Food & Everyday Life in the Postsocialist World

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Across the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the socialist period, food emerged as a practical symbol and medium for articulating both the successes and failures of socialist ideals of progress, equality, and modernity. On the one hand, social engineers concerned with enhancing the productivity of socialist workers introduced measures such as communal kitchens and public canteens that liberated citizens, especially women, from the drudgery of shopping, cooking, and cleaning up, and supported futurist food sciences and technologies that promised to provide healthy, tasty, and affordable foods. On the other hand, recurring food shortages caused by inefficiencies in socialist production and distribution systems threatened both the well-being of socialist citizens and the utopian visions of progress and egalitarianism. Bread lines and other queues for scarce
goods became internationally recognizable symbols for the shortcomings of state socialist systems.

By the late 1980s the climate of political change that swept across the socialist world was symbolically realized with the arrival of McDonald's "behind the Iron Curtain." McDonald's first appeared in Eastern Europe with the 1988 opening of a restaurant in Yugoslavia, followed less than two years later by the arrival of the Golden Arches in the Soviet Union in January 1990. Not quite two decades later, the effects of these arrivals are evident in the spread of foreign food corporations across the postsocialist world and their integration in local communities. The diverse food products, food technologies, and food cultures spawned by these interactions with global capitalism include new kitchen architectures (Fehérényi 2002) and appliances (Shevchenko 2002); new types of foods and food experiences, ranging from sushi and cappuccino to Western-style grocery stores and discount cards; and new political, religious, and social orientations to both foreign and domestic foods (Caldwell 2002; Harper 1999; Lankauskas 2002; Patico 2002). Professional and popular interests in food are represented in an ever expanding variety of food programs and channels on television, cooking magazines, cooking schools, and cooking implements. Glitzy food shops selling expensive imported foods occupy prime real estate along central avenues in big cities and small towns alike.

Perhaps the example that best captures the profundity, and frequent ironies, of these changes is a restaurant that appeared in the late 1990s in downtown Moscow. Located in a historic shopping district next to the Lubyanka, the infamous building that was the headquarters of the KGB (now renamed the FSB, or Federal Security Bureau), this restaurant belonged to the latest craze in Moscow's forever changing food fashions: the sports bar. The sidewalk entrance leading downstairs to the sports bar was covered by a red and yellow awning advertising cheap beer, big-screen televisions, and continuous sports coverage. Flanking the awning and staircase was the bar's name and signature decoration: a set of books, with the title written in large letters on the spine: Karl Marx's classic text Das Kapital.

As these examples show, food offers perhaps the most fascinating and compelling lens for tracking and measuring the diverse, unexpected, curious, and often paradoxical trajectories and consequences of the dramatic transformations that have spread across the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe over the past century. Throughout the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first, food has been central to both socialist and postsocialist reformist projects as social engineers have used food to promote new societies based on modernity, progress, and culturedness (see, especially, Glants and Toomre 1997). The explicit attention that social engineers—and their analysts—have consistently paid to the types of foods that citizens eat, the places where food is produced and consumed, the social relationships that can be fostered through food practices, and even the cultural values that can be inculcated through food and eating reveals the tremendous impact that food has had on practically every aspect of daily life in the presocialist, socialist, and now postsocialist countries of this region. Food is a particularly conducive channel for enacting and understanding social change, both because its materiality makes it a concrete marker of transformation and because the sensual qualities of food evoke visceral responses that transform external, anonymous social processes into intimate, immediate, and personal experiences. Not only does food make the political personal, but it also makes the world accessible to ordinary people in ways that other things do not.

This volume takes food seriously as a starting point for exploring the political, economic, social, and cultural transformations that have taken place across the formerly socialist worlds of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The authors in this volume grapple with the legacies of state socialism and the consequences of global capitalism as each shapes the lives of the residents of this region. Through careful, critical studies based on fine-grained, ethnographically informed research, the authors probe fundamental and enduring questions: In what ways have the social worlds of socialist and now postsocialist systems changed over the past two decades? What changed, what did not, and how do formerly socialist consumers make sense of these processes? How do people living in postsocialist societies understand these transformations and the world around them? And, finally, what do these shifting food habits reveal about the nature of postsocialist social systems and the expectations of those inhabiting them and, perhaps more important, about the significance of postsocialist societies for the field of food studies itself?

A key objective of this volume is to unsettle the idea, often presented in both scholarly and popular accounts of this region, that a "postsocialist" cultural form is somehow distinctive and definitive. The social world of
state socialism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has too often been presented as a monolithic, singular cultural phenomenon so that only the similarities across the region are acknowledged. This is partly a consequence of the homogenizing and standardizing practices among state socialist leaders, most notably Soviet leaders, where “culture” was invented at the center (i.e., Moscow) and distributed outward. Further, the particular institutions and structures of state socialism—economic, political, and religious, among others—cultivated a unique *habitus* that produced similar cultural forms in different contexts. At the same time a persistent tendency in state socialism discourses is to treat the entire Eurasian mass as a socially and culturally homogeneous entity. Soviet experiences—and, more specifically, Russian or Moscow experiences—are typically represented as emblematic of life throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. This penchant for homogenizing and, more explicitly, substituting urban Russian cultural forms for the totality of state socialism, obscures the tremendous diversity of social life across the region, thereby preventing careful attention to similarities and differences in the ways in which inhabitants have experienced and managed state socialist systems. For their part, consumers in this region of the world have embraced these changes in different ways—or, in some cases, not at all. It is therefore risky, and intellectually shortsighted, to presume a universal postsocialist experience. This warning is especially relevant given that European expansion has offered countries like Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia, among others, opportunities to shift away from state socialism and toward an integrated “European” social world that excludes Russia and other former Soviet republics.

As the authors of these essays document so convincingly, the reality is that political, economic, social, and cultural changes have unfolded in myriad ways across the postsocialist landscape. Taken together, these essays present striking differences as well as surprising similarities. Thus, the explicit and implicit comparisons invited by these articles challenge us to rethink the nature of “state socialism” and its successor systems, and to consider the many conflicting, overlapping, and distinctively unique trajectories of postsocialist processes as they take shape in different places at different times.

Building Socialism by Feeding the Nation

Tracing a coherent but sufficiently expansive narrative about “socialist” experiences with food is challenging, not least because the various countries belonging to the “state socialist” world joined at different times and for different reasons, an important detail often minimized in accounts of state socialism. Although the official “birth” of the state socialist world can perhaps be traced to the formal creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922, the socialist world on the European continent emerged only gradually over the twentieth century, primarily in the post–World War II period as East European countries were absorbed into the Soviet sphere of influence during postwar reconstruction, followed by the Soviet Union’s empire-building efforts. Thus any accounting of the experience and impact of state socialism on daily life in this region is necessarily a partial one.

Putting aside this admission of partiality, one may still identify events and trends that have had significant consequences for the experience of state socialism more broadly. Both because of the importance of the Soviet Union as the dominant political and economic power at the center of the state socialist world, and because the institutional structures of state socialist food systems emerged with the very birth of the Soviet Union, it makes sense, perhaps, to start our narrative there.

Among the key changes affecting the creation of socialist food systems was the reorganization of Russia’s food supply infrastructure immediately following the Russian Revolution in 1917. Accounts of the revolutionary activities of the early twentieth century point to the role of food in the political movements that subsequently led to the downfall of the aristocracy and the creation of the Soviet Union. Not only were citizens’ political sentiments incited by severe food shortages, but political mobilization took place in the bread lines themselves (Davydoff 1971; Kitanina 1985; Lih 1990; McAuley 1991), foreshadowing the continuing role that food and food distribution sites would play in an emerging socialist form of political engagement.

Early Soviet efforts were directed at improving the efficiency and safety of the domestic food supply. In 1928 the Soviet Union’s First Five-Year Plan, the first of many such blueprints for mapping out the complete reor-
ganization of the country, expressly targeted food practices as an essential component in this process (Rothstein and Rothstein 1997:181). In keeping with the Soviet leaders' trust in the objectivity and rationality of science and technology, reformers in the food sector also appropriated philosophies and methods of scientific rationality. Soviet scientists, nutritionists, chefs, and food-services employees collaborated in the invention and implementation of a "scientific" food regime that revolutionized food production, distribution, and preparation; nutritional standards; culinary principles; and even the very arenas in which food was produced, prepared, and consumed (Borroto 1997; Rothstein and Rothstein 1997). Food "radicals" and other proponents of healthful food treated cuisine as a scientific discipline that drew from chemistry, physics, physiology, and other physical sciences (Rothstein and Rothstein 1997:184).

At the same time that Soviet leaders focused on reorganizing the physical infrastructure of this new social order, they also searched for practical ways to introduce and cultivate ideologies of communalism and egalitarianism among their citizens. One such method entailed radically reorienting the relationships of individual citizens to food and the relationships between people by moving food practices from the private sphere into the public sphere. Between the 1920s and 1940s private kitchens were replaced by workplace canteens and public dining facilities. In more extreme cases, reformers advocated eliminating kitchens and other facilities for food preparation from apartments, thereby forcing citizens out of their apartments and into public settings for eating (Borroto 1997, 2002; Buchli 1999; Rothstein and Rothstein 1997), where meal preparation and consumption were managed—and monitored—by professional staff. These changes were intended to accomplish several goals. First, the transformation of meal production and distribution activities into a public-service activity was meant to free workers from the time and inconvenience of preparing their own meals, thus increasing their efficiency for the state's labor needs. Second, moving consumption activities into a central location encouraged communalism and fostered camaraderie among workers. Third, these changes were promoted as a way to enhance women's liberation and gender egalitarianism: removing kitchens from private homes would free women from the drudgery of cooking and feeding their families. Nevertheless, Soviet citizens' accounts reveal that these utopian ideologies of food communalism were rarely matched by the realities of the food and service they received in public cafeterias (Glants and Toomre 1997:xxi).

Soviet officials also endorsed new moralities, especially concerning ethics of personal responsibility, through explicit attention to the foods that people ingested in their bodies. Proponents of the Soviet temperance movement, which emerged and receded at different times during the twentieth century, sought to impose and enforce moral standards of responsibility and commitment. The primary targets of these campaigns, not surprisingly, were workers who were seen as shirking their responsibility by turning their attention and energies away from the state because of alcohol addiction. Secondary targets were consumers who were diverting and wasting valuable resources—sugar, grains, and other ingredients—to satisfy personal needs rather than directing them to the greater good of society.

Over the course of the twentieth century, as the sphere of state socialism expanded to include the countries of Eastern Europe, food systems and food practices of these countries became increasingly entangled with the projects and policies of the Soviet Union. As part of its project of building a cohesive empire, the Soviet Union pursued initiatives that incorporated and celebrated the multicultural diversity of its citizens and its satellite states. Individual foods and culinary styles were potent symbols in the politically savvy hands of socialist leaders who wanted to facilitate the ideals of international communism and regional interdependence. In many respects, the wealth of the Soviet bloc could be measured in the quantities of foods produced and the culinary diversity of these regions. Ukraine, blessed with rich soil and a climate well suited for growing grains, was heralded as the "Breadbasket of the USSR," and Central Asia emerged as a prime source of fresh fruits and vegetables for the entire Soviet Union as well as Eastern Europe, Asia, and beyond. Bulgaria, Moldova, and Georgia were key wine-producing regions, and the Baltic republics were major suppliers of dairy products.

In perhaps one of the most compelling examples of this celebration of culinary diversity, food was prominently displayed in the exhibits at the All-Union Exhibition Center in Moscow (VDNH), a permanent socialist version of a World's Fair celebrating the cultural, technological, and industrial accomplishments of the socialist world, with the USSR at the
center. The USSR's fifteen republics were each represented by individual pavilions with exhibits highlighting the republics' unique traditions and contributions, including examples of regional culinary traditions with presentations on food production, preparation, and consumption (Glants and Toomre 1997a:xiii).

This emphasis on regional culinary diversity also had a significant secondary importance. At the same time that the division of labor in food production for the socialist world provided a means to celebrate regional food specializations, it was also an effective management strategy for bringing each of the Soviet republics, as well as their satellite allies, into mutually interdependent relationships. As part of the larger process of political consolidation, the constituent members of the Soviet bloc became dependent on one another for their basic survival needs. This mutual interdependence facilitated not only the inward-looking focus of the Soviet Union and its satellite states but also strategic alliances with other socialist countries outside Eurasia. Allegiances among the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, and socialist African countries were fostered through the circulation of consumer goods—food, in particular.

Food also emerged as a key symbol in the mythologies of socialist states and socialist citizens. Farming implements, livestock, fertile grain fields, peasant farming traditions, and other agricultural themes became key symbols in socialist mythology. The successes of the socialist project were nowhere as visible as in the imagery of agricultural workers captured in paintings, frescoes, statuary, and even stamps throughout the Soviet bloc. Even the nature of socialist time was embedded in agrarian themes, as citizens tracked the passage of time according to growing seasons for both domestic and wild foodstuffs such as potatoes, berries, and mushrooms (Paxson 2005; Pesmen 2000; Verdery 1995).

More generally, food emerged as a commemorative medium for documenting and preserving the victories and accomplishments of socialist citizens. In the Soviet Union, citizens were recognized for their contributions to the creation of the Soviet state with medals and honorary orders. One of the highest and most prestigious honor designations was that of "Hero of the Soviet Union," which was awarded to citizens who had served their country in the most exemplary ways possible: military personnel, politicians, socialist activists, and artists. Chefs and restaurant managers who had rendered exemplary service were also honored and awarded medals. The contributions of Soviet "Hero Chefs" were further recognized in a detailed exhibit in the Museum of Public Catering (Muzej Obshchestvennogo Pitaniia) in Moscow.

Even as food enjoyed public recognition as positive, celebratory, and patriotic symbols of state socialism, it also acquired salience as the ultimate emblem of the failures of that same system. More precisely, food practices often became the medium by which these failures were enacted across the Soviet bloc. During the first decades of its existence the Soviet state's project of geographic, political, and economic consolidation included the forced collectivization of farms and other industries, an agenda that played out later across the socialist landscape. The intention behind these measures was to maximize the efficiency of the agricultural sector and harness its resources in ways that would distribute food resources more equitably among the population. However, the forcible seizure of private farm property and the removal of peasant farmers from their lands, followed by their replacement by state employees, resulted in the massive destruction of crops and livestock and the sabotage of farm equipment. These losses were compounded by a series of poor harvests. In the 1930s these events contributed to widespread food shortages across the Soviet Union but were particularly acute in Ukraine, the prime agricultural region of the USSR, where thousands of people died of starvation and by violence perpetrated by agents of agricultural reform. These incidents are frequently interpreted in Ukrainian national memory as the deliberate genocide against Ukraine by the Soviet Union (Dolot 1985).

After World War II perhaps the most common images of socialist failure across the socialist world (including Asia and Cuba) that were most recognizable to outside observers were empty store shelves and food-provision strategies such as queues, hoarding, and small garden plots. Because the state socialist economic system was skewed toward production and not consumption (Verdery 1996), for maximum efficiency factories were encouraged to produce large quantities of certain types of goods rather than a wide variety of products, resulting in little diversity. At the same time shortages of raw materials affected the quantity of goods produced, and inefficiencies in the distribution network prevented the goods that were produced from ever reaching their destination. Socialist production plans, based on political whim instead of ecological realities, further disrupted natural harvest cycles. Consequently the twentieth cen-
tury was marked by periodic famines and food shortages throughout the socialist world.

These persistent shortages generated food practices relatively unique to state socialist societies. Queuing emerged as a necessary cultural practice among consumers who were forced to wait in line to acquire limited provisions. While these queuing practices contributed to congenial social relationships and a cooperative attitude toward shopping among consumers with the common interest of filling their pantries, they also facilitated competitiveness among consumers literally battling to purchase scarce resources. Through hoarding, socialist citizens accumulated stockpiles of staples such as flour, oil, sugar, and even bread, enabling them to “invest” their savings in these staples. During extreme shortages, socialist states introduced ration coupons to regulate the distribution of scarce foods and other goods.

The nature of shopping itself was also shaped by this need to manage the equitable distribution of scarce goods. Stores in some parts of the socialist world were organized around a three-queue system: customers first stood in line to inspect the available goods and decide what to buy, then moved to a second line to pay and receive receipts, and finally, stood in a third line to exchange their receipts for their purchases. Not only were foods and other items located behind glass counters, out of customers’ reach, but classes of food items such as dairy, meat, canned goods, beverages, and so on, were also segregated in different sections. Thus customers could not interact directly with the products and had to rely on salesclerks for their purchases. Salesclerks, moreover, wielded considerable power, deciding not only whether to serve a particular customer but also which items to sell and of what quality. A further form of food segregation involved the creation of specialty stores, each selling only one type of food product. Consequently customers had to develop shopping strategies around visits to various stores and even stores in different parts of town.

Because socialist shoppers could never guarantee that the foods available in one store one week would still be there the following week, consumers learned to stockpile and improvise. Socialist consumers also developed extensive systems of informal exchange networks to circulate foods and other goods (Ledeneva 1998). Finally, the privations of the socialist period cultivated a strong reliance on personal gardens to provide for basic needs. Especially when food was scarce in the shops, socialist citizens intensively worked their tiny garden plots to produce tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, herbs, and fruits that could be turned into preserves to supplement their food supplies for the entire winter or longer (see Acheson 2007; Bellows 2004; Caldwell 2007; Hervouet 2007; Zavisca 2003).

Family dynamics and other social relations among socialist citizens were also structured by food and eating, most notably the different forms of kitchen culture. Kitchens were especially contentious places, as socialist-era housing shortages often forced multiple families into co-housing arrangements in which kitchen and bath were shared by all the residents. In these communal kitchens, which were particularly common in the Soviet Union, families negotiated for time and space to store food, prepare meals, and eat. Savvy apartment dwellers marked out and protected their respective spaces for storing food and cookware in these kitchens. As Katerina Gerasinova reports, losing control over one’s physical space in the kitchen could mean a loss of status in the entire apartment (Gerasimova 2002).

At the same time that kitchens in communal apartments were places of conflict, kitchens in private apartments emerged as highly social and safe areas where close intimates could gather and talk more freely than in public spaces. In a society where free speech—and especially dissenting speech—was dangerous, this “kitchen talk” facilitated a sense of privacy and encouraged free expression (Ries 1997). In some cases the political discussions that were generated in kitchens over meals with friends became the very sustenance that nourished these socialist citizens. In a revealing vignette drawn from her personal experiences living in socialist Eastern Europe, Slavenka Drakulić describes a dinner party with several colleagues in Bulgaria. Drakulić writes that, even after the food had long been eaten, “nobody seems to mind that there is no more food on the table—at least not as long as a passionate political discussion is going on. ‘This is our food,’ says Evelina. ‘We are used to swallowing politics with our meals’” (Drakulić 1991:16).

Finally, despite the social egalitarianism expressed in the ideologies that socialist states promote, these societies were marked by striking social hierarchies articulated and maintained through differentiated access to food goods. In some parts of the socialist world, hard-to-get food
items, including out-of-season produce, were available only in special stores with access determined by one’s employment, party affiliation, or even political status. A professor in Russia recalled a time during the 1970s when she was allowed into a closed cafeteria for a private dinner and, during that meal, ate her first banana. Later, when the professor described her encounter, an acquaintance scolded her for eating the banana; it was “unpatriotic,” the acquaintance said, because bananas were beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. In other parts of the socialist world, access to special shops was restricted only by one’s ability to pay. In Bulgaria “Show-Off Stores” (pokazani magazini) offered special, high-end luxury items to anyone who could afford them.7

Above all, socialist-era food consumption was characterized by ambiguity, unpredictability, and uncertainty in terms of availability and access (see also Patico and Caldwell 2002). Yet, if these features were important for the people who lived through these experiences, so, too, did they matter for the scholars who have studied these societies. In many respects we can track the development of the fields of socialist and postsocialist studies through the preoccupations of anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and other scholars with food scarcity and the resulting coping mechanisms employed by socialist citizens (e.g., Caldwell 2004b; Clarke 2002; Haukanes 2007; Osokina 2001; Patico 2002).

Nevertheless, the compelling nature of scarcity as an analytical subject may obscure the impact of another subject that has consistently informed most of the anthropological studies of socialist Eurasia: farming. Much as they have done for other areas of anthropological research, studies of rural farming communities have formed the backbone of ethnographic research in socialist Eurasia by indigenous and foreign anthropologists alike. In fact, the earliest ethnographic research projects in socialist countries done by Western anthropologists were typically conducted in collective farms and other agricultural communities. For instance, the first ethnographic monograph of daily life inside the Soviet Union produced by a fieldworking Western scholar was Caroline Humphrey's Karl Marx Collective (Humphrey 1985). Thus the Western scholars who created and shaped the field of socialist ethnography—Gerald Creed, Chris Hann, David Kiddecke, and Katherine Verdery, among others—did so primarily by focus-


This interest in farming communities coincided to a great extent with broader anthropological concerns with locating “tradition” and “culture” in rural spaces, and with preserving peasant culture in the face of modernizing forces. For socialist states that were grounding their ideals of progress and modernity in urban settings, the impetus to document and preserve rural cultures before they disappeared was strong. Food played a critical role in these efforts. Ethnographic museums across socialist Eurasia are noteworthy for their detailed attention to farming implements and cookware in exhibits devoted to traditional peasant life. At the same time farming communities have often provided some of the most accessible field sites for foreign ethnographers forced to navigate the logistical and political difficulties of conducting research “behind the Iron Curtain.” Regardless, even if these scholars were not focusing explicitly on food practices, the fact remains that food-production communities were, in profound ways, the birthplace of socialist, and later postsocialist, ethnography.

Food and the Postsocialist World

Given the centrality of food in socialist life, and in socialist ethnographic research, it would be understandable to speculate that the significance of food may have diminished in the postsocialist, capitalist period. If anything, however, food has become even more essential as a political medium and marker of the events unfolding in the postsocialist world following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The very negotiations between socialism and capitalism, communism and democracy, and the past and the present have been deeply and strikingly embedded in the food practices of postsocialist consumers.

Leading the way in this transformation was the arrival of fast food in the Soviet bloc. Through a joint-venture project established during the Soviet period, Pepsi-Co., Inc. and its subsidiary, Pizza Hut, had established a presence in the socialist world by the 1980s. They were followed in the late 1980s and early 1990s by McDonald’s. As the bearers of capitalist ideologies and practices, fast-food restaurants represented the quintessential Other in the socialist world. Ironically, these fast-food establishments also played a part in the collapse of the socialist world. McDonald’s
negotiations over the beverages to be served at the post-wedding reception revealed generational conflicts about the nature of post-Soviet Lithuanian identity. Members of the elder generation, including the parents of the newly married couple, insisted on serving alcohol and making toasts, thereby linking their identity as Lithuanians to Soviet-era cultural practices. By contrast, the younger generation—the bride, the groom, and their friends—refrain from drinking alcohol and insisted on drinking juice and soft drinks at the reception to emphasize their identities as post-Soviet citizens who belonged to a global community of like-minded serious consumers (Lankauskas 2002). Krisztina Fehérváry tackles similar issues about the nature of postsocialist identity in Hungary, where she observes urban consumers actively remaking their kitchens according to western European architectural and design standards as evidence of their ability to converse and participate in European notions of modernity. As her informants discover, however, the transformation of kitchens from sites of social gatherings to aesthetic sites of food preparation brings about an unintended loss of sociability, thereby illustrating that social relations and social stability are at stake in shifts from "traditional" to "modern" (Fehérváry 2002).

A related theme in these discussions of "tradition" and "modernity" is that of "normalcy," as postsocialist citizens chafing under the perception of having been "held back" by regressiveist Soviet policies strive to identify and achieve a "normal" life under capitalism. This "normalcy" takes many forms but is typically rendered as being "Western," for instance, the ability to enjoy the same foods and other goods, and the same quality standards, as "Western" consumers (Jung 2005; Patico 2005; Rausing 2002). Another aspect of "normalcy" is being able to participate in a global economy more generally, such as Bulgarian consumers who enjoy the influx of Chinese immigrants—and Chinese cuisine (Jung 2006).

Public awareness of these new food systems reveals another important innovation in postsocialist life: branding. Although socialist states employed their own forms of marketing to promote their products and educate consumers (see, especially, Jung’s 2006 discussion of socialist consumer cooperatives in Bulgaria), postsocialist companies have unveiled new measures taking these tactics to new heights. In order to introduce unfamiliar, foreign products to postsocialist consumers, foreign companies have employed such strategies as frequent shopper cards, in-
formational programs in stores and on television, advertisements in media outlets, and even "free samples." Branding has become an especially important aspect of these new marketing strategies, as Klumbyté describes for the growth of Lithuania's sausage market (Klumbyté, this volume) and Dunn for the case of Poland's juice industry (Dunn 2004).

The new styles of food packaging introduced by food transnationals have also contributed to the environmental movements that have emerged in postsocialist societies. Food companies are more than just the target of pro-environment and anti-globalization activists and have instead emerged as important partners in local green movements. As Krista Harper has documented for Hungary, McDonald's has actively participated in Hungarian efforts to introduce new environmental standards and reform consumers' recycling practices. In response to environmentalists' concerns about how its business strategies and production practices adversely affect both the natural environment and the cultural landscape, McDonald's actively sought out and encouraged new modes of production and consumption that have improved recycling efforts (Harper 1999). In eastern Germany, the Czech Republic, and elsewhere across postsocialist Europe, fast-food restaurants have been at the forefront in changing the ways in which customers dispose of trash. Unlike the American model where customers dispose of their refuse in a single trash can, European customers leave their trays on racks and restaurant employees then separate the wrappers, food bits, and other items into bins for paper and food trash. Other food and beverage companies have introduced packaging made from recycled materials.

Attention to industrial foods also sheds light on important concerns about safety and hygiene, both particularly prevalent issues among officials and consumers in European Union countries (Friedberg 2004). Despite the initial popularity of foreign foods in the postsocialist world, many consumers were skeptical about whether these products were healthy. Rumors circulated throughout postsocialist Eurasia, warning that imported foods, especially from the United States, contained harmful additives or had expired (Caldwell 2002; Patico 2001). Even domestic food industries came under scrutiny from consumers who were suspicious of the production process and voiced fears—sometimes based on personal observations—of how factory workers deliberately sabotaged the food supply (see Jung, this volume). Issues of food and healthfulness are also directly related to the responses of postsocialist states to environmental disasters. As Sarah Phillips has shown for post-Chernobyl Ukraine, consumers look to food as a means to manage and prevent radiation poisoning, thereby generating a market niche of protective food (Phillips 2002; cf. Pesmen 2000:17 for the case of Russia). Even the perceived consequences of economic disasters have been interpreted and alleviated through food. In a study of garden food in Russia, Cynthia Gabriel reports that one of her informants expressed his suspicions of commercially produced and distributed foods by calling them "capitalist food" (Gabriel 2005:186). In contrast to these "capitalist foods," garden produce that is grown, picked, and circulated informally by friends or relatives is seen as a safer and healthier, and hence preferable, alternative (Gabriel 2005; see also Caldwell 2007).

Beyond issues of food safety, industrial foods are also intimately connected to larger debates about labor and the relationship of postsocialist food-production systems to the global marketplace. In her work on factories in Poland, Elizabeth Dunn has documented the paradoxical consequences of national and international efforts to impose food regulation standards on postsocialist food industries. Even as implementation of these food standards on food industries promises to facilitate companies' participation in the global marketplace and their ability to engage in fair and free trade, these same efforts favor the interests of global capitalism and thereby threaten the viability of small-scale, local producers (Dunn 2003). At the same time, the introduction of Fordist labor techniques and capitalist models of autonomous workers into Polish food-manufacturing plants has dramatically transformed the ways in which factory workers relate to one another and to the products they are producing (Dunn 2004). Similar issues about the connections between industrial food systems, labor, and tradition have been taken up by Hans Buechler and Judith-Maria Buechler in their research on the economic implications of German unification on East German bakery traditions. As Buechler and Buechler document, the capitalist models introduced through unification processes entailed a Westernization of East German baking traditions that forced bakers to adopt new business styles and forms of property ownership that ultimately challenged their identity as East Germans (Buechler and Buechler 2000).10

As more postsocialist countries join the European Union, EU regula-
tions concerning food quality and standardization will have profound effects on regional food specialties and the ways in which postsocialist societies link cultural identities with culinary practices. As Zsuzsa Gille has described for Hungary, EU laws threaten the very types of pepper that can be used in Hungarian cuisine (2006). Similarly, in Lithuania, EU laws governing dairy production threaten not only the livelihoods of small-scale farmers but also consumers who prefer raw milk and see it as healthier and cleaner than processed milk (Mincyte 2006).

Even nationalist sentiments have been directly affected by postsocialist food trends. In multiple settings across the postsocialist region, consumers, worried about the potential saturation of their markets and the loss of their distinctive cultures, have sparked vibrant nationalist food movements. In Russia this movement began with the opening of Russkoe Bistro, an inexpensive Russian fast-food chain that set up shop directly across the street from the first McDonald’s in Moscow and served “authentic” Russian dishes like meat pies and dumplings instead of more “traditional” fast-food fare such as hamburgers and french fries. Several additional chains quickly followed, offering “traditional” food; one chain even emphasized Russia’s peasant history with decorations evocative of a rustic house in the midst of a village, complete with farm implements and stuffed chickens beside every table. Responding to consumers’ interests in nationalist food, Russian officials launched a widespread “Buy Russia” campaign encouraging Russians to buy only domestic goods. Although the wide appeal of this campaign was to stimulate Russia’s industrial sector and impel consumers to contribute their income—via consumer practices—to Russia’s economy, food themes took center stage. Food companies have capitalized on this emphasis by launching brand names explicitly evoking nationalist ideals, historical events, and historical figures ranging from Peter the Great and Catherine the Great to Soviet-era artists and athletes.

Similar concerns with food nationalism and food patriotism appear across the postsocialist world and are often linked to nostalgic reminiscences of the socialist past. In one of the most enduring and powerful events in the German film Goodbye, Lenin, the son attempts to counteract the postsocialist Westernization of food products—and prevent his ailing mother from knowing that her beloved East Germany no longer exists—by repackaging Dutch pickles in jars bearing socialist-era East German labels (Becker 2004). Daphne Berdahl documented similar attitudes to food in her article on “nostalgia,” the uniquely East German manifestation of nostalgia for the socialist past (1999a). Perhaps Lithuania provides the most striking example of these nostalgic trends, where sausages bearing the brand name “Soviet” line supermarket shelves, attracting a faithful following among consumers who long for the stability and healthfulness of the Soviet period (see Klumbytė, this volume). Even more than pointing to the dynamic relationships between past and present, and between socialist and postsocialist, these foods and food practices reveal the extent to which nostalgia itself has become a lucrative industry in the postsocialist world (see, especially, Boym 2001).

A notable example of the centrality of food to this nostalgia industry is the Museum of Public Catering in Moscow, which is devoted solely to preserving the culinary heritage of the Soviet Union. Part of the museum exhibits individual dishes and ingredients representative of the cuisines found across the Soviet Union, but most of the displays feature the role of food in national politics. The tour guides are retired chefs and restaurant managers who walk solemnly through exhibits packed with cooking appliances and implements, menus, and cookbooks from both famous Soviet-era restaurants and modest public eating places, before stopping in front of portraits of individuals who have been recognized as “Hero Chefs” for their exemplary service to the Soviet Union, particularly during the Great Patriotic War (World War II). These “Hero Chefs” are further acknowledged with exhibits devoted to menus, place cards, and other souvenirs from the restaurants where they worked, as well as artwork, postcards, and other personal effects of these individuals. Their portraits hang in a special Hall of Honor, and special recognition is given to members of the food-services profession who died in combat. The veneration paid to members of the food-services profession clearly underscores the importance of these individuals to the project of building the socialist state.

Nationalist foodways similarly occupy a central place in the Haus der Geschichte (House of History), a museum dedicated to East Germany’s socialist past located in the town of Wittenberg in the former East Germany. Museum exhibits are explicitly structured around the evolution of socialism in East Germany, so that each suite of rooms in a former apartment presents daily life in a different decade. In each of the decades represented, exhibits devote considerable space and attention to cooking
implements, appliances, kitchen furniture and furnishings, and even food packages that were representative of each period.

Finally, food is at the center of the latest identity trends at work in this region, namely, Europeanization. Despite the commonalities linking socialist states, the dissolution and fracturing of the socialist world has been solidified with European integration. Formerly socialist countries like Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia have formally joined the European Union, a move that officially distinguishes these countries from their Soviet peers but also charts new trajectories of future development and further distancing from socialism, and even postsocialism. At the same time, several contributors to this volume have documented both here and in other publications, the process of Europeanization is problematic as the diversity of Europeanness becomes ever more evident and contested. Despite ideologies of European “equality,” typically rendered through ideologies about “standards,” some postsocialist European countries have discovered the existence of rigid social hierarchies in which a socialist past is a liability, such as in Hungary (Gille, this volume). These hierarchies have been especially noticeable in the recent efforts by West European wine producers to preserve their share of the wine market by limiting, or even eliminating, wine production in “inferior” regions—all of which are, notably, East European countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and the former East Germany, all with historic and celebrated wine-making traditions of their own. In other cases, postsocialist consumers find the taste and quality standards implemented by the EU to be inferior to those of socialist states, as in the case of Lithuania (Klumště and Mincyte, this volume). Ultimately, as these various examples suggest, food will continue to be a prime battleground for the next stage of empire building in Europe.

These illustrations offer but a glimpse into the ways in which food continues to inform, reveal, and respond to the realities of everyday life across the postsocialist world. This discussion is not meant to be an exhaustive discourse on food politics or even food scholarship from this region, but, instead, the aim is to highlight several key themes and issues that have shaped this field. As noted above, food is an essential, perhaps the most consistent, element within postsocialist life. Moreover, food is the one element, perhaps even more than any other consumer trend, linking postsocialist communities together, materially, symbolically, and analytically, even as it delineates subtle and sharp differences between them.

Introducing the Volume

This volume has three primary goals. The first is a critical analysis of the significance of food issues for understanding the nature of postsocialist societies. Within the larger field of food studies, which has expanded significantly over the past fifteen years, research has noticeably concentrated on postsocialist studies, not just in the regions of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe but also in Asia and Cuba (e.g., see the essays in Watson and Caldwell 2005). One reason for this is because food offers a compelling—and concrete—lens with which to view these transformations and access how ordinary people experience them. The materiality of food practices, to a great extent, enables critical observation and analysis. A second reason for the critical mass of research on postsocialist food practices is that the specific institutional and cultural legacies of state socialism and postsocialism in these regions provide a critical and productive vantage point for understanding processes such as standardization, agricultural reform, food safety, consumer identity, and global capitalism more broadly than that offered by research in societies that have historically been organized around industrial capitalism. Consequently the essays in this volume are an important contribution to the field of food studies.

The second aim of the volume is to provide a comparative analysis of postsocialist societies through the lens of food issues. The ethnographic settings explored in the chapters broadly examine social formations across the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and the subjects addressed represent a wide array of critical issues including everyday survival strategies, the evolution of taste preferences, gender relations, alcoholism, nostalgia, identity, and Europeanization, to name only a few. Despite their diverse topics and settings, the essays intersect in important ways. Not only do these cross-regional comparisons create opportunities for acknowledging and unpacking social and cultural differences, but they also present a necessary and timely intervention into the scholarly work on “socialism” and “postsocialism.”

Third, while charting new directions in postsocialist societies, the book
also engages and builds on older conversations about food practices in these regions. In particular, the essays draw on and update the pioneering studies of food in presocialist and socialist Russia and the Soviet Union collected in Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre’s volume, *Food in Russian History and Culture* (1997). Not only does that volume offer critical historical and literary details about food practices in the prerevolutionary and Soviet periods, providing context for understanding the changes taking place today, but it also highlights the long history of popular and official preoccupations with food in these regions dating back to the mid-nineteenth century (Lunts 1997). Thus, in many ways, this book, and the research it presents, owes its inspiration and existence to this earlier volume.

All the authors in this volume are field-working anthropologists or sociologists who have conducted long-term ethnographic field research in their respective field sites. They are also scholars with enduring interests in the study of food, although each comes to the field from a different vantage point. This methodological and theoretical diversity is apparent in the chapters, as are the varied stakes of each author, and ultimately contributes to broader theoretical conversations about the value of approaching food topics through multiple perspectives and ethical standpoints. Further, the authors are knowledgeable of one another’s work and have all engaged in frequent conversations through their involvement in this volume and in conferences and workshops.

Because of the authors’ ongoing dialogue, their essays share numerous themes and issues of topical and theoretical significance, provoking intriguing questions about commonalities across diverse regions and historical contexts. The chapters also diverge on significant points, generating equally stimulating discussions about cultural particularities and the value of cross-cultural comparison.

Evident in each chapter is a serious commitment to understanding the nature and consequences of globalization on postsocialist societies. From the essays on the consequences of EU standards by Jung, Gille, and Mincyte to those on global and local negotiations by Caldwell, Klumbytė, Metzo, and Shectman, each chapter addresses the myriad ways in which global forces and local preferences are mutually intersecting and complex.

Another theme shared by many chapters, particularly those devoted to postsocialist countries that have recently joined the European Union, is that of standards. Taking up the case of canning practices in Bulgaria, Yuson Jung critically examines the processes by which Bulgarian consumers decide when to engage in “traditional” Bulgarian practices of home canning and when to purchase manufactured canned goods from the shops. Jung suggests that the processes of standardization and normalcy in which canning debates are embedded, particularly in light of EU standardizing templates, have profound consequences on local identity, personal health, and national heritage.

Similar concerns with the effects of standardizing regimes on identity, health, and heritage are addressed in Diana Mincyte’s chapter on informal dairy markets and the politics of raw milk in Lithuania. Through a careful study of the issues facing milk producers and consumers, Mincyte argues that negotiations over raw milk reveal larger conflicts between socialist and postsocialist “European” traditions of taste, labor, and gender. Specifically Mincyte presents a compelling picture of the adverse effects of these rigid milk policies on the women who depend on raw milk production and selling to support their families in a harsh, postsocialist economic environment.

In her chapter on Hungarian paprika, Zsuzsa Gille extends this discussion of the unintended and often adverse consequences of EU standardization. Gille documents how the elaborate standards of quality and hygiene adopted by EU regulators as a way to safeguard food safety, both for individual consumers and the European Union as a whole, have, in fact, undermined the very objectives they were enacted to meet. She also shows how these rigid standards regimes are paradoxical within the globalizing project of the European Union itself.

Stas Shectman similarly focuses on questions about the values attached to competing systems of standards in his chapter on the emergence of a new culinary arts culture in Russia. Beginning with a case study of cooking competitions, which represent the latest trend in Russia’s professional food-production sector, and continuing with an exploration of the changing field of professional chefs, Shectman traces the evolution of new standards governing postsocialist cooking styles and taste preferences from their origins in a distinguished Russian culinary tradition to their current manifestation in some of the world’s most avant-garde styles of *haute cuisine*. Shectman suggests that it is the ethics, techniques, and expertise of Russia’s long-standing cultural heritage that make this culinary internationalism possible.
The intersections between past and present, Soviet and European, that emerge in Shectman’s essay acquire a different form in Neringa Klumbyté’s chapter on Soviet sausage in Lithuania. Here Klumbyté explores the issues of post-Soviet branding through a fascinating study of the popularity of “Soviet” brand sausages vis-à-vis their “Euro” brand competitors. In a context where Lithuania was the first republic to secede from the Soviet Union, the popularity of “Soviet” brand sausages reveals the consequences when post-Soviet pasts and European futures collide. My own chapter on the new publics formed in the changing consumer landscape also tackles questions about how postsocialist consumers navigate the changing spaces of food consumption in today’s Russia, particularly as the emergence of coffeehouse culture, among other new food cultures, challenges Russians to reorient themselves and their comfort levels according to new distinctions between public and private consumption. Katherine Metzó pushes these themes of public and private in a different direction by investigating the problematic nature of women’s drinking practices in today’s Russia, with sensitive attention to the overwhelming silence accompanying women’s alcohol consumption. In a moving essay detailing the struggles of a female acquaintance with alcohol addiction, Metzó calls attention to the consequences of the gendered norms shaping Russian experiences with drinking and alcoholism, norms that ensure that men’s drinking practices are normalized and made public, while women’s are silenced. Thus Metzó’s chapter is powerful not only because it critically interrogates the factors contributing to these differences, but also because, in the very act of telling the story of her acquaintance, Metzó shatters the prevailing silence about women’s experiences with alcohol.

Additional themes linking these chapters include the types of communities that emerge and disintegrate as new food practices arise or become radically transformed, as well as the types of identity (national, transnational, European, modern, traditional, female, and so on) that are constituted through and complicated by food practices. The processes by which taste preferences are cultivated, asserted, and legitimated are also recurring subjects, as are questions about the degree to which postsocialist consumers are fully and freely able to engage these new food systems. Finally, despite the celebratory nature so often associated with postsocialist food practices, these new cultural forms are associated with, and provoke, numerous hazards. Thus every chapter, either explicitly or implicitly, also provides insight into the risks accompanying these dramatic transformations.

NOTES

1. McDonald’s operates more than 100 restaurants in Russia alone, and another 250 are scattered across Central and Eastern Europe. See http://www.mcdonalds.com/countries/russia.html; other country specific sites at www.mcdonalds.com, accessed on March 17, 2006.
2. In her study of homelessness in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, Svetlana Stephenson (2006) discusses the stigmas attached to Soviet citizens who were seen as socially unproductive. Homelessness, criminality, and alcoholism were all factors that could cause Soviet citizens to be labeled as unproductive and parasitic, and lead to their expulsion from formal society.
3. For a longer and fascinating account of the themes of agriculture and industrialization in Soviet stamps, see Dobrenko 2003.
4. This holds true for China and Cuba, among other state socialist countries.
5. For other accounts of socialist queuing, see Pine 2002 and Hessler 1996.
8. Other scholars of socialism/postsocialism whose work also touches on rural and often farming communities include Martha Lampland, Deena Kasseff, and Frances Pine, among numerous others. This does not even begin to take into account the ethnography of Soviet and post-Soviet societies that has focused on hunting, fishing, and herding communities.
9. For a more detailed discussion of the arrival of McDonald’s in the Soviet Union and its subsequent impact on postsocialist societies, see Caldwell 2004b and Cohen 1999.
10. See also Czeglédy’s discussion of the implications of Hungary’s new fast-food industry for division of labor (Czeglédy 2001).
11. Most recently Dunn has begun exploring issues of food safety and canned foods in Georgia with her work on botulism (Dunn 2008).

REFERENCES CITED

From Canned Food to Canny Consumers

Cultural Competence in the Age of Mechanical Production

YUSON JUNG

"Burkanite" (The Jars)

One clear fall afternoon, the appetizing smell of roasting bell peppers permeated the entire building in downtown Sofia. While riding in the elevator up to the sixth-floor apartment I shared with my seventy-eight-year-old landlady Katya, I speculated about which neighbor was roasting peppers on a weekday afternoon.¹ My first thought was that it must be Nadiya, our downstairs neighbor and one of the few people in the building who would be home and cooking during this time of day. On entering my landlady's apartment, however, clearly the wonderful smell was coming from our flat. I peeked into the kitchen on the left side of the apartment halfway along the hallway but did not see anyone or any sign that the stove was in use. Proceeding along the hallway and into the living...