workers, coffee became especially important in the nineteenth century. The shortages of raw beans resulting from world war, economic strife, a National Socialist war economy and another (disastrous) world war left most Germans largely deprived of this beloved drink for three decades, heightening East Germans' sensitivity to the benefits that access to coffee could bestow, including warmth, comfort, and social interaction.

Coffee's return to everyday life, which the regime intended to coincide with its plans to overtake Western consumption through the GDR's own "consumer turn" in 1958, was heralded as a clear and present sign that living standards were improving, and that Socialism was providing a lifestyle every bit as rewarding as that found across the border. Moreover, from the GDR's claims to pursuing ethical trade practices with formerly colonized producing countries, to making coffee available for all workers, Socialism had allegedly 'democratized' coffee, at home and abroad. Especially once the regime closed the border in 1961, planners needed to convince

the population of Socialism's capacity to fulfill citizens' material desires, and what better way to do so than to ensure every East German had a cup of coffee at their breakfast table every morning? Planners not only sought to fulfill desire; through the imagery and rhetoric surrounding coffee drinking, the regime's official message in fact fostered and encouraged that desire, in effect tying its own political legitimacy to its ability to follow through on the promises it made to its population. Moreover, the official messages perpetuated and validated certain cultural ideas surrounding coffee drinking – leisure, rest, tradition and hospitality – some of which could challenge the regime's sole claims to defining what consumer socialism – or later, “real existing socialism” – could mean.

My focus on the material, print and social cultures surrounding East German coffee drinking also helps to re-insert the GDR into a broader European history. The presence of similar discussions in both East and West about the importance for public health of balancing work and leisure demonstrates the extent to which European societies on both sides of the Iron Curtain struggled with the same kinds of issues while adapting to rapid economic, social and cultural changes in the second half of the twentieth century. The fact that societies throughout Europe faced similar challenges brings into further question the historiographical separation of eastern and western Europe. Nonetheless, these questions' very presence indicates a certain tension regarding the proposed solutions to modernity's challenges: just how ‘new’ were the models proposed for either socialist or non-socialist societies? As I have argued here, patterns of coffee drinking in the GDR still resembled those of earlier generations. Despite forging a brave new world of socialism, older notions of sociability stretching as far back as Wilhelmine Germany, including hospitality and tradition, remained visible and active in the cultural milieu of East German society. Coffee had a tangible, commanding pre-GDR, pan-German history, a history



that East German planners sought to deploy and exploit to further their own vision of a socialist utopia.<sup>712</sup>

The Coffee Crisis was never truly a crisis of shortage: the roasting industry found ways to stretch the supply of raw coffee far enough to ensure it could fulfill the planned volume of coffee for the rest of 1977, and its plans would allow for a continuation of supply well into 1978. The problem was a fundamental miscalculation on the part of state planners about customers' personal taste preferences, and their expectations that they be able to choose between products whose price matched a preconceived notion of quality. To East German coffee drinkers, it was insufficient to merely have a cup of coffee if the beverage did not meet their taste expectations – otherwise, coffee had little to no value, as evidence by the nationwide boycott of *Kaffee-Mix*. Taste, therefore, mattered to East Germans, which seems to indicate that this consumer culture was not bereft of some of the same value judgements found in the west, or indeed, that had existed in Germany since before the War. This outrage over *Kaffee-Mix* demonstrates that people were perhaps more satisfied with the goods they had than those in the west often thought, and that there may have been more colour to daily life than the images of a drab gray GDR indicate.

I have also argued that consumer socialism created the very set of expectations which drove East Germans' outrage over *Kaffee-Mix*, and which in turn propelled the regime to reach out to the developing world to find new sources of beans. Considering the much larger economic crises afflicting the GDR in the late 1970s, the regime might have simply ignored this particular problem, and abandoned its coffee industry until such a time that world prices declined.

Certainly, such a solution would have saved a great deal of time, effort and financial cost.

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<sup>712</sup> Paul Freedman notes a similar pre-GDR history associated with other foodstuffs, specifically *Spreewaldgurkin* (Pickles), in his discussion of luxury dining in the GDR. See Paul Freedman, "Luxury Dining in the Later Years of the German Democratic Republic," in *Becoming East German: socialist structures and sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 179-200.

Nonetheless, state and party officials at the highest levels agreed that ignoring this problem would be a gross political error, and chose to maintain supply of this beloved drink. The fact that the SED and SPK made precisely the opposite decisions – to continue to provide coffee to the population, committing enormous amounts of resources, time, and expertise to finding new sources of coffee in the global South – highlights how important it was for the SED to maintain its visible commitment to providing a sense of living in ‘real existing socialism’. The complaints and disquiet regarding coffee adulteration had clearly shown citizens’ growing mistrust of the government to make good on its promises, and that “in [citizens’] eyes, the social contract of exchanging political rights for prosperity had been broken.”<sup>713</sup> Indeed, it is also worth noting that East Germans’ rejection of a coffee that failed to meet their *personal* taste preferences is another example of the “remarkable ‘patterns of individualization’” that were taking root by the late 1970s “in an otherwise highly regulated society.”<sup>714</sup> The coffee crisis reveals the widening cracks in the GDR’s welfare dictatorship by this point. It also shows the extent to which the GDR’s alternative ‘socialist modernity’ relied on the blending of traditions, culture and socialist values that could include personal taste expectations. Socialism’s legitimacy rested on how well the regime could fulfill consumer needs, convert citizens to a set of socialist consumer values, *and* fulfill personal taste preferences. If anything, officials recognized that there was no politically viable alternative, especially amidst an economic crisis that brought into question the viability of ensuring a steady flow of coffee.

Exploring this ‘choice’ tied the GDR to a system of global exchange – but this dissertation has shown that the GDR was not always at the mercy of that system. Scholarly treatment of East Germany’s connections with the global economy tends to focus on specific

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<sup>713</sup> Betts. *Within Walls*, 190.

<sup>714</sup> Betts. *Within Walls*, 174.

themes, such as the GDR's dependence on a world economy, and specifically on the market economy, for the raw materials and finished goods it needed – a familiar narrative that highlights the GDR's failures. Without a convertible currency, East Germany's ability to navigate the ebbs and flows of that market structure was inherently limited, and meanwhile, this dependence on the capitalist markets also necessitated and perpetuated the GDR's ongoing competition with that system – specifically West Germany. In other words, scholarly attention to the GDR's global entanglements often overdetermine its relationship to the rest of the world, over-emphasizing the ways in which the GDR was irrevocably beholden to a set of disadvantageous circumstances from which it could never wrest itself, ultimately leading to its inevitable collapse in November 1989. But is this all there is to say about East Germany's place in that global economy? Indeed – this dissertation has suggested that scholarship move beyond considering merely East Germany's *place within* a global order, as if to say the GDR maintained a static position within a global hierarchy, and produced no lasting impact or influence. Rather, I have argued that historians ought to examine the GDR's global *engagement* more closely, because far from being a static entity, the GDR took an active role within that global community. East Germany's activities in developing countries – from reluctant participation in civil wars and regional conflicts, to the extensive economic growth projects – constituted far more than mere involvement in a global economy: through these projects, the GDR played an active role in *shaping* the process of globalization in the second half of the twentieth Century, and its contributions had effects lasting well beyond the fall of state socialism in Germany.

Given the findings here, one must consider that in other ways, the GDR's contributions to the development and reshaping of emerging national industries and global coffee markets can also be understood as part of what helped *stabilize* the GDR. Certainly, the regime took pains to

encourage pride in its cooperation with developing nations, and its efforts abroad created important, tangible links with the Third World movement. By exploring the links between the cultural practices and the politics surrounding a single commodity, I have demonstrated that, to the population and regime officials, the GDR's international reputation continued to matter. By emphasizing the GDR's ability to provide large scale and long-term assistance to newly independent developing nations, the SED hoped to convince its population that they had a vital role to play in helping developing nations improve their economic and social conditions.

In many ways, the cooperative relationships East Germany formed with coffee growing countries did in fact lead to meaningful and mutually beneficial exchanges. The GDR's efforts to help Vietnam build their local coffee industry proved successful, and had lasting effects well beyond the GDR's dissolution. As well, the interpersonal connections between Germans and locals in developing countries also led to cultural exchange and understanding, as well as a genuine belief that both sides were involved in an important humanitarian project, a belief that anthropologist Christina Schwenkel has called "affective solidarity." For the East Germans helping to rebuild the North Vietnamese city of Vinh, she argues, solidarity meant more than a vague connection with the Third World, and the Vietnamese were more than "mere tokens of racial otherness." In fact, East German specialists' "humanist ethics and political values coalesce[d] in the collective work of rebuilding a devastated city."<sup>715</sup>

Yet in complicating this periodization by reinserting the GDR, we must take care to neither overstate German involvement nor, as Young-Sun Hong warns, "romantici[se] East

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<sup>715</sup> Christina Schwenkel, "Affective Solidarities and East German Reconstruction of Postwar Vietnam," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 270.

German rhetoric of anti-imperialist solidarity.”<sup>716</sup> As I have argued, East German officials often relied on the fundamental assumption that the coffee-producing countries with whom the GDR traded were inherently underdeveloped, primitive, and above all, too “young” to truly forge their own revolutions. Politics – both domestic and international – played a key role in East Germany’s coffee endeavours.<sup>717</sup> In each case explored here, East German traders, as well as public media portrayals of trade partners, repeatedly celebrated the deals as not only a source of coffee, but an opportunity to “guide” these underdeveloped countries towards “socialist development.” From critiques about the “primitive” technological developments, to the ineptitude of local managers, and even chastising opinions of local communist leaders, the coffee deals proceeded with thinly veiled assumptions of East Germany’s superiority, both in terms of pure technological and scientific modernization, but also in terms of achieving a ‘truly’ socialist society.

Together, these assumptions constituted what I have argued was a sort of East German “civilizing mission” to the global South, a mission that was grounded in an understanding that European approaches to Socialism were more ‘pure’ than others, and that there were ‘correct’ ways to achieve Socialism.<sup>718</sup> It also bore many of the very trappings of colonialism –

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<sup>716</sup> Young-sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 320. Hong also reminds us that humanitarian projects in both East and West Germany were inherently political, the goals of which were often “to shape long-term postcolonial state-building projects in accordance with the ideology of one party or another.” Hong, *Cold War Germany*, 3.

<sup>717</sup> The resulting relationships did not establish inherently exploitative power dynamics between East Germany and its coffee producing partners. In fact, each of the GDR’s coffee partners pursued their own agendas vis-à-vis the Germans, and often frustrated East German officials with their ability to influence and control the parameters of the coffee projects. Indeed, many Developing countries exercised a great deal of control over the activities in their own lands, as well as over the aid entering their countries. See David C. Engerman, “The Second World’s Third World,” *Kritika* 12, no.1 (Winter 2011): 183-211, here 198.

<sup>718</sup> The concept of a ‘civilizing mission’ is certainly not new, and has been used to describe a variety of state systems. James Scott has argued that modern statecraft is largely a project of internal colonization, often glossed, as it is in imperial rhetoric, as a “civilizing mission.” The builders of the modern nation-state do not merely describe, observe, and map; they strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit their techniques of observation.” See James Scott, *Seeing Like A State: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 83. A number of Soviet historians, notably Michael David-Fox and Tracy McDonald,

ethnocentrism, eurocentrism, racist tropes, and so on – from which the GDR claimed to distance itself.<sup>719</sup> I have suggested these attitudes stemmed from the East Germans' preconceptions of what Hong has called "civilizational difference," a set of cultural attitudes which the Germans felt set them apart from the global South.<sup>720</sup> While my dissertation has not been primarily concerned with race in the GDR, it has nonetheless provided a means to explore the ways in which race and racial hierarchies factored in to East Germans' preconceptions of their relationship with the global South. As Gregory Witkowski has argued, "while East Germany officially rejected the colonial past of Imperial Germany, the government and its people continued to define themselves in a national and racial hierarchy in juxtaposition to the developing world."<sup>721</sup>

Studying these global coffee concerns demonstrates that East Germany's foreign activities, far from being ineffective, or a mere footnote of history, in fact left a legacy within the countries with which it cooperated, and affected trends in the globalization of a world coffee trade. I draw attention to the multifaceted ways the GDR's society-building projects intrinsically

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have applied Scott's concept of a 'civilizing mission' to the Bolshevik's attempts to sovietise the various peoples within the borders over which they claimed authority, calling this process one of "internal colonization." See Michael David-Fox, "What Is Cultural Revolution?" *The Russian Review* 58, no.2 (April 1999): 181-201, here 183; Tracy McDonald, *Face to the Village: The Riazan Countryside Under Soviet Rule, 1921-1930* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011), 13. See also Stephen P. Frank, *Crime, Cultural Conflict, and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels Under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>719</sup> This phenomenon was by no means limited to the GDR. As David Engerman writes, "fraternal socialist aid bore much in common with aid from capitalist countries: an emphasis on industrialization and large showcase projects, a determination to integrate the Third World into global trade networks, and the application of technical expertise." David C. Engerman, "The Second World's Third World," *Kritika* 12, no.1 (Winter 2011): 183-211, here 199.

<sup>720</sup> Young-Sun Hong makes this argument as well with regard to Soviet humanitarian aid practices, compared with those of the capitalist West. She argues "[Socialist Humanitarian] assistance was beneficial to the developing countries to which it was offered. However, socialist bloc aid programs also reflected – in a postcolonial context – many of the parasitic, exploitive features of neocolonial rule that the socialist countries had considered characteristic of their capitalist foe. Last, Soviet bloc aid, including that provided by East Germany, was, like that of its Western counterparts, based on a narrative of specious notions of civilizational difference, and, [...] it unwittingly reproduced many of the problematic features of the Western-dominated humanitarian regime and thereby blunted its appeal to its would-be recipients." Hong. *Cold War Germany*, 48.

<sup>721</sup> Gregory Witkowski, "Between Fighters and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Imagery of Solidarity in East Germany," in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 73-94, here 73.

and irrevocably weaved the GDR into an increasingly globalizing economy.<sup>722</sup> These global entanglements reveal the connection between consumer socialism and the GDR's international relations, but I have argued that relatively marginalized countries found ways to maneuver the complicated geopolitical and economic circumstances brought about by both decolonization and the global conflict. In turn, these countries fostered meaningful relationships that, without the Cold War, might not have been possible. My work thus furthers scholarship now pushing to examine the GDR in a global context, to trace not only its 'global footprint,' but its active role in perpetuating the processes of globalization.<sup>723</sup> East Germans formed their own conceptions of the global divisions of the Cold War world and furthermore, the GDR had its *own* ambitions, self-image, and its own approach to what constituted 'socialism.'

These connections cannot be understood as mere trade agreements arranged for the sake of political or economic efficiency. Geopolitics certainly played a large role in shaping the framework in which the coffee projects discussed here were formed, and economic realities placed considerable limits on the conditions of those endeavors. But these partnerships also came about because of the SED's political choice to uphold a set of cultural values and traditions associated with coffee drinking, and must be understood as the culmination of these considerations. The coffee crisis was never truly a problem of supply, either in terms of the

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<sup>722</sup> By doing so, I compliment economic history that discusses the GDR's ties to the world economy. See for example Hartmut Berghoff and Uta Andrea Balbier, eds. *The East German Economy, 1945-2010: Falling behind or catching up?* (Washington D.C.: Cambridge University Press for the German Historical Institute, 2013) (in particular Ray Stokes' treatment of the Oil Crisis, and Ralf Ahrens discussion of foreign trade).

<sup>723</sup> In addition to scholarship by Sanchez-Sibony, Quinn Slobodian, Young Sun Hong, and others, one might also consider the recent panels and calls for papers at major international conferences in 2017 alone. For instance, see "CFP: Transnational relations between Eastern Europe/USSR and the Middle East, the Cold War in the twentieth century," Geneva 02/18 (<http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-33847>); accessed 10.04.2017; "Toward New Global Cold War Studies for Asia," Panel at the Association of Asian Studies, 18 March 2017 (<http://www.asian-studies.org/Portals/55/Conference/AAS%20AC%202017%20Full%20Program.pdf?ver=2017-02-09-115713-240>); accessed 10.04.2017; or "CFP: The Other Globalisers: How the Socialist and the Non-Aligned World Shaped the Rise of Post-War Economic Globalisation," The University of Exeter, Devon, UK, 07.2017, (<http://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/termine-33386>); accessed 10.04.2017.

regime's conceptualization of its causes or solutions, nor in practical terms, as access to a form of coffee remained. Rather, I have argued that cultural understandings of coffee's place in German and European history tied *East* Germans to a broader continental experience, and to a past that weaved together traditions and values associated with coffee drinking, such as pleasure, enjoyment, stimulation and relaxation. Official East German rhetoric encouraged those cultural ideas, and so they were manifest in society and everyday life when planners suddenly faced a severe shortage. It was the population's cultural affinity for the beverage, and the widespread expectations of taste and aroma – perpetuated by the regime's own rhetoric – which caused the backlash that ultimately necessitated the search for coffee in the developing world. Furthermore, the regime recast the colonial legacies associated with coffee through its claims of pursuing an ethically superior form of socialist trade, one which was mutually beneficial to all participants: East German consumers and coffee farmers in Africa and Asia. In this way, East Germans could partake of a European coffee tradition without worrying about perpetuating the exploitative practices of colonial rule, because the GDR traded for a portion of its coffee on equal terms with its international socialist partners. While the cultural practices of coffee drinking, the marketing surrounding these practices, and the general attitudes with which the GDR pursued its trade agreements bore many similarities to the capitalist system from which the SED sought to distance itself, East Germany's social contract with its citizens and new relationship with its trading partners for a time succeeded in fostering meaningful relationships which introduced changes to a globalizing world economy that lasted well beyond the GDR's forty year existence.





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- DC 6 Staatliche Kommission für Handel und Versorgung
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- DE 4 Volkswirtschaftsrat
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- DG 4 Ministerium für Leichtindustrie
- DG 5 Bezirksgeleitete Industrie und Lebensmittelindustrie
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