

**THE (RE-)INVENTION OF THE NEW RUSSIAN CUISINE:
GASTROPOLITICS IN THE POST-EMBARGO MOSCOW**

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Abstract

This thesis takes the Russian food embargo as an entry point in discussing gastropolitics and culinary patriotism. Previous studies of gastronomy, culture and politics in the Russian context have shown that contemporary food discourse in Russia (2000 – onwards) reflects moderate nostalgia for the past, as well as a cautious attitude towards imported products. Russian-Ukrainian crisis in 2014 reanimated the idea of food security as an independence from imports, and the food embargo policy was officially introduced on August 6, 2014 as a response to economic sanctions imposed by the EU and the USA. The state media and officials focused on the additional subsidies aimed to support Russian agro-industrial complex and farmers. In my research, I focus on the local level to see how this discourse is perceived by the farmers themselves, as well as by some of their consumers. To understand this, I focus on one farmer cooperative, whose director promotes organic farming in Russia and the revival of Russian culinary traditions. In addition, I interviewed two other small-scale organic entrepreneurs, and a number of their consumers. At least four different narratives are expressed in relation to food, patriotism, local farming and identity. On the local level, the quality and taste narratives are prominent. At the same time, small-scale farmers have their own agenda that is opposed to the large-scale agro-industrial complex. My main conclusion is that there is a discrepancy between the level of the "official" agenda and the local level that can be described through class and taste configuration, and the concept of depoliticization.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2010, Dmitriy Medvedev, the then president of Russia, adopted a *Doctrine on Food Security*, in which the emphasis was put on being self-sufficient – all food necessary to feed the population on a daily basis should be produced in Russia¹. While the admission of Russia to the World Trade Organization in 2012 seemed to take this issue out of the agenda, Russian-Ukrainian crisis in 2014 reanimated the idea of food security as an independence from imports, and the food embargo policy was officially introduced on August 6, 2014² as a response to economic sanctions imposed by the EU and the USA. Food and other fast-moving consumer goods suddenly were divided into “ours” and “theirs” in media: *ours* were Russian and imports from allies (like China), *theirs* were Ukrainian, European, and American. The concept of security and self-sufficiency in terms of independence from *the Others* not only returned to the public discourse in 2014, it became the central concept of domestic policy, was massively covered by the media, and, despite the general increase in customer prices got mass support in opinion polls³.

These measures were recognized as a major shift towards economic protectionism, as it was introduced as an opportunity for Russia to develop its own agricultural industry (Wengle 2016). Although the economic evaluation of embargo was unclear, representatives of agricultural industry including farmers and entrepreneurs were enthusiastic about the changes (Barsukova 2018; Susanne Wengle 2016; Wegren 2014). The optimism of Russian farmers aiming to transform the outdated postsocialist infrastructure loos justified: according to opinion

¹ Russia, Team of the Official Website of the President. 2010 “Food Security Doctrine”. *President of Russia*. Retrieved January 29, 2019 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/glossary/37>)

² Russia, Team of the Official Website of the President. 2014. “Executive Order on Special Economic Measures to Protect Russia’s Security.” *President of Russia*. Retrieved January 29, 2019 (<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46404>).

³ Vospriyatie sanktsiy i anti-sanktsiy / FOM” (“The Perception of sactions and “anti-sactions” / FOM”). FOM, February 14, 2017 (<http://fom.ru/Ekonomika/13192>)

polls, nearly 70% of respondents prefer to buy domestic products over imported ones⁴. The first four reasons for this choice are: “better quality”, “safety, trust”, “patriotism” and “clean, without additives”⁵.

Following the events of 2014-2015, a number of international media outlets published articles about “strange, but delicious” transformation of Russian cuisine, as retail chains and restaurants had to re-assemble their menus from the scratch from local products:

One of the unintended consequences of Russia’s self-imposed food sanctions has been a strange and wonderful renaissance in its cuisine—a hipster-driven, artisanal revolution that has transformed Moscow into one of the most interesting culinary capitals of Europe. Locavore cooking—the movement to eat only local food—is popular in many parts of the world, but in just about everywhere except Russia it’s through choice, not necessity. The Russians have made a blessing of it⁶ (Newsweek, 2016)

Positioning culinary traditions or certain types of food as something endemic for national landscape is not new. Turning the idea of local into a marketing asset is also a worldwide phenomenon that has different degrees of severity: from nationalist attempts to promote ‘local / national values’ through advertisements, to creation of a *glocal* identity in attempts to popularize certain national dishes worldwide through gastrodiploamacy ⁷ (Helstosky 2004; Ichijo and Ranta 2016). Connections between food and identity, ethnicity, gender or even a certain generation have been studied in recent decades (Bell and Valentine 2013; E. N.

⁴ Ob Importozameshenii (“On Import Substitution”). FOM, September 2018 <https://fom.ru/Ekonomika/14103>

⁵ 17%, 17%, 15 and 14% respectively.

⁶ Matthews, Owen. 2016. “Moscow Is Enjoying a Wonderfully Unexpected Renaissance of Local Cuisine.” Newsweek. January 24, 2016. <https://www.newsweek.com/2016/02/05/strange-delightful-renaissance-moscow-cuisine-418847.html>.

⁷ For example, see Zhang, Juyan. 2015. “The Foods of the Worlds: Mapping and Comparing Contemporary Gastrodiploamacy Campaigns.” *International Journal of Communication* 9: 568–91.

Anderson 2014; Ichijo and Ranta 2016; Judit Bodnár 2003; Monterescu Daniel 2017; DeSoucey 2010).

After the embargo, re-discovering Russian culinary traditions acquired new dimension: a thing for connoisseurs before, it suddenly became *politically fashionable* to promote, buy and *eat Russian*. In my research, I propose that the idea of local food in Russia is prone to be used in social messages of two sorts. First one is narrative of locality, taste, quality and re-invention of the tradition (*terroir*). The second, ‘big scale’ message is openly political – it is about opposing to the West, creation of “us” and “them” and about food security in a very special definition of self-sufficiency and independence of countries that are not ‘allies’.

In my research, I am going to describe and analyze how small-scale local farmers define the ‘local Russian food’; how they reproduce and promote the ideas of ‘localness’ and whether it intersects with the governmentally promoted discourse of food patriotism. To analyze my case, I will use frameworks of **gastropolitics** and **gastronationalism**. The term gastropolitics, coined by Arjun Appadurai, refers to “conflict or competition over specific cultural or economic resources as it emerges in social transactions around food” (Appadurai 1981, 495). I use the term gastronationalism, when gastropolitical discourse involves the issue of authenticity, national sentiments and attempts to mark certain foods, dishes or culinary traditions as something exceptionally endemic to one nation, country or ethnicity (DeSoucey 2010, 2016).

I will start my work by describing the methodology and material I collected during my fieldwork. After that, I will review already existing research on food, identity and nationalism. My theoretical part ends with the brief overview of already existing research on Russian food – from pre-revolutionary times until postsocialist transformations. The main body of this research is constituted by either historical or cultural studies, but it is necessary to mention it for two reasons: to bring my work into a bigger context and to give some factual information about pre-existing conditions. My analysis starts with an ethnographic trip to the farm-to-table

restaurant, owned by one of the most popular Russian farmer, who owns a chain of local organic food stores and promotes the re-invention of Russian gastronomy. There I made an attempt to understand where to find Russian culinary tradition, what happened with it during the Soviet times and how it can be rescued with the new policies. I also asked people who are interested in consuming local their opinions on “Russianness” of food and authenticity. In “Battling Against the Global Food Order” I am focusing on my respondent’s view of global agro-industrial complex, local / organic farming and whether new protectionist measures can help with that. I am finishing my analysis with the chapter on class and taste because it was a vivid aspect of my ethnography and interviews, and it contributes a lot to the conclusion.

Chapter 2. Methodology

This thesis represents a result of my longtime interest in memory, nostalgia and politics mediated through food in Russia. Previously, I worked on postsocialist nostalgia for “Soviet”-branded foods. For this project, I changed my focus to Russian food, a topic that suddenly appeared in “Politics” section of Russian and Western media. My fieldwork took place in April 2019. To address my questions, I conducted one participant-observation and several in-depth interviews with farmers and with their customers. In addition to the data collected, I used some media articles and interviews to facilitate my small-scale research with different opinions.

From methodological point of view, this research cannot be called “grounded theory”-based, as I had done desk research and theoretical overview before the fieldwork. Nevertheless, I used the principles of axial coding to get the main narratives in my respondents' speeches. All interview recordings and transcripts with codes are available upon request.

To select small-scale entrepreneurs and farmers, three criteria were used. First, in their marketing each of them should put an emphasis on localness, “Russianness” and purity of their products. In addition, it was important for my research to find projects with articulated “social mission”, or, at least, clear statements about their ideas. Secondly, each of them should cooperate only with other small-scale producers and stay outside of large supply chains including local agro-industrial holdings⁸. My third criteria included visible media presence – articles about them, interviews and other materials. This information was used to enrich my study. In the end, I selected three businesses that met the conditions above.

During my desk research, I became interested in one particular case – farmers’ cooperative LavkaLavka⁹¹⁰. Several reasons made it attractive for me. LavkaLavka has a very

⁸ In the end, I realized that it was the hardest criteria to fulfill, as even small-scale organic business involves different branches that provide you with ingredients, machines and labor. I tried to keep them as small as possible.

⁹“Lavka” means small shop in Russian.

¹⁰Official website: <https://lavkalavka.com/page/english-version>

pervasive media-strategy, and articles about this initiative were published in media; it actively participates in the Slow Food movement, which has an openly anti-globalist, politicized agenda. In addition, the cooperative has its own newspaper (LavkaGazeta) online, where the director, a former journalist himself, writes a lot about local food and organic farming¹¹. The newspaper's website has six thematic sections on it: "Slow Food", "The Big Earth"¹², Food (recipes, articles about local food and crops that are indigenous for Russia), "Responsibility" (articles and opinions on how make world a better place, support the villages and regions, being self-sufficient and sustainable), "Farmers" and "Ecology". Some of the articles there mention the patriotic food policy in positive terms. In Moscow, LavkaLavka has 11 stores that sell organic local food, one restaurant in the center of Moscow. In addition, Lavka's director owns a farm-to-table restaurant. All these details gave me an impression that LavkaLavka would be a great case to explore new Russian gastropolitics.

The farm-to-table restaurant is located 150km away from Moscow, and I made a one-day field trip there. I was not the only visitor, as the restaurant serves around 10 visitors each day. During my stay, I did a participant-observation: tried all dishes and drinks, asked about them, made some photos and recorded table conversations. The latter was important for me to understand how the owner of the cooperative discusses his ideas with other customers. From this observation I have field notes, photos and 2-hour recording of table conversations. After my visit to the farm the owner of the cooperative agreed to give me a personal interview. It lasted about an hour. We discussed what motivated him to launch this business, how he understands his mission and how things changed after the sanctions.

I did two additional interviews with small farmers who also focus on local / organic production of food. It allowed me to get the general idea what happens in this field, and

¹¹ Newspaper: <https://lavkagazeta.com>

¹² The Big Earth is a semi-separate project about territorial branding and "culinary identity development" in Russia.

diversify the data with different opinions. To get the consumer-side narratives, I conducted 5 in-depth interviews with people who identify local Russian products as part of their preferences. In addition, they should know LavkaLavka, visit their restaurants at least once and express interest in Russian cuisine in general. Five in-depth interviews (around 1,5 hours each) were collected. My “consumer-side” respondents were recruited through social media, mostly from Facebook. I acknowledge the limitations of my way of recruiting respondents in the next section.

To sum up, the data used for this thesis contains: 1 participant-observation (photos, field notes, conversations); 3 interviews with small-scale local farmers / entrepreneurs; 5 in-depth interviews with customers who buy products that are labeled “local”, “Russian”, “organic”; they buy farmers products; all of them visit the LavkaLavka restaurant and buy products there systematically. In addition, articles in the cooperative’s newspaper that mention “responsibility”, “embargo”, “food traditions” and “Russian” were used.

Limitations and Positionality

I was open about my affiliation, research and topic. During the participant-observation at the farm-to-table I was a client. This fact contributed to the distance between me and one of my main respondents. Nevertheless, he was relatively open and critical during our personal interview.

The main limitation of my research is that it is done on a very small sample and focused on the local level. It does not allow me to generalize the situation to the whole food industry in Russia, as I am focusing only on one particular sector. Secondly, my paper is research is focused on organic food and the people who produce and sell it at the prices far above average. Organic segment in general is more expensive than the average products from supermarket shelves (this is how value-add mechanism works), but in my case it plays a very important role. In stagnating Russian economy, when prices on basic food needs grew considerably since implementation of

international sanctions¹³, this style of consumption means exclusivity. Therefore, this case contains a very explicit class dimension: *buying Russian* requires a decent income; the idea of the revival of Russian food traditions is sold to the shrinking middle and upper-middle classes. My respondents from the consumer side were recruited through personal social networks on Facebook, which, according to Facebook's mechanisms, means that these people have relatively similar education, social class and consumption patterns. Nevertheless, I assume that exploring *gastropolitics* in the particular social setting allows me to find out how the taste for authenticity intersects with the dominant discourse of food security.

¹³ Rapoza, Kenneth. "Sanctions, Isolation And Inflation Are Killing Russian Incomes." Forbes. Accessed April 11, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2019/01/08/sanctions-isolation-and-inflation-are-killing-russian-incomes/>.

Chapter 3. Literature Review

The Global Food Order

Our daily nutritional needs automatically make each of us a participant of the global food order, that includes production, distribution and consumption (E. N. Anderson 2014, 6). The ingredients of our meals come from all over the world through global supply-chains – sets of ostensibly independent actors, interlinked for subcontracting and outsourcing the process of production (A. Tsing 2009, 149; Parasecoli 2017). Food supply chains make it possible for commodity processes to span across the continents, and, sometimes, the whole globe (A. Tsing 2009, 149; A. L. Tsing 2012). The development of globalized industrial agriculture is also inseparable from its sad consequences like colonialism, slavery and creation of interdependent relations, when less economically developed regions have no other choices than providing cheap labor and material resources to the “core” Western countries (Pratt 2008; Phillips 2006). For instance, Mintz (1986) provides a detailed historical account of how the extraction of sugar, an ingredient introduced in Europe as a luxury, contributed to European expansion and development of global capitalism (Mintz 1986). Tsing argues that supply-chains contributed to what generally can be called the human condition – how we live and feel ourselves in the world where everything is *outsourced, liquid, moveable and changing*. (A. Tsing 2009).

Marxist scholars are not alone in their dissatisfaction with the global food order. Despite the observable popularity of sustainable agriculture and organic farming during the last decades, contemporary agro-industrial complex is criticized both by farmers and by food justice activists for its environmental, economic and social effects (Alkon 2014; Peter et al. 2008; Aistara 2018). From economic point of view, institutional conditions force small and medium-sized businesses to merge within each other or to be taken over by bigger market players; small-scale farmers are simply pushed out of the market, as they are unable to meet certification standards and do not have enough capital for modernization (Alkon 2014; Aistara 2018; Zsuzsa

Gille 2016). Environmental effects of industrial expansion lead to pollution of soils and water; moreover, usage of fertilizing technologies is related to decreased biodiversity (E. N. Anderson 2014; Alkon 2014). Placing labor in food issues is especially important as it reveals race and gender aspects, as well as problem of low-paid jobs on the peripheral zones of global capitalism (Besky and Brown 2015; A. Tsing 2009).

In these circumstances, battling capitalist order with institutional initiatives like Fair Trade or smaller associations of organic producers became a big fashion (Pratt 2008; Besky and Brown 2015). Apart from declared sustainability, these institutional arrangements and movements are aimed to provide opportunities to farmers to receive additional funding, manage costs and keep prices higher because their products are organic, clean and artisanal (Aistara 2018). With general trend towards healthy living, organic farming itself became a globalized industry with its own bureaucracy, certificates and conventionalization (Aistara 2018)

Gastropolitics and Return of the Local

In previous section, I briefly described the phenomena of global food order – a complex set of power relationships between producers, consumers, countries, global regulatory structures (like World Trade Organization) and other actors. On the one hand, food resources work as a medium for these power relations – access to territories, markets and other food-related resources is continuously exchanged for another goods and possibilities. On the other side, food itself is a powerful semiotic device that is capable to signal positions in hierarchies, identities, solidarity or hostility and so on (Appadurai 1981, 494). As food, according the idea has its own grammatical structure that has to be deciphered, the power relationships and discourses around food and about food should be explained (Mary Douglas 1972; Counihan and Esterik 1997). In this work, I will use the term **gastro-politics**, coined by Arjun Appadurai (1981), to describe the power relationships and discourses around food and about food.

Various forms of inequality and complexities generated by the global food order have resulted in number of social movements aimed at challenging the status quo. The particularly interesting form of battling the globalization is. They have different strategies – from raising awareness to boycotting products of certain companies and promoting protectionist measures and support for local small-scale producers. Food justice movements are highly varied and demonstrate a whole set of ideologies. Some of them promote leftist and social-democratic agenda, while others emphasize the national aspect and can be classified as eco-nationalists (Pratt 2008; Hamilton 2002). The latter emphasize not only protection of the environment but also primordial ideas about spiritual connection to the place and geographical nationalism (Hamilton 2002). Some scholars argue that eco-nationalist movements played a particular role in late USSR and postsocialist transformations (Dawson 1996).

In this section, I would like to focus on the Slow Food Movement for one apparent reason: the organic cooperative I am studying in my thesis is an active member of this movement. The other two local entrepreneurs I've interviewed for my research also took part in events organized by the Slow Food Russia. Moreover, their agenda allow me to turn to concepts of authenticity and place.

In 1980s, Carlo Petrini, a sociologist and political activist, participated in protests against opening McDonalds in main Italian cities, including Rome. McDonald's was the embodiment of all the worst qualities that food can possess: cheap, fast, standardized, conveyor-based and full of additives. Opposition between fast food companies and local cooking traditions became an ideological basis for Slow Food Movement: anonymous market forces vs. personal involvement and authentic vs. artificial (Pratt 2008, 56). Food should not be a commodity; instead of that, environment-friendly, sustainable production of organic food typical for particular region should be a socializing ritual that sustains the local community (Pietrykowski 2004; Schneider 2008). Adrian Peace argues that the annual festival ("Terra

Madre”) organized by the movement in Italy is an example of contemporary political theater, where “the concept of community is inseparable from fetishized key figure of the small-scale producer” (Peace 2008, 38). Although the connection between farming and community is debatable, the consistency of Slow Food statements made it very popular: by 2018, nearly 1500 convivia in 160 countries were established¹⁴. Russian Slow Food movement has 30 convivia and more than 100 participants¹⁵.

Carlo Petrini’s rise from activist to recognized gastro-political enthusiast is not the only story. In 1999, same happened in France, when Jose Bové became a leading figure in Roquefort vs. Big Mac debate (Judit Bodnár 2003). The tension between global and local was explored in general terms and regarding the Slow Food Movement and in general (Parasecoli 2017; Philippon 2015; Ichijo and Ranta 2016). The constant emergence of these debates and popularity of food justice movements highlight several important aspects of contemporary gastropolitics. The scalability of global food chains is perceived as a threat to cultural identities and so-called gastronomic heritage. The preference to buy local products can be seen as a form of ethical consumption and a way of expressing values, including political preferences (Carrier 2008; Jung, Klein, and Caldwell 2014). These aspects make food bigger than its nutritional value, as it becomes the way of expressing identity, highlighting the differences between “us” and “others”, and an object of fierce debates about who has a right to produce and consume it (Monterescu Daniel 2017; DeSoucey 2010, 2016; Ichijo and Ranta 2016).

Longing for the Authentic

Living in a *flexible, commercialized constantly moving* world of global supply chains creates a strong longing for authenticity. Gastronomic authenticity is usually defined as the

¹⁴ “Where We Are - About Us.” *Slow Food International* (blog). Accessed April 17, 2019. <https://www.slowfood.com/about-us/where-we-are/>.

¹⁵ “Convivia in Russia.” n.d. *Slow Food International* (blog). Accessed April 17, 2019. <https://www.slowfood.com/nazioni-condotte/russia/>.

linkage between a specific ingredient, technique, recipe or tradition of serving to particular geographical space and time (A. S. Weiss 2011; Aistara 2014). Despite the prevalence of this term in popular writing on food and its impressive ability to create ‘added value’, authenticity has always been a suspicious term for scholars. Both contested and sensitive at the same time, the search for authenticity was usually associated with conservative move towards the invention of tradition and essentialization. As Weiss argues, “until the beginnings of industrialization...the majority of people were intimately familiar with the plants and animals that were to become their food” (A. S. Weiss 2011, 75). In that case, the distance between the producer and the consumer in spatial and social terms turns something local, handcrafted and simple into luxury (Pietrykowski 2004; A. S. Weiss 2011; B. Weiss 2012)

The French word *terroir* means a unique combination of geographical characteristics, soil chemistry, climatic conditions and history (Trubek 2008; Monterescu Daniel 2017; Barham 2003; DeSoucey 2010, 2016). It is *terroir* that allows one to call the product unique and endemic for a particular country or region; it is *terroir* that significantly rises its price and exclusivity (DeSoucey 2016; Trubek 2008). As a result, it has become an object of regulation and conventionalization: Hungary creates its unique *Hungaricum*, France battles for its *Foie Gras*, EU countries develop the AOC labeling (Barham 2003; Zsuzsa Gille 2016; DeSoucey 2016, 2010). Terroir is directly connected with the land, soil, and therefore - with people who live on this land. Turing food into a national icon that makes a lot of money brings *terroir* (and uniqueness in general) closer to discourses about exceptionalism and nationalist sentiment. Symbolic boundary politics and gastronationalism can be illustrated with the Hummus Wars case, refusal to buy Russian products in Western Ukraine or “nationalization” of steak and chips in France (Avieli 2016; Barthes and Lavers 1972, 62; Ferguson 2010).

From historical point of view, equation between nation and food is contradictory. Tracing the history of national cuisines allows us to see that food traditions were formed by

patterns of trade, migration and mix of ethnic group and cultures (Bell and Valentine 2013).

Why and how certain foods become national and ethnic icons?

Food and Nationalism

As the connection between food and one particular place is historically challenged, it is hard to find singularities there. As Ichijo and Ranta (2016) argue, the idea of national food has its own stakeholders who must be willing to recognize this space for meaning-making, recognize its features, find means to identify and protect it (Ichijo and Ranta, 2016). The occurrence of strong relationships between culinary traditions can be traced to 18-19th centuries and emergence of nation states (Ichijo and Ranta 2016, 4). This brings us to Hobsbawm and Ranger's concept of invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Creation and enforcement of specific "culinary canon" can be one of the elements that unify the nation. It becomes prominent when we turn to the phenomena of cookbooks: as Ferguson (2010) notes, "By what recipes exclude as well as include, in what they assume as much as what they specify, cookbooks define what is appropriate and what is not. They tell us what is French or Italian or Provençal or Tuscan, and what is not" (Ferguson 2010, 102). Cookbook, as a codified set of traditions, written on one particular language and distributed within the country strengthens the "imagined community" in Anderson's sense (Anderson 1991). Codifying and describing food as a sort of edible heritage also resembles how states create the inventory of historical and cultural heritage (Brulotte and Di Giovine 2014; Kowalski 2007).

Cookbooks also bring in the gender dimension, as women were the initial audience of them. On symbolic level, women are giving birth to new citizens of a nation, and they should feed men (the soldiers that protect the land) and children (future soldiers or women) with proper food to give them strength to protect the homeland. A prominent example of that is food policy in Mussolini's Italy. According to Helstosky (2004), the Mussolini-era government in Italy had 'an obsessive focus on food' and creation of "truly Italian" cookbooks. It was consciously

embracing the symbolic role of food as a source of health and well-being for the united, national body (Helstosky 2004, 66). Emphasis on ‘traditional’ food was directly connected with protectionist policies of the fascist government and their attempts to be self-sufficient from imports (Ichijo and Ranta 2016, 93; Helstosky 2004). Another illustrative example is, of course, the invention of French culinary traditions, celebrated all around the world as an example of best food (Ferguson 2004; Ferguson 2010)

Yet, not only states invent the nation through cooking traditions. As food is part of our ordinary daily lives, it is related to banal nationalism. Coined by Billig in the same name book, it means routinized experience of belonging to a certain nation (Billig 2014). This approach became an alternative to the “top-down” perspective where citizens are perceived as passive recipients of national ideology promoted by governmental structures (Ichijo and Ranta, 2016). Daily experience of identity through food and thematic restaurants is vivid in the lives of immigrant communities, like Russian-Jewish diaspora in the Brighton Beach area of New York (Holak 2014). Palmer describes three main flags of identity in one’s daily existence: the body, the food and the landscape (Palmer 1998). Therefore, as a source of identity production food can be either unifying or differentiating.

Food Studies in Russian Context

As a source of identity production, food can be either unifying or differentiating. In that context, it is interesting to focus on food in Russian context, where getting rid of worn-out traditions, including culinary ones, was the main aim of the Bolshevik revolution (Rothstein and Rothstein, 1997.; Gluschenko 2010).

The research on food in the pre-revolutionary Russia is relatively limited due to lack of accurate historical sources and the novelty of the topic itself. Munro (1997) describes the food traditions of Russian nobility in Catherinian St. Petersburg and emphasizes the fact that most of the dishes were aimed to impress with the size and the look, but not with the taste. In contrast,

regular peasant's diet was extremely poor and included "rationalized hunger": periods when people consciously limited their food consumption to survive (Frierson 1997). The Orthodox Church has had a great influence on the diet of peasants, in particular on the mass practice of fasting, which continues to be practiced in Russia (Mitrofanova 2018; Heretz, Glants, and Toomre 1997). Alison K. Smith described how discussions about proper Russian food in 19th century newspapers contributed to the process of imperial nation-building (Alison Karen Smith 2011; Alison K. Smith 2009)

Food studies of Soviet Russia have different dimensions. The leaders of the Russian Revolution set out to get rid of all the remnants of the past, which included the practice of women housewives cooking for the whole family. This emancipatory idea was linked to the creation of public catering (*obschepit*) - canteens and cafes that could feed all Soviet citizens with simple, nutritious food (Rothstein and Rothstein, 1997). Rare ingredients, traditions and table decoration were recognized as bourgeois excesses. This experiment had a great long-term influence on culinary practice and popular consciousness about food and nutrition (Rothstein, Rothstein, 1997). From the perspective of economic and social history, Osokina (2001) describes how the devastation of civil war, war communism and famines during the 1920s (especially late 1920s) escalated the hostility between Politburo and peasantry which ended in punitive measures against private traders and collectivization (Osokina 2000). Under these circumstances that caused massive food shortages, an access to food became an instrument of instrument of controlling the population and reshaping the social order according to the hierarchy of distribution, which allows us to speak of gastropolitics in the situation of emergency (Osokina 2000). Modernist attempts to unify, industrialize and show the achievements of Stalinism were the basis for the creation of the most popular Soviet book – "The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food" and the official establishment of Soviet cuisine (Strong 2011)

Despite the fact that there was no inequality in the USSR on official level, highly privileged members of the communist party had an access to special closed stacks in department stores, and shops called *Beryozka* (“The Birch”) where imported goods were available for foreign currency (Иванова 2017). With the gradual deterioration of the economic situation in the late Soviet period, existence of these exclusive shops played a major role in proliferation of informal exchange of goods among people and growth of the second economy (Ledeneva 1999; Иванова 2017). existence that played a role in the spread of porcelain meat and the growth of a "second economy" based on the informal exchange of wealth among people.

Life in the late Soviet Union and its collapse caused several trends in food consumption and cooking. Firstly, it is the emergence of interest in the "national" cuisine, which is connected with the gradual spread of nationalist ideologies in the striving for independence USSR republics (Jacobs 2013). Secondly, it is a passion for imported food, which flooded the shop shelves in the 1990s and became a new object of desire (Oushakine 2000).

As Melissa Caldwell notes in her meticulous ethnography of Muscovite food experiences, right at the same time when imported goods became more affordable, a new, more explicitly nationalistic orientation to consumption emerged (Caldwell 2002). For instance, a “*Buy Russian*” campaign that was launched by local authorities put an emphasis on values and images drawn from Russian past. But what is an authentic Russian cooking? The definition of traditional Russian cuisine becomes vague, as it has different sources of tradition like “childhood memories” to “historical roots” (Caldwell 2002). In 2000s, scholars articulated the emergence of postsocialist nostalgia for “Soviet”-branded foods and restaurants.

Most recent research on Western sanctions, food embargo and patriotism mainly covers only the economic aspect of the issue (Susanne Wengle 2016; Kazun and Barsukova 2016; Barsukova 2018). Kazun (2016) describes the media coverage of Western sanctions and argues

that the rise of patriotic sentiment in public opinion polls is related to the “rally-around-the-flag” effect (Kazun 2016).

In this chapter, I tried to give a brief overview of already existing research on food, identity and nationalism and place my research within the already existing field. This research is the first attempt to investigate gastronationalism (or gastropatriotism) in modern Russia at the local level. It also allows us to discuss how traditions are invented, and how they are "remembered" in certain political realities, as well as in certain social and class conditions.

Chapter 1. The (Re-) Invented Russian Cuisine

As I explained in my methodological section, I have chosen three farmers with bigger interest in one particular case, farmers' cooperative named LavkaLavka. To understand how *Russiannes* is embodied in food, I decided to organize a short-time ethnographic trip to LavkaLavka's farm, where its owner (Boris) has a farm-to-table restaurant. The place is located 150 km away from Moscow, in Knyazhevo village close to Pereslavl-Zalessky. The location is not random, as this area is a part of the Golden Ring of Russia – a geographical area northeast of Moscow, where a number of old cities known as parts of the ancient *Rus* ' are located. The main landmark of Pereslavl-Zalessky is the Nikitsky Monastery, founded in the 12th century.



Picture 1. The Knyazhevo Village

Despite the popularity of the area, the Knyazhevo village almost abandoned. According to the official census, only 11 people are living there on constant basis. When I arrived there, the only site with signs of life was my host's farm. Later, Boris mentioned that when his parents got the house in this area, it was lively and flourishing, but the urge to move to bigger cities made it empty. Before the dinner, Boris's son showed me their farm, where they keep

surprisingly a lot of animals for a single household: chickens, rabbits, cows, goats, pigs and other agricultural species. While we were looking at them, my guide mentioned a worker. As it turned out later, the owner of the farm is trying to hire locals. This is not always successful, as most of them prefer to have short-time jobs in the nearby city. The only permanent employee of the farm was a migrant from the Republic of Moldova.

When I entered the house, I met Boris – an owner of the cooperative, restaurant and culinary enthusiast. He met me personally while his wife and elder daughter were working on the kitchen. I had a brief tour over the house, and noticed that kitchen has a lot of state of the art culinary equipment. The “restaurant” was in the dining room of the house, and Boris shared his plans to build shared his plans to build a separate summer house for the guests with a large stove. Interestingly, a big stove has become a necessary element of almost every Russian-themed restaurant because of its prominence in Russian tales and folklore (Tempest 1997).



Picture 2. The Home Interior

The dinner consisted of six elements meant to complement each other. All products were local, produced directly on Boris's farm, and seasonal – as the owner puts is «we eat what nature gives to us». Flexible part of the menu included drinks popularly perceived as Russian,

like *sbiten*¹⁶ or *samogon*¹⁷, and wines. What attracted my attention here is that almost none of these wines were produced in Russia. In description of the wine selection, Boris proudly elaborated on it: it included products of Pheasant's Tears, a Georgian winery that, according to our host's introduction, provides drinks to world's best restaurants like Noma¹⁸. Other wines were made with the Kvevri method, traditional for Georgian region: large earthenware vessels with wine are buried under the ground for fermentation and storage. There were no Crimean wines.



Picture 3. Pheasant's Tears. Georgian wine in all-Russian restaurant

Probably, Georgian wine is familiar to every Russian customer, even if he or she never drinks alcohol. During the Soviet period, Georgia was one of the main suppliers of wine for all socialist republics. After the independence and movement of Georgia towards pro-NATO and

¹⁶ Hot drink mixed with honey, spices and sweet jam. Common for Eastern European countries.

¹⁷ Strong alcoholic drink.

¹⁸ Noma is a two-Michelin-star restaurant in Denmark.

pro-EU policies, Russian-Georgian relations always had an element of gastropolitics with different actors involved. The strictest Russian ban of all Georgian wines and wine products was described in media as “wine war” and started in 2006 after the statement by Chief Sanitary Minister Dr. Onischenko that Georgian wines are unsafe and contain falsified products¹⁹. These measures coincided with the deterioration of diplomatic relations between two countries after the Rose Revolution²⁰ What particularly attracts attention here is that Georgian wines hallmark the drinks selection in a farm-to-table restaurant that emphasizes its authentic *Russianness*. This can be described as an example of geographical nationalism, as some of the ex-USSR countries are still perceived as “ours” (or “us”) in Russia. This raises the question of difference between actual geographic map and political imaginaries, sustained by collective memory and international relations.

The food course started with *Kisel*’, a pudding-like substance served as an appetizer and dessert after the main course.

“Kisel’ is usually perceived as a starchy drink you are given in school canteen. But in fact, this is not a drink but a dish made of different ingredients... Kise’l with pea is something like hummus. And sweet kisel’ made from oats is like Russian answer to pannacotta” (Boris, farmer, owner of the cooperative and the farm)

The Kisel was served with a piece of rye bread. The serving style was no different from all restaurants.

¹⁹ “Tbilisi Hopes To Reverse Wine Ban.. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Accessed June 13, 2019. <https://www.rferl.org/a/1067641.html>.

²⁰ Ibid.



Picture 4. Kisel' as the appetizer. Example of serving style.

During my stay, our host was continuously mentioning that he got these recipes from the “traditional cookbooks” and “historical sources”. All of them were from the pre-revolutionary period with some contemporary editing. In fact, there is a lack of systematic knowledge about typical Russian diet before the sixteenth century (R. E. F. Smith and Christian 1984). Probably, the earliest accounts of what later was transformed into Russian cuisine were made in *The Primary Chronicle*, the oldest source of written history of Eastern Slavic peoples from 9th to 11th centuries (Lunt 1997). First attempts to systematize the national Russian cuisine were made in 1700s-1800s as a part of imperial politics that required articulating what is truly “Russian” (Alison K. Smith 2009; Alison Karen Smith 2011). At that time, the introduction of first cookbooks played the same role as in European countries, creating an imaginary space and community (Alison Karen Smith 2011).

My visit took place in April, during the Orthodox Great Fast. This coincidence determined not only the menu (no meat, only fish and vegetables), but also the topic of table conversations. Boris shared his plans to organize food festival in Pereslavl-Zalesskiy combined with the big religious holiday. The combination between the religious motives and selection of foods here makes it possible to discuss the influence of the Orthodox Church on what we call

the Russian food (and “Russianness” in general). As *The Primary Chronicle* mentioned above was presumably written by Orthodox monks, food there was regulated by religious prescriptions and traditions which spread during the Christianization process; ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ food was used as a symbolic mean to identify the outsiders like *Polovcian* nomadic tribes or pagans (Lunt 1997, 25). Historians agree that the traditions of the Orthodox Church played an important role in establishing food-related traditions in Russian culture, especially the tradition of religious fasting (Heretz, Glants, and Toomre 1997, 67). Fasting also became a ritual that unifies ‘the people’, and an important category of Russian social and philosophical thought (Heretz, Glants, and Toomre 1997).

The selectivity of ingredients is marked not only by time period, but also by their simplicity and association with peasant diet. According to historical and literary sources, apart from regular religious fasts, peasants in Russia kept a very ascetic diet, mainly based on wheat, and only small amounts of meat and vegetables (Frierson 1997). Despite the limited availability of food, the peasants’ calculations of their dietary needs were surprisingly rational and allowed them to survive in months between one harvest and the next (Frierson, 1997, 52). In my research, I am talking about restaurant and food products with prices much higher than average. Here, simple peasant food becomes associated with “authenticity”. Simplicity is also associated with healthy diet, a food consumption pattern prevalent for middle and upper-middle classes with higher levels of cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu 1986).

Limited source of tradition causes a reasonable question: why only this period? Where is the Soviet food heritage? In one of his articles, Boris writes that he is not interested in Soviet cuisine for the following reason:

From my own childhood in the Soviet Union, I have developed an allergic attitude to words like "friendship of peoples". All the peoples of the USSR scratched under one roof - and this is where the modern world order is a direct heir to our Soviet past. A Soviet citizen without a clan and tribe is a universal and global consumer today

This sceptic sentiment about culinary production of Soviet Union was shared by another farmer whom I interviewed later. In the Russian local and organic sphere, the Soviet culinary traditions are almost completely ignored. Such statement can be recognized as an attempt to detach from USSR culinary heritage on symbolic level. On the one hand, this can be identified as an attempt to get rid of the trauma associated with poor service, bad quality and unavailability of good food in the late Soviet years (Ries 2009; Caldwell 2009, 2007). Jacobs (2013) describes the emergence of somewhat primitive, primordial nationalism in late USSR as a reaction to Brezhnev's Thaw-era: "artists and intellectuals made increasing use of nationalist rhetoric to critique urbanization, industrialization, and environmental degradation, looking for truth and regeneration in national tradition and rurality" (Jacobs, 2013, 167). In popular culture, nostalgic images of the Russian Empire are quite popular in the media, while the Russian Revolution sometimes depicted as one of the greatest catastrophes in Russian history (Blackburn 2018)

At the same time, some of my respondents who are familiar with the LavkaLavka project and buy local products expressed their skepticism over invented traditions:

As a philologist, I like it... But since people are restoring it all from literature... Of course I am glad that people are restoring the past and trying to reconstruct it. But the past cannot be reconstructed, you can only get a projection. Sources are questionable. Texts lie. ... I also have the feeling that something was destroyed, something that existed. But I am not sure it all needs to be reinvented. (Olga, student).

One of the motives for this skepticism was "state propaganda". The decision on the embargo was quick and strongly influenced the food habits of people with a certain socio-economic status. The "rally-around-the-flag" effect in the media gave the impression that all media discourse was focused on the figure of the President of Russia and his anti-Western policies (Kazun 2016). At the same time, some of my respondents shared an opinion that Russian food traditions have to be re-discovered:

In Italy, each region has its own food traditions... But in Russia everything is the same everywhere. Pancakes, pel'meni and so on. Nothing regionally-specific. Everything is similar. It surprises me, it looks unnatural. Historically, all regions developed differently. It is surprising that there are no specific dishes (Lada, book editor)

Soviet food policy, aimed at feeding all citizens, contributed a lot to emergence of this “sameness”. “The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food” demonstrated the perfect Soviet feast: black and red caviar, fish, salads, wine and other dishes that are inaccessible in everyday life (Strong 2011) . Previously done research on collective memory and nostalgia in postsocialist Russia revealed some food narratives (Abramov, 2014, Kalinina 2017). In my case, the absence of Soviet food nostalgia and even the aversion to this type of food can be explained through class and taste dimension: massively produced, standardized by GOST products do not fit into haute cuisine standards. Soviet food is a comrade, not an exclusive commodity.

Chapter 2. Battling the Global Food Order

At the first glance, most of local/organic initiatives look like commercial projects, targeted on Moscow hipsters who are longing for authenticity in their urban, middle-class life settings. However, the small-scale organic entrepreneurs whom I selected for my research, are constantly mentioning their values and mission. Boris, whose attempts to restore Russian food heritage I described in previous chapter, calls LavkaLavka a social project. In my personal interviews with those entrepreneurs, I decided to ask them directly: what is the main social agenda of your project? What makes it special? How is it related to the economy? Did the sanctions help?

If you look at the most fundamental part of this, it seems to me that the agro-industrial complex as a part of the business...Is a part of the capital, its beneficiaries are not the people who are related to the territory that uses this territory, it seems to me a fundamental thing. That is, they aggregate huge spaces, include a huge amount of some ecosystem elements to create some products and make a profit out of them.

This does not mean that those people are very bad. They may be great owners, but they just work only for their interests. It is understandable. Their interests are related to profits. Not to the space they use. They think: 'let's use effective agricultural technologies. What kind of technologies? More pesticides, more herbicides, more mineral fertilizers, because we need to show profitability». They say: «yeah, it may be bad for the environment, but you have to prove this. And I don't care much because I live thousands of kilometers away and have never been to these places». (Boris, entrepreneur, farmer, owner of the cooperative and the farm-to-table restaurant)

These citations demonstrate my interlocutor's imagery of global agro-industrial complex. Generally, it correlates with the critical narrative about food supply-chains, common both for activists and in academic circles (Alkon 2014; Besky and Brown 2015; Carrier 2008). The important point here is the articulation of the spatial distance between those who make profits from a certain territory and those who work there, which is presented as the fundamental reason of social injustice. As I have already mentioned in the literature review, the opposition between the "global" and the "local" represents one of the key themes for food movements, in

particular for the Slow Food movement, of which Boris's cooperative is a member (Pietrykowski 2004; Philippon 2015; Miele and Murdoch 2002; Nonini 2013). Here, “globalized” food has no identity, no origin and no history, it is just a commodity that meets utilitarian needs. Instead of that, local food is positioned as something that sustains the community around this (Pietrykowski 2004; Schneider 2008). Food should have identity and history, it should be associated with particular region and traditions, like local Italian “...osterie and trattorie, the kinds of places that serve local dishes and which have traditionally been frequented by people of all classes” (Miele and Murdoch 2002, 317).

In Russian context, full-scale global food order reached the country when it became a member of World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012. This process caused protests both by profile committees in the government and from local companies not capable to compete with global corporations (Barsukova 2018; Kazun and Barsukova 2016). However, in my respondent's views, industrial farming has deeper historical roots in the beginning of 20th century, when “the traditional peasant way of life was demolished by Soviet kolkhoz and collectivization”. Market transition was hallmarked by the flows of foreign capital to Russian markets and decreased costs. To compete with western companies, local agri business “... just adopted the similar model based on expansion”. Did international sanctions help to stop uncontrollable growth that is depleting natural resources?

Sanctions have become a logical continuation of this story... Sanctions and embargo did not solve the problem I am talking about, because we are ... sort of separating ourselves from the global agro-industrial complex. And their methods are no different from the methods used by Western agro-industrial companies. They operate in the same way and they have a desire to enter the global markets and become exporters... Maybe we got more attention, but it does not mean that there was any real support. It [our initiative] still remains a very marginal phenomenon at the moment. (Boris, owner of the cooperative, farm and restaurant)

This citation highlights one of the main issues of my work. Despite the fact that in some of his articles on the Lavka's website Boris praises the embargo as a supportive measure, in his

personal opinion they were no help. This contradicts numerous statements in Russian press, where international sanctions were presented as a win-win situation for both agricultural holdings and small-scale entrepreneurs and farmers (Barsukova 2018; Barsukova 2016). This narrative resembles Anna Tsing's understanding of scalability: the key feature of supply chain is that it can involve an infinite number of diverse players, and it doesn't matter how "local" or "global" they are in the end, as this diversity does not challenge the main principle. This point of view was supported by my second interviewee from this business, and his speech revealed another aspect of local-global and organic-industrial opposition in Russia:

When the sanctions were imposed, I was asked by investors to be the head of the farm in Tver region. Definitely the sanctions directed people's attention to the fact that it is possible to engage in farming. ...

This is politics. There is "Miratorg", they have seized the pork market. Where this company comes to the region... They find some infections in local farmers' pigs. All pigs are slaughtered, and then this company enters the local territory with its farms. They have administrative resource. But this is production, and I am speaking about the idea... When there is 10 thousand hectares, no one is bothered [with sustainability]. (Sergey, small-scale entrepreneur in organic farming)

In these statements, the Russian agro-industrial complex appears to be the main beneficiary of the sanctions, and organic small farming is described as marginal phenomenon. Moreover, gastropolitics has another internal dimension here, which related to the administrative resources of large local companies, which allows them to capture new markets and territories. It is represented as a direct continuation of the Soviet industrial system, and it does not matter who receives the main benefits: the government, international or local corporations. However, my third respondent had an optimistic point of view:

I am proving in with my own business and my work. What I've seen... What is going on with the dairy products? We worked on cheese festival this summer. It was a real bomb. There were so many producers. And people who were interested in it... They traveled to Europe and knew all these cheeses. And they went to [local, Russian] cheese fair and spent a lot of money there. (Igor, small-scale entrepreneur, sells organic products made of pumpkin).

The cheese festival he mentions in this fragment was organized by Oleg Sirota, an entrepreneur famous for his patriotic marketing and public support of Russian self-sufficiency policy²¹²² (*The Economist* 2016) . His company, “Russian Parmesan” (Russkiy Parmezan), produces various cheeses and organizes thematic fairs and exhibitions in cooperation with other representatives of the dairy industry. One of the possible reasons why situation with cheese looks a bit more positive than others (vegetables, fruits, meat) is related to the specificities of the dairy industry in Russia.

Interviews with two farmers (Sergey and Boris) revealed that, in their understanding, the global (and Russian - as part of the global) agricultural complex exists in its logic, different from the logic of small-scale production and sustainable development. What is the difference between these logics?

There is a difference between food and products (*produkty*, like commodities). Food is something useful, nourishing. And products are something that is produced for consumption. There is a struggle. It is a matter of ideology... True food improves your health. ..., Some people want money. And when the money comes, all these additives appear... As a producer, I can say that it is not necessary to add these acids to tomatoes... They are added to make tomatoes easier to store.

– And what about the scale of production?

– This is the key. What do we produce: food or commodities? Sometimes there is more control on the factory. But it also means additives. Just another ideology, you know. (Sergey, small-scale entrepreneur in organic farming)

According to Sergey’s view, good food and commodities represent two different logics: the logic of unique and the logic of scalability. “Good” organic foods can be an element of the moral economy of ethical consumption (Carrier 2008). The differentiation between profit-driven logic of commodification and value-oriented initiatives also refer to so-called imagined economies: ideas of how proper, fair exchange of goods should look (Herrera 2004). In his talk

²¹ I made an attempt to contact Oleg Sirota during my fieldwork, but he did not respond.

²² In ... made a short documentary about Oleg Sirota and his cheese. See “War and Cheese”:

about logics, Boris emphasized the role of personal relationships with the territory and the local rationality:

“If I live on this territory... Because I use this water and my kids drink it, I don’t want them to get sick. This is where the identity is born, this is related to the territory. He [the owner] passes it on to his children, and the children do not want to leave, the territory lives, and the depopulation [of rural places] does not happen... In social, economic and cultural sense... Territorial development takes place” (Boris, owner of the cooperative, farm and restaurant).

In addition to his main business, Boris’s cooperative supports a sideline project ‘The Big Earth’ (*Bol’shaya Zemlya*) aimed to attract investments and support sustainable development of remote areas. This enterprise became famous after the reconstruction of Teriberka, a devastated rural area on the Barents Sea coast²³. According to my interviewee’s words, the main goal of projects like this is to make those territories sustainable, stable and independent from global changes and shocks. Boris’s new project is dedicated to develop ‘gastronomic identity of the Krasnodar region. This “spirit-of-place” discourse, again, corresponds with the one proposed by Slow Food movement (Carrier 2008; Nonini 2013; Peace 2008). At the same time, the imagery of territory without migration, independent from global changes, resembles some of the conservative utopias (Wegner 2002). When I asked Boris for an example of sustainable territorial development, he referred to his experience of traveling around Russian North, when he encountered a church in a small, gradually deteriorating city. The church was built in the 19th century by a local entrepreneur; the city itself was full of life, and “when somebody bought bread there, the money went to local bakers who live and work there”. According to historical sources, economic development before the Revolution was far from sustainable (Smith and Christian 1984). But nostalgic images do not have to be accurate. Instead of that, their purpose is to represent the utopia: a better, authentic life that was possible,

²³ “Teriberka: Leviathan Filming Location.” 2015. *Weird Russia* (blog). January 18, 2015. <https://weirdrussia.com/2015/01/18/teriberka-leviathan-filming-location/>.

but never happened. As it was already mentioned, romanticized images of the past are indicative of collective trauma (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011). Here, fascination with the rural life may be caused by the traumatic image of the Civil War, military communist and forced collectivization that led to starvation (Blackburn 2018). Sergey's point of view had a similar emphasis on environment and “localness”:

Around 150 years ago, only 20% of people lived in cities... Everyone were capable of growing up a garden. Even the emperor (Nicholas II) was capable of growing plants and getting food from the nature... Now the situation is different. There are people distanced from the life, detached from the Earth, but with money. And these people want to develop agriculture! But there are no specialists for that. We should not go against nature; we should be together with it. (Sergey, small-scale entrepreneur in organic farming)

Therefore, sustainable agricultural development lets one live in good environmental conditions, which is a common requirement of food justice movements (Alkon 2014). But this environmentalism is closely related to the place and its history, and it is also focused on rural life. The closeness to ‘spirit’ and ‘soil’ reminds of eco-nationalism of grounded utopian movements: social movements that do not seek recognition from the government or other official institutions (Price, Nonini, and Tree 2008). Instead of that, they are grounded in visions of alternative principles and ways of living independently. The vivid example from Russia is the Anastasian movement that promotes its primordial, eco-nationalist agenda and calls upon its supporters to move away from urbanized civilization (Davidov 2015).

The third small-scale organic entrepreneur, Igor, pointed out that he is generally satisfies with the current conditions. He also noticed that serious political slogans seem strange to him:

Now they talk too much about ethics, all things like this... Global interests, walking somewhere with banners... It starts to sound crazy. It is just food...! (Igor, small-scale entrepreneur, sells organic products made of pumpkin)

The narratives of small-scale producers presented here illustrate that binding to a certain area is an important issue for local / organic production. However, as the example of Georgian

wine in the previous chapter has shown, imaginary national landscapes can be very different from the official map. This brings us back to the debate on the contested terroir (Monterescu 2017). When referring to the ideal examples of sustainability and organic farming, respondents reproduced a nostalgic image of rural life.

In this chapter, I described how the small-scale organic entrepreneurs perceive the official state discourse on local food, identity and patriotism. Despite the visible similarities between local/organic ideas and official version of Russian gastronationalism, the respondents in my case clearly separated themselves from the state discourse. The state is seen as a part of global agro-industrial complex, and the protectionist measures that are aimed to “help the Russian farmer” do not help the small-scale producers. This conclusion is conceptually important, as it allows us to argue that gastropolitics in post-embargo Moscow exists on two levels: the level of “official” discourse and the “local” level. In the next chapter, I will try to discuss the class and taste issue, as well as possible reasons for this discrepancy between state and local levels.

Chapter 3. Gastropolitics of Exclusivity

The statements on the global food order in the previous chapter definitely can attract attention. The other thing that can make one wonder is the level of prices. One jar of organic honey in Sergey's shop costs around 900 RUB (~ 13 EUR). In comparison to that, the prices of the third farmer are the lowest. Turning back to Boris's cooperative, all shops are located in posh districts of Moscow. The two-course meals consisting of soup, salad and drink costed me around 1500 (~20 EUR). The menu is a bit different from the farm-to-table restaurant I've described in the first chapter. It also has an interesting detail: all menu positions contain names of the members of cooperative that produced these ingredients. The personification of foods is important for the idea of "localness", as it gives the face to the food providers. Food portions are relatively small and serving imitates Michelin-type restaurant:



Picture 5. Cheese Plate. All cheeses made in Russia

Prices in the shop are 3-5 times higher than in regular supermarket, and restaurant has a medium check of 1500-2500 rub (20–35 EUR). In comparison, median income in Russia is 26900 RUB (approx. 375 EUR). These numbers lead us to the question – how widespread and affordable is practice of eating local slow food from Lavka? In stagnating Russian economy, when prices on basic food needs grew considerably since implementation of international

sanctions²⁴, this type of ethical consumption means exclusivity. Some of my consumer-side respondents also mentioned the high prices (in shops and in restaurants):

I don't know why it is more expensive on the level of production... I don't think it's that hard to do. I don't understand why it costs more than a burger...

My original turn to Lavka happened because my friend goes there. And he is a partner in a law firm. The gets crazy money... And I just went there once and liked it. I only go there if I am in a good mood. (Lada, book editor)

My consumer-side respondents separated daily consumption of local / organic products from *the Russian cuisine*. The latter was thematically related to the topic of restaurants. Therefore, this case contains a very explicit class dimension: *eating Russian* requires a decent income. The Slow Food Movement that inspired the Lavka's founders is widely criticized for its emphasis on exclusivity: from "eating locally, acting globally" fashion was turned into an upper-middle class fashion, and a new way of reproduction of specific cultural and symbolic capital through taste for artisan products (Philippon 2015; Pietrykowski 2004). If one has enough economic capital and taste, he or she can afford being a connoisseur, but for majority of population this option is unaffordable. Apart from this example, it should be acknowledged that gastropolitics always stimulated the debates on class and visible elitism of *the authentic food discourse*. The latter is strongly related to valuing the unique, which means culturally and symbolically constructed scarcity. In addition to this, one should possess a certain amount of economic and cultural capital to develop the taste for the authentic goods. Embeddedness of organic and local food initiatives into the haute cuisine discourse was criticized as a form of inequality reproduction (Alkon 2014; Philippon 2015).

In his account on class, cultural capital and eating patterns, Bourdieu separated the taste of necessity (simple, high in cabs and calories food, necessary for hard manual work) from the

²⁴ Rapoza, Kenneth. "Sanctions, Isolation And Inflation Are Killing Russian Incomes." Forbes. Accessed April 11, 2019. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2019/01/08/sanctions-isolation-and-inflation-are-killing-russian-incomes/>.

taste of freedom. The latter means freedom of choosing your diet and lifestyle in general (Bourdieu 1986). This distinction is conceptually important, because it allows us to look at the discourses around the Russian terroir, traditions and cuisine through the logic of practice.

When you are doing something that is not in the system... It always costs you more. But, in fact, 90% of all state subsidies go to the 10 largest producers. This means that when we come and see milk for 50 rubles on the shelf, we have to understand that our money was given to the producer in the form of taxes so that it costs less... In addition, the consequences of all these agricultural technologies... poisoning of soil, air poisoning. We spend a lot of money on improving health. As a result, ... We pay for the fact that our daily food is cheap with our own health. And taxes (Boris, owner of the cooperative, farm and restaurant).

All organic products are more expensive – this is how add-value works, and making them cheaper means working with big agriculture corporations, which many farmers refuse due to ideological reasons (Aistara 2018). Yet, this citation demonstrates the narrative where buying local Russian products of higher quality turns into one's personal deal. The state is represented as a machine that is incapable of proper regulation, and this narrative is coherent with the previous chapters. *Eating Russian* turns into a way of expressing the taste for freedom and capability to choose. This practice also reproduces the symbolic distance from those who has only the taste for necessity and cannot choose between quality of the local products consumed. It is also possible to explain the visible dissatisfaction of some consumers with the new food policies, as the embargo itself can be recognized as an attempt to limit tastes for freedom of a certain social class. The most important fact that contributes to my conclusion is that this degree of exclusivity obviously separates the local level described in this work from the official, state-imposed food patriotism.

Another aspect that contributes to the distance between local context and the “official” form of food patriotism is depoliticization of these discourses. Throughout this paper, my respondents continuously used terms that could be classified as political statements. For instance, Sergey and Boris's dissatisfaction with the global food order perfectly corresponded

with the food justice agenda. Nevertheless, they spoke of their projects as completely “non-political” initiatives:

The purpose of this project [culinary identity and territorial development] is not to say that everything is unfair and try to rebuild the world. We are not a political organization. The goal is not to fight, but to find whether we can find something in these territories that is unique and inseparable (Boris, owner of the cooperative, farm and restaurant)

This case can be used to demonstrate the neoliberal logic of certain food justice movements: instead of aiming for large-scale change and support from the state, the idea of self-reliance and market-driven measures are proposed (Alkon 2014). What is also interesting here is the depoliticization of the discourse on food, identity and territory. In “We Have Never Been Modern” Bruno Latour (Latour 1993) argued that the distinction between “political” and “natural” realms (as well as between nature and culture) should be challenged, as it contributes to the depoliticization of the environment – which also includes territory, soil, climate and all these factors that constitute the uniqueness of a certain food product. Following this logic, the idea that “we are doing things, not politics” is contradictory in the state that openly divides food, dishes and other material goods into “ours” and “theirs”.

Conclusion

In my thesis, I tried to describe how local farmers and culinary enthusiasts are inventing the new Russian food in post-embargo times, when food imports were framed by the media and state officials as something unnecessary and even dangerous. My main research objective was to discover the gastropolitics on the local level. Does the patriotic discourse exist at the local level of small-scale food producers and consumers? To address this, I conducted interviews with farmers and their consumers and made one ethnographic trip for participant-observation.

I discovered at least 4 different narratives regarding the topic of taste, politics, Russian food and identity. First narrative, addressed both my producers and consumers, is the narrative about quality and taste. Here, Russian food is reinvented in a very specific way: based on pre-revolutionary traditions of eating found in cookbooks and historical sources. Local ingredients and simple dishes like *kisel* or *schii*, historically specific for a very ascetic peasant diet, become parts of restaurant cuisine in attempts to rediscover *the Russian terroir*. The choice of some products like Georgian wine also highlights how the concept of local is actually stretchable in space: in the imperial imagery of the state, they are still perceived as “ours”. One particularly interesting element is that the enthusiasts of the new Russian cuisine, in my case, are ignoring the Soviet food heritage. This is motivated by negative perception of the Soviet food industry as “spoiled”, “industrialized” and “unified” – qualities opposite to the idea of unique food.



Picture 6. The Conceptual Map

The space of taste can be described in Bourdieu's terms: to have an interest and understand simple, yet fashionable new Russian cuisine one should possess enough cultural and economic capital. LavkaLavka restaurant is operating within the logic of the field of high cuisine: this is visible from their self-promotion, location, style of serving and interview with owner of the restaurant. This can be classified as an attempt to embed a new Russian gastronomic tradition in the international context: next to the recognizable French *foie gras* there should be pancakes with black caviar from the Far East. My informants also emphasize the limitations of the audience high prices. At the first glance, this may look like the field of gastronomy only – without open references to Russian state.

But behind the vivid class and taste aspects there is a “social mission” declared by the owners. On the local level, the socio-political narratives are mostly similar to the ones proposed by food movements, especially by the Slow Food movement. The small-scale organic entrepreneurs I've interviewed for this research are separate themselves from the global agro-

industrial complex. Their perception of the state protectionist policy is negative, because it is aimed to help only the big companies. Therefore, the global food order is not challenged. However, one of the respondents characterized the measures positively. The key feature of this narrative is that it is not articulated openly ('we are not a political movement') and is not defined as political at all. Instead of 'politics', they suggest way of doing things: promoting the local territories, attracting investments and giving jobs to the locals. This allows us to discuss the embeddedness of these food justice initiatives into the neoliberal regime. Instead of system change, the self-reliance and self-sufficiency are promoted.

I started my research with the main hypothesis that state discourse and local discourse somehow overlap and enrich each other. During the fieldwork I found out that there is a big discrepancy between state and local levels: attempts of the government to support and attract investments to local farmers were not successful; moreover, they have increased antagonism between small producers and cooperatives and major market players aimed at feeding the population and becoming exporters to neighboring countries. According to my respondents' opinion, the state tries to fill the void with cheap copies of "Western" products like Russian Parmesan. At the same time, not all consumers are disappointed by these attempts of import substitution. This brings up the issue of authenticity: is in-non-authenticity always bad? In the global economy of the unique it is the worst that can happen with any commodity; this is the point of view shared by the small-scale organic entrepreneurs I have interviewed for this research.

What has been surprisingly missing here is the issue of labor. The topic of work, working conditions and related difficulties was not touched upon in detail by my respondents. In the end, I must acknowledge the limited nature of my study, 8 interviews with only 3 farmers and one participant observation is not enough even at the local level. Nevertheless, I assume

that this work sheds a light on a very specific kind of gastropolitics in Moscow, that involves not direct support or confrontation of the state discourse, but way of co-existence on two levels.

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