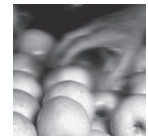

Article

Journal of Consumer Culture
0(0) 1–22

DOI: 10.1177/1469540519891276
journals.sagepub.com/home/joc
SAGE

Luxury consumption as identity markers in Tallinn: A study of Russian and Estonian everyday identity construction through consumer citizenship

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Abstract
While the importance of consumption of luxury goods as a mechanism accompanying upwards movement in a social hierarchy has been well acknowledged, attention to the role and perceptions of luxury in multicultural societies has been scarce so far. It is nonetheless intriguing that ethnic groups inhabiting the same territory, and exposed to a same culture, might develop substantially different notions of luxury, which may end up affecting the integration, or isolation, of one of the groups. Our article addresses this deficiency in the literature by exploring the case of Estonia, a multi-ethnic society where Russians make up almost one-fourth of the population. Much has been written about the integration, and lack thereof, of ethnic Russians into Estonian society. We contrast these views by looking at inter-ethnic relations in the country from a different angle and by a) looking at consumption of luxury in the country through the concept of 'conspicuous consumption'; b) endorsing Foster's concept of consumer citizenship. This allows us to shed light on an under-explored tendency and maintain here that, in a significant number of cases, ordinary citizens challenge official identity narratives by the state through counter-narratives centred around consumption of luxury at the everyday level. The identified counter-narratives end up translating into (consumer behaviour)

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instructions for those Russians willing to assert their Estonianness thus allowing them to seek integration into the majority group by simply consuming luxury items that they perceive as appreciated among Estonians, or associated with Estonian high status. By doing this, we make a case for expanding the parameters for academic scrutiny of social integration to include more 'banal' forms of consumer practices through which top-down narratives and macro studies may be challenged.

Keywords
Consumer citizenship, Estonia, identity, Russians, luxury

Introduction

Across post-socialist spaces and beyond, exclusive narratives informed by ethnic, statist and cultural elements (Laitin, 1998; Vihalemm and Kalmus, 2009) offering a significant advantage to national communities at the expense of national minorities (Ehala, 2009; Vetik and Helemäe, 2011) have been recently challenged. Informed and inspired by Eriksen's informal nationalism (1993), but also encouraged by sporadic albeit significant studies on the role of agency (Chanet, 1996; Connor, 1990) and the everyday (De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991), a growing number of scholars have been contrasting state-centred nation-building narratives by putting emphasis on the agency of middle and bottom actors (Berezkina, 2017; Polese, 2010). This perspective may be regarded as building on Billig's notion of banal nationalism (Edensor, 2002; Fox, 2017; Skey, 2011) and Brubaker's understanding of ethnicity (Brubaker, 2006; Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) to propose an 'everyday focus' as a new locus for the construction of identity (Bassin and Kelly, 2012; O'Beacháin and Kevlihan, 2013; Polese et al., 2018). It is indeed the 'turn to the everyday' in the study of nationalism (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008; Khattab and Fox, 2016) that leads to the idea that identity is constructed through a multi-vectoral (top-down and bottom-up) mechanism. In the post-socialist region, this new direction prompted reflections on the role of human agency and how identities are renegotiated at the everyday level (Isaacs and Polese, 2016; Knott, 2015; Kulyk, 2011; Seliverstova, 2017b) both formally (through state-centred narratives, see (Jacobson, 2006; Menga, 2015; Siiner, 2006) and informally by ordinary citizens (Cheskin, 2013; Pawłusz, 2017; Strzemanska, 2017).

Based in, and constructing on, the debates above, this article analyses consumption tendencies with regard to luxury goods among the two main ethnic groups in Estonia that, despite palpable differences in identity and attitude towards 'the other', are in fact 'unified by consumption', which leads this article to offer two distinct contributions to the study of identity construction and consumerism. Empirically, we give continuity to a stream of scholarship on the symbolic meaning of food and other consumption objects in post-socialist spaces. Building on Patico's (2002, 2003) works, we consider that the choice of particular products

helps consumers to identify with a given category (as in Patico's works, helping post-Soviet citizens to feel a bit more 'Occidental' by consuming Western goods) so that that objects are not what they are but rather what they come to be (Thomas, 1991). By doing this, our article attempts to bring back the agency of ordinary people and the everyday in shaping or reshaping national discourses and official state-narratives on identity. Elites certainly have latitude to articulate various identity markers. However, ordinary people have the capacity to oppose, reject or renegotiate them, which leads to the construction of new or renegotiated ones. Theoretically, our study aims to give continuity to the debate theorizing non-traditional forms of identity building and, in particular, economic nationalism (Nakano, 2004) by looking at economic performance as a civic identity marker. Moving from a situation where goods are available in a limited quantity and variety to a situation where large varieties are made rapidly widely available (as in post-socialist spaces) enables citizens to express preferences through consumption. However, and this is the civic quality of consumption, if consumption of certain goods becomes an identity marker, virtually any citizen is able to (literally) purchase that identity marker by engaging in consumption.[1] This idea stretches the concept of consumer citizenship (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Cronin, 2005), redefining it as some sort of consumer nationalism through which a national project or narrative can be confirmed, supported, or perpetuated by citizens through their everyday activities (i.e. shopping) (Luedicke, 2015).

When applied to our fieldwork site, the city of Tallinn in Estonia, where identity is constantly renegotiated between the two main linguistic groups (Estonian and Russian speakers), the above positions help us formulate our argument as follows: the production and consumption of goods associated with a national identity create cultural references and identity markers that allow people to identify with a national community. This happens in spite of, or in contrast to, what the state may propose through top-bottom narratives. In this respect, our study illustrates the existence of a counter-narrative constructed by ordinary citizens through a discourse that is created, perpetuated and negotiated through everyday consumption practices. In practice, differences in perceptions of luxury create within each group additional stereotypes of the 'other' group. Translated into novel patterns of consumer behaviour, these stereotypes influence the perception of luxury of both Estonians and Russians in their search for markers making their self-identity (Estonian and European for Russians, European and modern for Estonians) more plausible. While Estonians try not to buy goods primarily associated with Russians, Russians tend to consume luxury items that are appreciated by Estonians, or associated with Estonian high status. Eventually, social climbing by Russians, as well as their attempts to feel, or at least to present themselves, as more 'Estonian', can be regarded as linked to the 'moral appropriateness' of Estonian national identity in their national context. As a result, the consumption patterns displayed by the two groups contribute to creating a new perception of Estonian national identity that is a compromise between what the state proposes and what its citizens perceive.

The core material for this article involves 27 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2014–2015. Our sample consisted of educated lower-middle-class and middle-class urban population aged 25 to 63 years who had lived in Tallinn for at least 5 years.[2] In an attempt to avoid ethnic classification of informants, which could eventually bring in some additional levels of complication,[3] we divided respondents into two groups based on their mother tongue. A total of 15 interviews (40–90 minutes) were conducted with Estonian speakers and 12 with Russian speakers and were guided by a set of questions elaborated to hear informants' voices and their own conceptualizations of the reality they live in (Ashforth, 2005; Kubik, 2009). Starting from the assumption that people choose consumer goods in order to understand and express themselves (Dunn, 2008; Erikson, 1994), the interviews first centred self-perception and then consumption practices that were, in turn, discussed in the framework of four main domains of everyday consumption: food, home, leisure and fashion.[4]

We triangulated the results of these interviews with a wide range of data. First, the authors were based in the country for several years and engaged in informal interviews with informants working in the marketing industry and were thus aware of the degree to which new products are created to meet needs and aspirations of both Estonians and Russians. Marketing has a special function in the construction of national identity since it is profit driven and thus aims at giving people what they think they need. However, it also contributes to creating habits and modifying patterns of consumption, thus affecting the historical memory of citizens and the way they consume products.[5] In addition, the authors have been going through websites and brochures produced by private and state entities contributing to the definition of Estonianess (websites, brochures, fashion, local culinary and home interior design magazines) in order to cross-check the information generated through the interviews.[6]

This article is organized around five main sections. The next provides an overview of the context of the research so to familiarize readers with the peculiarities of Estonia, and Tallinn, as a research site, and its evolutions. The following section clarifies our theoretical concepts and the intellectual journey that led us from the concept of conspicuous consumption into an exploration of identity construction through consumption. The remaining three sections provide empirical evidence to support our claims and are organized around three modes of consumption. The first looks at perception of boundaries and luxury construction through consumption of goods, in particular clothing; the second one deals with eating out and the restaurant industry and the different views of these constructed by Estonian and Russians; the third one explores the construction of cooking both at home and through codification of what has come to become Estonian national(istic) cuisine. Taken together, these sections convey that everyday consumption of what may be perceived as luxury comes to create a further space for the construction of a de-ethnicized national identity. As a result, new boundaries and markers of identity are proposed, confirmed and developed through consumption of what both groups perceive as 'national' luxury items.

Tallinn, Estonia and identity dynamics

Tallinn is chosen as a case study in order to contribute to debates on Estonian identity and unveil the inconsistencies, or subtleties, of Estonian official narratives. In spite of hosting Russian speakers as nearly 30% of its population, these are often considered by state narrative as some sort of exception in an otherwise modern and mono-ethnic Estonia. Here, dual citizenship is not allowed, an Estonian language exam is mandatory to acquire citizenship and state-sponsored narratives have depicted Estonia as a modern country with one national language, an IT and business paradise, where English is widely spoken and where Russian has only a marginal role in the country (Pawłusz and Polese, 2017). In contrast to this narrative, unofficial accounts show that in everyday life, language and identity are regularly negotiated and that non-official practices tend to accommodate Russian speakers, at least in a number of situations (Berezkina, 2018). Conversely from other regions, and in particular Narva in the east, Tallinn offers a variety of opportunities to learn Estonian from an early age, which results in higher proficiency in Estonian of Russian speakers, when compared to the eastern regions. This is due to the more frequent contact points between the languages offered in the city. A number of Russian speakers have Estonian-speaking members of the family. Some of them have also attended Estonian schools or used Estonian at the university, whereas others have learned (some) Estonian through interaction with Estonian speakers at work or through leisure activities.

In spite of these attempts, labour and social hierarchies dictate that, although Russian can be considered an asset (especially for some types of work), Estonian native speakers, especially with English skills, may be preferred to someone fluent in both Estonian and Russian. For example, in Tallinn, bars and restaurants that target primarily expat and Western tourists require knowledge of Estonian and English. Russian is an asset, and a smart choice is to have at least one of the staff with Russian knowledge, just in case some Russians step in.

Estonian speakers are sometimes insecure in connection to the wider geographical zone in relation to what could be considered the 'Eastern European complex'. Although Estonia is one of the most eastern members of the EU, references to Estonia as an Eastern European country, as post-Soviet or post-socialist space, or even that Estonia is in the Baltics, are likely to generate tensions within the interlocutor. Narratives encountered, both at the state level and among ordinary people, tend to propose Estonia as modern, innovative, multicultural, European or even 'Nordic', a term that is relatively unloaded culturally, allowing the minimization of any reference to a 'Soviet' or 'communist' past in favour of a classification based on climate or imagined role of geography (Pawłusz and Polese, 2017).[7]

In other words, if domestic Russians strive to be perceived as Estonians, Estonians strive to be perceived as 'European', modern or at least Western. There is no accepted normative definition of 'European', modern or Western, but neither is there a widely accepted definition of Estonian, and this is ground for the existence of a grey zone where identities are negotiable and fluid. This is also not to say that Russians reject Europeanness or modernity, but they have, as a

major concern, their daily life and the desire of being accepted in their own country. By contrast, Estonians seek little acceptance among Russians but seem pleased by thinking of themselves as 'European'.

Symbols, identity and integration

At least since Veblen (1965 (1899)), symbolic or status goods have been regarded as sensitive to social influence and volatile in their symbolic significance, thus inspiring the idea that consumption can contribute to constructing personal identity (Campbell, 2004: 35). The decision whether to consume a given product can be regarded as performing or reproducing identity (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996), thus creating and confirming a bond with a given community or supporting an ideological stance. Indeed, consumption is but one of the everyday actions influencing the construction of a national identity (Goode and Stroup, 2015; Menon, 2012) and regulating the interaction between a state, its institutions and citizens through banal, unnoticed or apparently insignificant practices (Billig, 1995). These may acquire significance exactly because they remain unnoticed (Fox, 2017) while contributing to societal transformation and reproduction (Migdal, 2001). This means at least two things. First, official narratives by political elites can be performed, inculcated and reproduced through dynamics that are subconscious, unperceived and often 'hidden' in everyday life (Polese et al., 2017b, 2018). Second, official narratives can be contrasted at the micro level without necessarily challenging the symbolic order on which a state is constructed (Scott, 1985), so that 'the accumulation of thousands or even millions of such petty acts can have a massive effect for warfare, land rights, taxes and property relations' (Scott, 2012, on the definition of 'infrapolitics').

Consumption is particularly prone to be used in an infrapolitics framework. It is indeed performed autonomously by each citizen, and states have a limited capacity to influence consumers' choices. Of course, marketing promotion, commercials, social advertisements and other tools can be used to influence such choices. It is not possible, however, to predict which product will become widely appreciated or start a new worldwide fashion or which other product will remain unnoticed or become popular for only a short spell. As empirical studies have shown, consumption is not immune from ideological and political elements, and a state can promote consumption of national(istic) goods (Jenkings et al., 2008; Ozkan and Foster, 2005). Consumption can also work the other way (bottom-up), and massive purchase or boycott of a given product can become a symbol of national identity (Bulakh, 2017). In addition, consumption and consumer choice may be regarded as inclusive rather than exclusive. An individual has little chance to change their native language, physical traits, family history and other traits that are associated with identity markers. Yet, the same individual can perform identity by simply purchasing a given item, with the sole limitation being their income and purchasing power. In this way, consumption is civic as opposed to ethnic, and even if members of an ethnic group in a given society identify through consumption of a good, that

marker can be acquired or literally purchased by members of another ethnic group. Eventually, it is by being exposed to the same set of products, commercial media and everyday discourses accompanying consumption practices that people participate in an imaginary community of citizen-consumers (Foster, 2002).

Post-socialist spaces offer a fertile environment to test this hypothesis. Indeed, generations of citizens have grown up with little or no choice when it comes to purchasing food or household items. As an old joke says, 'the man on the plane was given two dinner options: to eat or not to eat'. Consumption for Soviet citizens was not a matter of brand but a question about whether an item was available or not. The availability of certain products was associated with a particular region or a republic. For example, pomegranates would be used by Azeri and other people of the Caucasus to thank civil servants or friends in Moscow, and a trip to Odessa or Chisinau would generate an opportunity to purchase shampanskoe or wine (Polese, 2009).

Food, in particular, has been a major focus in terms of its symbolic meaning (Mack and Surina, 2005). The way it is lived in the everyday (Caldwell, 2006; Manning and Uplisashvili, 2007) and represented (Keller, 2004; Seliverstova, 2017a) both on the domestic table (Spalvena, 2011) and abroad has been regarded as a way to reinforce or reproduce identity (Rabikowska, 2010; Rausing, 2002, 2004). It is perhaps because of, or thanks to, the years of restriction that the luxury market (food, clothing, items) has grown exponentially. This is particularly true for the former USSR regions where, in contrast to an initially state-led construction of luxury (Gronow, 2003), the luxury market has developed in many and divergent ways around a number of symbolic, or better symbolized, items such as gastronomy (Bogdanov, 2012; Magee et al., 2019; Winterhalter, 2009), clothing (Gurova, 2014) and cars (Morris, 2016; Shevchenko, 2008).

National identity has been perhaps the last frontier of this approach that encourages scholars to seek a correlation between identity construction and consumption of ordinary and luxury goods (Roberts, 2018). Production of other consumable spaces and items made possible the rediscovery of consumption as a proxy for the study of identity formation (Dunn, 2008; Edensor, 2002; Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008; Skey, 2011), leading to the concept of consumer citizenship (Foster, 2002; Ozkan and Foster, 2005) and prompting the regard of consumption as a means to understand the socio-political engagement of ordinary people in identity building dynamics. What has been less frequent in literature, where a relatively large body of works has examined consumption of luxury goods as a mechanism accompanying upwards movement in a social hierarchy, is a focus on the role of luxury in multicultural or multi-ethnic societies. Indeed, perceptions of luxury may vary across ethnic groups, thus creating a further element of friction, or else a point of contact between segments of a society. The relative scarcity of such literature can possibly be explained by the argument that citizenship (and its perception) and consumption have sometimes been understood as either oppositional or even mutually exclusive domains of activity. In contrast, consumption can indeed be regarded as a site of citizenship (Soper, 2007) and a prism through which to analyse the

relationship between the political, its construction and state structures that may shape consumers and the nature of their consumption (Trentmann, 2001). Circulation of commodities over long distances – the high speed and broad extent of which characterize contemporary globalization – has accompanied the idea of construction of citizenship from the bottom (Aldred, 2010; Banet-Weiser, 2007; Lukose, 2009). These approaches have documented, and fed, an understanding of the consumption of material culture and other modern items as creating a symbolic space between the state and citizens, de facto modifying governance as it was initially conceived (Christopherson, 1994), while also seeking new places of intersection between movements and associations and the way people govern from the bottom through non-traditional tools (Bell and Binnie, 2004). Attention to luxury and its construction can be understood as a way to construct identity and bond citizens and a state in a way that creates cohesion (Danziger, 2004; Silverstein and Fiske, 2003). This is particularly the case because consumption may end up having different meanings depending on history (Berry, 1994; Nueno and Quelch, 1998), regional settings (Weinbaum et al., 2008), and the type of goods and level of satisfaction that it can entail (Frank, 2001; Turunen and Laaksonen, 2011).

Fashion and leisure: On the construction, and perceptions, of luxury

Veblen's (1965 (1899)) concept of 'conspicuous consumption' can be used to explain why people tend to buy luxury goods and put them on display. Display of expensive commodities reflects, in his view, the economic and symbolic power of an individual person, which may be associated with a particular social status. Indeed, 'in a society of blurred class lines, norms established by the highest class tend to sink toward the lower levels' (Dunn, 2008: 38). Consumption in post-Soviet spaces may be regarded from a similar angle (Gurova, 2014; Humphrey, 2002), with people sometimes concealing economic hardship by using money to buy expensive items, sometimes fakes, that help them enhance their social status. This also makes markers of 'lower-class' origin stigmatized across post-socialist states (Morris, 2017).

Role models or other kinds of ideal models are part of people's daily lives. Everyone strives to become someone or something with the use of skills but also of symbols. When it comes to Estonian identity, however, a dramatically different attitude is noticeable between Estonian and Russians. Estonians might feel threatened by being part of a country with a small population and claim that their identity has been repressed, or hidden under the sand through centuries of foreign occupation. Yet, they feel certain and proud of being Estonian. In a number of cases, Russian speakers, but also Estonian speakers with one or both Russian-speaking parents, display a sense of insecurity, a fear that their less than 100% Estonianness might be unveiled or discovered at some point. If they feel proud to possess two languages and two cultures, they also live in fear of not being fully accepted by Estonians as Estonian. We can refer here to the case of Russian

parents speaking with their children only in Estonian to 'facilitate their integration'. Estonia, and access to the opportunities the country offers, is often lived as an advantage for which one finds it worth suffering. In the words of a Narva-born informant living in Tallinn for more than 15 years:

> I am Russian. Russian is my language and I speak very bad Estonian. But I could not live in Russia as well as I live here. I have a job, stability, a flat. Sometimes I feel a bit discriminated against because I am Russian or my Estonian language skills are poor. But I am fine with standing these moments given that I like my life here and the opportunities I have here . . . I would never get them in Russia. (Sasha, RUS)

Estonians and Russians might strive to show themselves as modern, but Russians might also try to 'act Estonian' sometimes. This does not necessarily mean acting like an Estonian speaker but rather to embrace the values that they perceive as Estonian. There are many everyday markers of Estonian identity, many ways of being Estonian, and Russians and Estonians refer to different ones in a number of cases. Imitation of Estonian lifestyle, especially consumption habits, becomes a strategy used to climb the social ladder of Estonian society. In practice, this means to identify, and strictly follow, some particular consumer patterns that Russians perceive as performed by Estonians, with a high status. Their construction of the everyday is thus reproduced by a number of habits that they can associate with what they perceive as an 'Estonian daily life'.

In this respect, clothing, although not necessarily a statement in its own, is a companion to, or confirmation of, a given status. It can, nonetheless, be used to create a facade. 'If you want to appear more Estonian, use elements from Estonian folklore. It is like an unwritten rule in any sphere, especially homes and we try to use it in advertisement as well' was the advice of a Russian working in the public relations (PR) industry. Indeed, the strategic choice to go for expensive clothing might be due to the intention to convey a message that 'everything else is there'. Things can go the other way as well. A number of male informants (including Estonians) reported to perceive Russian women as generally more attractive. Estonian female informants also acknowledged this gap, pointing to the fact that they simply prefer more modest looks, but admitted that sometimes they might get inspired by Russian women when choosing their attire or buying clothes: 'If we need to compete with Russian women, we sometimes have to use similar weapons' (Kristi, EST).

However, there is a limit to it: 'when it comes to things like design and fashion I get the feeling it's just as important to define what Estonians are not – there's a general feeling that the modern Estonian taste is superior to the more ''flashy'' and ''kitsch'' Russian style' (Thomas, EST). By contrast, the dressing style of Russians during the day is often toned down to more 'Estonian' standards, more modest or at least less visible to make work relations easier and to not stick out as a Russian in the office or during business meetings outside. One might say that Tallinn 'speaks Estonian by day and Russian by night'. Estonian-Russians follow a similar

tendency, sometimes even neglecting elements and symbols dictated by their 'native' culture or going against their aesthetic criteria, or looking for a 'third way' that is mixing consumer patterns that they see as 'Estonian' and those dictated by their own preferences. Estonians use consumption to create distance from Russians – avoiding consuming something that may be associated with Russians or 'opening their way to Europe'. The Estonians' angle is therefore substantially different, grounded in two main attitudes. One is certainly 'performing Estonianness'.

As a result, there is a degree of convergence between Russian and Estonian women in terms of strategic choice of clothes. Russians are still more intrepid in their choices, but Estonians often try to catch up. Interestingly enough, this may also be one of the spheres of life where Estonian with mixed parents (one Estonian and one Russian) let their 'Russianness' slip out with little inhibition.

Celebration patterns follow a similar tendency. In the words of an informant, 'it is possible that Russians go out more, Russians do better parties. This is probably because they have a stronger community feeling, they are so easygoing. After Russian parties, Estonian ones doesn't look exciting at all' (Timo, EST). As another informant put it, 'In Russian culture people are ready to spend a lot of money on holidays, celebrations . . . Estonians are not even getting married anymore, they are so pragmatic . . .' (Alma, EST). Indeed, Russians are perceived by Estonians as displaying more joie de vivre:

> Russians in Estonia even in these circumstances (economically less advantageous) enjoy life where Estonians would not enjoy. They make picnics everywhere, in a city park or just on the beach. Estonians would need to ride 100 km away from the city to be all alone. Maybe they don't even have their dachas, but they seem not to care about it, they take a bus to the park or just relax in front of their house. (Eva, EST)

Purchase, and display, of symbolic objects, affects both your self-perception (Ariely, 2008) and how other people, and groups, look at you. The so-called *borsetka* is a medium-size purse, often in leather or faux leather, where money, cards but also documents, keys and the phone can be stored. In other words, it is an ordinary accessory but it has one specificity. It is considered used only by Russian businessmen. Estonians, at least in the words of Estonians, would never buy, or use, such a thing. It is not a matter of convenience – the purse is in some respect very practical and has pockets for everything. It is a matter of perception: the imagined community of Russian in Estonia is constructed, by Estonians, wearing a *borsetka* and the imagined Estonian community is not using it.

Consumer preferences are sometimes also dictated, rather than by what one wants, by what one thinks their choice will be perceived, and possibly endorsed, by people around them. Estonia is flat, roads are good between main urban centres and the only places where an SUV might be needed are rural and isolated areas. City driving, or even intra-city, is perfectly feasible with ordinary cars, but 'Driving a jeep in Tallinn is a matter of status [this was followed by memories of the

informant's childhood, when her grandfather and father were carrying her around in an SUV while living in Rakvere]... it is a case when Estonians spend a lot of money on purpose and they want to show it' (Merili, EST). On the other side of the spectrum, there is the case where purchasers think what others will say if they see them in a given car. This consideration led a couple switch away from a Porsche Cayenne, which would be their first choice and would match their family situation, since the husband maintained that it is mostly Russians who buy such a car and thus could not be the choice of a 'true' Estonian family.

Consumption, in this and other cases, teases out of people a variety of tactics and strategies for daily survival. On the one hand, it modifies the preferences of a given segment of a society, or an ethnic group, in this case, to move towards standards acceptable by the other. However, and this is the fascinating side of consumption, this process is two-sided because it follows irrational criteria. Rationally, one would expect Estonians to stick to their traditional values and clothing, and this is visible when they need to ostensibly perform Estonianess (in a work environment or at folklore festivals such as Laulupidu, see Pawłusz, 2017, on this). However, these elements lose importance when there is a more immediate and simple goal: to gain consensus among close peers and within circles of friends and acquaintances, or at least in a given environment. In such cases, patterns of behaviour, and consumption, tend to converge, rather than diverge, and define a 'third way', a hybrid performance mediating habits present in both cultures and elements acceptable to the socio-professional environment they are exposed to.

Eating 'Estonian' vs Estonians eating

Performing Estonianess through food consumption may be regarded as important for both Estonians and Russians. However, inasmuch as the value both categories they refer to is to 'eat in a national restaurant' or 'eat national food', the meaning of 'national' may vary substantially across people and ethnic groups. Official Estonian narratives have tended to redefine national cuisine, taking distance from the Soviet one and proposing upper-class cuisine as inspired by their northern neighbours' traditions (Polese, 2017). In this respect, two elements may be regarded as distinctive to Estonian food consumption. It both strongly accents ecological labels and reframes *haute cuisine* within some sort of Nordic tradition. Informants often referred with pride to the capacity of combining genuine food and modern technologies:

> We like everything that looks modern. Estonian restaurants in terms of presentations of dishes look really sophisticated, but if you check their ingredients they will be very simple, because we like simple things, it's a presentation of food that makes it special. (Tiina, EST)

'Local', 'genuine', 'organic', 'natural' are associated with Estonia but can also refer to a Western pattern of consumption that Estonians, and in particular middle-class Estonians, associate with values they would like to embrace as bringing them back

to Europe. A restaurant owner described the difference between Estonian and Russian customers, explaining that Estonians are hungry for interior design, which makes them forget the USSR, with its standardization. This prompts a preference, among Estonians, for places where chairs and tables are all different and decorations are irregular and unique. In addition, Estonian customers are keen to see their food served in dishes, or plates that are original, with a nice visual presentation, often giving priority to aesthetic criteria over taste. Estonian respondents seemed to have a clear idea of the ideal place to enjoy authentic Estonian cuisine:

> Usually, when I go out with my friends, it's more like you look into how the place looks like, the atmosphere, and then you look at the rating as well. There are guides like '50 restaurants to go to in Tallinn'. We try to check different places from such lists and then compare, discuss them. To be honest, you don't really have to complain about the atmosphere, especially with the new restaurants, they are really nice from inside and the atmosphere and everything. I just try different things, and Estonian modern kitchen is becoming really popular, more and more places open up in Estonian modern food. (Merili, EST)

These places are, however, usually unaffordable for the majority of Estonians. Indeed, '... these restaurants-farms with authentic Estonian cuisine exist, but they are so expensive, that ordinary people cannot afford them, they rather go to their countryside places. Normally, only Estonian economic elites go there' (Maria, EST). Estonians themselves admitted that some places, such as countryside organic farms that are renovated and modernized could serve as a tourist attraction. Yet, they also offer a certain degree of comfort mixed with genuine products and 'real' Estonian dishes. In such a case, the food would be cooked from 'pure' local, often hand-processed products, and it can be eaten surrounded by nature, which adds additional value to the experience. An alternative could be, for people with a modest salary, to buy organic local products online or to simply visit shops and places well known for their local and genuine production. This symbolic meaning was felt by Russian informants in particular:

> This is pure nationalism. Young rich Estonians would buy it just because it is made in Eesti (Estonia), rational people or just those with some healthy mindset understand that these usually micro portions of jams, honey or some fish conserves are not worth even 1/3 of their selling price. (Sergey, RUS)

Ethnic cuisine seems to have a different relationship with the two groups. While there is no association with Italian or French cuisine, restaurants from other former USSR republics are often looked down upon by Estonians. Especially if the place is simple and puts an accent on the quality of food, with little attention towards interior design or atmosphere, Estonians might prefer to go to other places. A restaurant owner reported that Estonians and Russians fundamentally differ in their eating out approach. Russians look at the substance, how good is the

food, how generous the portions are and how all of this is presented in a luxurious way. Estonians, in contrast, are more attentive to the surroundings and the presentation of the plate, sometimes preferring something like a platter with a relatively small portion in the middle.

These two apparently divergent conceptions of food unveil an element that may unite the two groups and redefines Estonian identity. Both groups seek a compromise between what is familiar and what they aspire to in relation to the construction of luxury in a national context. For Russians, luxury might be to sense the value up to the last cent they spend, to feel abundance. For Estonians, luxury might mean sophistication and more accent on quality than quantity. For both groups, luxury means de-contextualization from their daily routine and a projection of models of consumption that they see existing elsewhere into their life. From caviar and champagne (Gronow, 2003) onwards, the construction of luxury in post-Soviet spaces, and beyond, has not been grounded on rational choice criteria but on perception, on emulation of models of consumption that were perceived as beyond one's possibility and thus a dream, something to strive to achieve. Russians and Estonians might claim that they eat 'national' food, but they might have different interpretations of what 'national' is. Different intentions in food consumption stir around national cuisine and transform it into something that is swept away from the initial desire of the nation builder. Eventually, this makes Estonian cuisine more international, more Russian, more diverse, mixing intentions, traditions and modernity and eventually uniting Estonians and Russians in symbolic consumption more than one could initially imagine.

Genuine and natural: Introducing buckwheat risotto and national(istic) recipes

Symbolic kitchen battles are part of our daily lives. Not only do they shape our identity at the individual level, but they also contribute to the construction of the imaginary of a nation. Estonians and Russians reveal a three-layer system composed of a national narrative on recipes, domestic food consumption and production which is received by Estonians and Russians in different ways. In other words, some words, recipes and practices appeal more to Russians and some others more to Estonians. Yet, they are all part of an official national narrative that eventually brings Estonians and Russians together through consumption.

The fluidity of borders for national food and the lack of its defined boundaries can turn out embarrassing in some cases. Among the pressures faced after independence, there was the need, for the Estonian authorities, to renegotiate or create a new national identity within a general programme of nation and state building. To this end, the Estonian government needed to decide upon the components (and exclusions) that could constitute the official narrative for a new Estonian identity (Wulf, 2016). Along with others, this aspect was highly challenging. Estonian official narratives, in common with those of Latvia and Lithuania, have been explicitly premised on the notion of a rupture with the Soviet past (Eglitis, 2004), whereby

the Soviet period is classified as an unnaturally bleak period that imposes itself upon the 'natural' history of an otherwise splendid and flourishing nation.

However, these intentions are somehow spoiled by the (not so) hidden (Soviet) side of the Estonian cuisine. How to tell Estonians, proudly dipping rye bread into their borshch and solyanka embellished with smetana that this is not an exclusive Estonian invention? How to explain that the word 'pelmeenid' comes from 'pelmeny' a typical Siberian, and then Soviet, dish? How to explain that translating 'grechka' (buckwheat) into English does not change the essence of things and that new generations of Estonians are eating what their parents used to eat under Soviet domination? The now popular buckwheat risotto ('grechka' with some healthy-sounding ingredients added) is not as purely ethnic as its fancy name might cause people to believe.

A further attempt to outplay Soviet-based narratives is visible in the association of Estonia with Nordic cuisine. The geographical location of Estonia as a 'Nordic country' is reflected in modern Estonian cuisine and the way that Estonian food products and food habits are promoted in official national media sources and incorporated in the phenomenon of Estonian nation branding as a Nordic nation (Jordan, 2014), possibly in an attempt to distance from a Soviet past. The quintessence of this narrative is the official website 'Estonian food' (http://estonianfood.eu), which is about Estonian national cuisine and products, launched by the Estonian Ministry of Rural Affairs. Here, the political elites dictate national food ingredients, symbols and practices with which Estonian citizens might associate themselves. The narrative is also used when dealing with domestic food production and consumption. Even if the act of cooking at home is common to both Estonian and Russian narratives, the underlying assumptions and reasons behind it are now considered different. In contrast to Soviet practices of mass production and industrialisation, Estonia is depicted as a country of small family businesses producing high-quality products. Food goes from the (Estonian) people to the (Estonian) people via the (Estonian) land; it is natural and healthy. A number of products playing on Estonianess have become extremely popular. Milk, bread or cheese is sometimes sold in a package decorated with an Estonian flag ribbon, and black bread ostensibly advertised as made in Estonia has gained a degree of popularity among middle-class Estonians. Descriptions of Estonian nature or, in particular, acts of gathering berries or mushrooms are often accented as acts of solitude, emphasizing a personal union with nature and silence. The act of gathering food, by force of this association, becomes more symbolically important than the act of cooking it. It is no longer a necessity dictated by the fact that food in shops is scarce, as it was during the Soviet period, but it is an individual choice. Cooking becomes rather the natural consequence of an individual that has performed Estonianness by paying a tribute to its nature.

This might be a way to foster national production but also for individuals to literally 'purchase' an identity marker. Nationalism, like all social constructs, is a sentiment reinforced through emotions. If we like a marker, or a food, we will be able to de-contextualize and eventually nationalize it. Russians, thus, might not be

ready to give up their identity, but they can support Estonian products and show their affection to the nation through consumer preferences.

Conclusion

Studies examining integration of Russian speakers into Estonian society through the lenses of the political, language use, or market labour have pointed to the limits of identity construction in the country. In contrast, this article has attempted to look beyond state-narratives at inter-ethnic and inter-class dynamics through the prism of consumption and consumer citizenship. In many respects, national(istic) goods can still serve the function of identity markers accepted by more than one ethnic group as long as they prompt people to take a stand with regard to those goods and choose to consume it or not. We have used this assumption to suggest that new boundaries of identity construction can be studied from a non-statist perspective by looking at consumption practices as forming or stretching the boundaries of identity and its construction. From clothing to restaurants to cars, the construction of luxury in Tallinn is based on the reproduction of a model of consumption that is perceived as providing status and prestige in a given environment. This status is sought after to satisfy two main needs. One is the individual hedonistic quest for pleasure, and the other is social acceptance. Put before a choice, Russian and Estonians apparently choose different foods, clothing, restaurants, cars, the style of house renovation or even grocery shopping. What they have in common, however, is that different interpretations of a given marker still confirm that marker as valid for a whole population and make it usable for social (and self) acceptance. Russians perform Estonianess by emulating some models of consumption, sticking to their habits in some cases (e.g. what they seek in restaurants) and providing even a positive model for Estonians (e.g. celebrations, clothing). Estonians perform Estonianess by openly expanding the boundaries of Estonianess (e.g. by seeking culinary innovation) but also by emulating some models present among Russians, looking up to the Russian ways of celebrating or trying to compete with female clothing. These opposition–emulation–evolution dynamics come to define an identity that substantially differs not only from what official narratives illustrate but also from what people themselves see. Estonian identity becomes thus something hybrid, not openly celebrating its Russian intrinsic elements (e.g. Estonians avoiding places with Russian music) but not denying Russian influences either (e.g. Estonianized Russian cuisine and dish names) while expanding its boundaries to include Nordic elements and celebrating the thirst of modernity widely present in the country.

Resting on the above reflections, this article has made a case for expanding the parameters for academic scrutiny of social integration in Estonia. Along with the well-known emphasis on top-down institutional and political approaches to integration, we suggest that there are other modes of integration or differentiation that are not always visible at a first inquiry. In particular, the multifaceted ways in which integration actually occurs at the everyday level of interaction. By broadening the scope of integration to include more ‘banal’ forms of consumer practices,

it becomes possible to investigate integration at the lived and micro level. While there might be a tendency to ignore or dismiss these practices as insignificant, it is here that individuals have the latitude to perform their national identities in complex and less rigidly determined ways.

We have looked at how individuals from various socially constructed groups can share common experiences that link them to national spaces while not contradicting ethnic categories of identity or belonging which often compete within the political sphere. Even though marketing and branding strategies are often constructed on the basis of well-known ethnic tropes, consumption offers a less politicized sphere, focusing as it does on individual choice. This proffers a more readily accessible means for individuals to enjoy access to ethnic practices that are often institutionally and politically prohibitive. Our evidence has been used to suggest that the political and the everyday may be considered separately, notwithstanding the inevitable overlap between these ideal types. A national narrative can thus be renegotiated, or even opposed by a series of behaviours and attitudes originated by ordinary people who, in this way, assert their agency and retake control on the construction of a multi-vectoral (top-down and bottom-up, but also side to side) identity construction.

While highlighting the complexity of identity formation and the fact that bottom, and everyday, processes can have a role in the formation of the political, this aspect has only been partly acknowledged by current debates on identity construction. In this respect, in contrast to narratives on restricted and ethnic citizenship often informed by top-down political measures, the everyday can help to grasp a dimension that has been long neglected and that could be a missing link between consumption patterns and the construction of identities at the micro level. While a growing body of scholarship has started considering human agency as crucial to the renegotiation of everyday, this has not been systematized sufficiently, and our article can be regarded as an attempt to advocate for more of these approaches in future research.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank several colleagues, to whom we are grateful for their help with the early drafts of this article: Rico Isaacs, Donnacha Ó Beacháin, Jeremy Morris. We also wish to thank Sandy Ross, Christopher Swader and the anonymous reviewers for the useful comments during all the stages of production of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: The research was conducted in the frame of the EU-funded MSCA project 'New Markets' (Grant No. 824027).

Notes

1. Each citizen may be for or against a given marker, but the marker is there. As Fox (2017) puts it, the flag may be waved or hang up, but it is there, and people support it actively or passively. When some citizens mobilize to challenge the flag, and perhaps

question its colours and the historical memory behind it, they will only reinforce the role of the flag as a marker. Two things are important here: one is the way the flag is designed and the symbols behind the choice of colours and shape. The other, implicit, invisible and possibly more important, is the very role of a flag among national symbols, a thing that has informed our definition 'spontaneous nation building' (Polese and Horak, 2015) on which part of this article's argument draws upon.

2. The 'five-year' criteria was suggested to go beyond subjective perceptions of 'being local' and ensure that even non-Tallinn-born citizens had already undergone some adaptation and integration phase.
3. For one thing, questions on ethnic identity of offspring of mixed families could easily inform a whole further study. In addition, ethnic Russians are not the only Russian speakers in Estonia.
4. All interviews were conducted by a Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizen, leading to an interesting combination, and bi-positionality of the researcher. The language in common with some of the interviewed could be considered as cohesion element, helping to build trust through the use of a common language. However, Estonian speakers did not consider her 'Russian' or associated her with Russian politics. On the contrary, by virtue of the 2014 Ukrainian events (and the occupation of Crimean by Russian forces), they felt some kind of civic closeness. Indeed, at several occasions, Estonian speakers declared to perceive Ukrainians as very different from Russians while also displaying a good deal of empathy with the country, which is also under threat from their powerful neighbour and 'common enemy' (Russia).
5. Although the study of supermarket items has directly informed two distinct articles (Polese et al., 2017a, 2018), the reflection prompted has helped us to formulate the main argument of this article.
6. Also, in this case, systematization of the material has allowed the publication of other articles (Pawłusz and Polese, 2017; Seliverstova, 2017a) while providing us data.
7. Such intentions to portray Estonia as a Nordic country were and are supported by the United Nations (UN) official classification of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as countries of Northern Europe. For more details, see http://estonianworld.com/life/un-reclassifies-estonia-northern-european-country/.

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