

Book Manuscript Excerpt:
Consumer Inequalities and Regime Legitimacy
in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia

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Note to Readers: I have included here excerpts from the introductory chapter, and the entirety of a chapter on consumer discourses on the West. The introduction excerpt describes the larger project and explains part of the theoretical framework that is relevant to the empirical chapter.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Russians encounter signs of post-Soviet transformations whenever they go shopping. Advertisements for mobile phones and Coca-Cola have displaced socialist slogans and images of Lenin. Shops and street vendors offer abundant and varied goods as they compete for consumers' rubles, and books once banned and fashions once frowned upon are readily accessible to those who can afford them. Yet for many Russians, this apparent cornucopia feels beyond reach. Discontented consumers, who used to grumble about hoarding by sales clerks, now object to prices that seem unfair in relation to incomes. The small social world once formed in the queue for scarce goods has been dispersed by the search for the best prices. As the fortunes of friends and family diverge in the new economy, social interactions have become awkward, straining networks constructed in the Soviet era.

The everyday experiences of consumers are the consequence of extraordinary changes in the relationship between state and society. After the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 the government radically reduced its responsibility for the stuff of daily life. The new leadership promised that the capitalist market would succeed where the socialist state had failed by generating wealth and justly distributing it. One year after freeing prices and privatizing industry, President Boris Yeltsin pointed to the emergence of new entrepreneurs as evidence that “prosperity is within reach of anyone who is not waiting for manna from heaven but is working for his own good.”¹ In the decade that followed, a protracted depression and skyrocketing inequality called into question both the effectiveness and fairness of market reform.

¹ “New Year’s Message by President Boris Yeltsin,” *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, 12/30/1992.

Drawing on original survey research, in-depth interviews, archival research, and ethnographic observation in the provincial city of Kaluga, this book investigates the meaning and morality of Russia's transition to capitalism from the perspective of consumers. The new government's promise to create prosperity, coupled with the rise of advertising as the main source of mass images of post-Soviet life, encourage people to interpret capitalist transition through the lens of consumption. As consumers, Russians struggle to answer two interrelated sets of questions. First, how has inequality between people in Russia changed, and are those changes fair? And second, how has Russia's relationship to the West changed, and are those changes desirable? Debate about these questions in Russia is quite open, providing an analytical opportunity to study class identities and national identities as they form.

The Russian case is also useful for building theory on the relationship between lifestyle and legitimacy. The most influential study on this question is Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*. Through a study of lifestyles in France, Bourdieu develops a framework for understanding how inequalities remain "doxic," that is, naturalized or taken-for-granted, through a dialectic between mental structures and social structures (Bourdieu 1984; Duneier 2002). How are inequalities experienced, interpreted, and legitimized during times of radical change, when social hierarchies cannot be taken for granted? In stable societies people strategize to improve their positions within stratification hierarchies whose existence they take for granted. When Russians compare their current lifestyles to those of other people or to themselves in the past, they overtly judge the political regime that makes new inequalities possible. Thus, state legitimation and the legitimation of inequality are interdependent. For a political regime to gain legitimacy the inequality it

produces must also be legitimated. At the same time, to achieve stability a stratification order must feel natural, which means that the political regime that supports it must also be taken for granted. A decade after socialism, neither the stratification order nor the political order in Russia was fully legitimate.

THE MEANING OF CONSUMPTION UNDER SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM

I define consumption as the acquisition and use of goods and services by individuals and households for some purpose other than reinvestment in the production process.² This study concentrates on the sociological meaning of consumption. Following Max Weber, to understand social action sociologists must investigate the meanings people attach to behavior. Clifford Geertz builds on Weber and structural anthropology to define cultures as semiotic systems of meaning (“webs of significance”) (1973). Another school of thought understands culture as practical competences or strategies for social action (Swidler 1986).

William Sewell Jr. synthesizes these perspectives by framing culture as a dialectic between system and practice. A semiotic structure is required for symbols to carry meaning, but the properties of the semiotic structure do not explain how meanings form or transform. Meanings are created through practices of using symbols, practices that are guided not only by subjective meaning, but by “other aspects of the environment in which they occur – ...for example, power relations or spatiality or resource distributions” (1999: 48). The task of the sociology of culture is to elucidate “...the relation between cultural meanings and the social circumstances and processes of their production and

² Publicly provided services such as healthcare, education, and public transportation could fall under this conception; however I exclude these services from my working definition to reduce this book’s empirical scope.

deployment” (Battani and Hall 2000: 150). Herein lies the theoretical project of this book.

Many studies assert that consumption assumes unprecedented significance in (post)modern capitalist “consumer societies.” This premise suggests that students of capitalist transitions should look for signs that consumption is becoming more salient to economic and cultural processes. Consumption is meaningful in all societies, however; it is a critical juncture between the material and symbolic levels of social life (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). The interesting comparative question is not to what degree consumption is meaningful, but *how* it is meaningful. Changes in meaning in Russia before and after Soviet rule stem from differences in the systems of production and distribution, the logics of social hierarchy, and the legitimation strategies of the state.

[LONG SECTION ELABORATING THESE DIFFERENCES OMITTED]

STATUS AND SYMBOLIC POWER

Weber’s concept of *Stand* (rendered “status group” by Roth and Wittich) is the canonical articulation of lifestyle as a principle of social stratification. Status groups share social honor based on distinctive stylization of life through consumption (Weber 1978: 935-6). The potential to adopt particular lifestyles depends on consumption capacity, but class situation does not determine or define status group membership (Abel and Cockerham 1993: 553; Sobel 1981: 8; Weber 1978: 306). Scholars differ on whether to treat class and status as independent variables that simultaneously stratify any society, or as principles characterizing two different types of societies. Weber’s texts offer support for both views. He writes that “class distinctions are linked in the most varied ways with status distinctions” (1978: 932), but he also asserts that societies can be

classified as class or status societies “depending on the prevailing mode of stratification” (306). Status stratification governs traditional societies in which high-status groups inhibit “the carrying through of the sheer market principle” by monopolizing goods that form the basis for their claim to social honor. Status groups inevitably decline with the rise of market-based, modern class relations (930).

Some scholars translate *Stand* as estate or rank to emphasize the formal closure mechanisms that structure inequality in non-class societies.. However, Weber’s concept also includes informal mechanisms of closure (Borocz 2001; Manza 1992). Inter-subjective evaluations of entitlement to social deference are key: “In contrast to the purely economically determined ‘class situation’ we wish to designate as *status situation* every typical component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*” (Weber 1978: 932). *Stand* entails “an effective claim to social esteem,” which may be based on style of life or “hereditary charisma” as well as formal political hierarchy (306). Post-Soviet citizens put forth competing but not necessarily effective claims to social esteem in the field of lifestyles. The competition takes place on moral grounds. As Richard Peterson writes: “While the specific criteria of status-giving honor vary from one society to another, in all societies status honor is based in an assertion of moral worthiness” (1997: 76).

Bourdieu names the power to (de)legitimize practices, that is, to “impose the definition of the social world that is best suited to [a group’s] interests,” *symbolic power* (Bourdieu 1991: 167). Status is a form of symbolic power, the power to define the criteria for evaluating “effective claims to social esteem” (Weber 1978: 306). In Bourdieu’s schema, symbolic struggles in the field of lifestyles concern the relative value and

convertibility of economic versus cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Economic capital consists of control over material resources, while cultural capital is constituted through (naturalized and misrecognized) social privilege in the form of upbringing, education, and access to rarified goods. In France, cultural capital is highly legitimate and associated lifestyles are widely recognized as prestigious, although economic capital is the chief avenue to power. The dominant class frames its tastes in aesthetic terms, expressing a distance from necessity. Those lacking both economic and cultural capital formulate lifestyles with respect to pragmatic rather than aesthetic principles, referring “often explicitly to norms of morality or agreeableness in all their judgments” (Bourdieu 1984). Through this “taste for necessity,” the economically and culturally dominated are also symbolically dominated.³

Yet, the convertibility of cultural capital into symbolic capital varies historically. Lamont finds that cultural capital is a less legitimate among the working classes in the U.S. than in France (2000: 219). In principle, those lacking cultural capital could refuse to acknowledge the honorability of consumption practices that cultural elites represent as prestigious. In other words, cultural capital is not equivalent to status, but rather one resource in bids for social esteem. Most of the time, tastes “exist typically as implicit, practical knowledge rather than as explicit ends-oriented statements of ideology or values.” By contrast, “explicit ideological struggle to defend boundaries is actually a sign that boundaries are under siege, or, in Bourdieu’s terminology, they have moved from the common sense acceptance of doxa to orthodoxy and heterodoxy...” (Holt 1997: 106).

This is precisely the case in Russia. During the settled period of late socialism,

³ See Joppke, especially pp. 64-68, for a critique of Bourdieu’s supposition that the most important cultural struggles take place within the dominant class rather than between classes (1986).

Soviet elites had distinctive lifestyles, founded on social privilege and access to scarce goods and services, that formed the basis for their claims to social honor. Yet Soviet ideology on proper life conduct for a socialist person influenced how status claims could be articulated, and provided avenues for lower-ranked persons to also claim social esteem. Consumption practices were a hallmark of *kul'turnost'*, or the state of being cultured, in Soviet ideology, due to the perceived “collective significance of individual behavior” (Kelly 1999).. This emphasis on being cultured originated in Stalinist Russia as a program for transforming peasants into urban, modern socialist workers through hygiene, manners, and cultural consumption (Dunham 1976: 22; Kelly 1999: 197). The ideology persisted throughout the Soviet period, as Soviet cultural production was guided by ideologies of sophistication in cultural consumption, rational style for interiors and clothing, and active leisure in activities such as dacha cultivation and sport. Official discourses on the moral significance of even the most mundane elements of life conduct such as hygiene and table manners came to dominate cultural meaning systems.

Since the collapse of Soviet rule, new status claims are conflicting with older ones. The value of Soviet cultural capital is uncertain, because the education system and professional hierarchies through which it was accumulated have declined. Furthermore, the distribution system that gave Soviet elites access to exclusive goods has collapsed, and much of the Soviet mass intelligentsia has been impoverished. Still, Soviet moral discourses, and the lifestyles associated with them, provide a ready if destabilized status claim for people who have not profited from recent changes. The “losers” of capitalist transition question what they see as the excessive, uncultured, and/or overly Western lifestyles of the newly wealthy.

The “winners” reveal the symbolic power of these criticisms by defending their lifestyles in moral terms (especially through rhetorics of hard work and rationality), in the process often employing or inverting Soviet discourses. The low degree of residential segregation between classes in post-Soviet society, especially in the provinces, where people tend to live in their old (if renovated) apartments, heightens elite sensitivity to mass criticism. In short, economic success in markets certainly brings higher living standards– but it does not necessarily lead to status honor. No group has consolidated the symbolic power to impose universal criteria for judging social esteem, in part because the new political system that destabilized the Soviet status order is not fully legitimate.

DATA SOURCES AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The period of study ranges from 1975 to 2004.⁴ I do not exhaustively document consumption in the Soviet era, but focus on those aspects of Soviet society that are most relevant to post-Soviet consumption. 1975 marked the peak of the development of the Soviet consumer economy, after which stagnation set in (Schroeder 1985; Schroeder 1992). The late socialist period from 1975-1991 is the reference point most Russians use today in comparing life “then and now.” Because archives are spotty after 1970, I triangulate archival sources with evidence gleaned from retrospective interviews and secondary sources.⁵

I carried out the bulk of the fieldwork in 2001 and 2002 in Kaluga, a city of 337,000 that is the capital of Kaluzhskaia province. By basing my research in one city I prioritized methodological depth over geographical breadth; secondary sources and

⁴ Further details are provided in the methodological appendix.

⁵ Many documents remain confidential because they concern living persons in the recent past. Furthermore, many documents from the late 1970s and 1980s never made it to the archives or have yet to be catalogued because of the administrative chaos and severe budget cuts resulting from the closing or reorganization of party-state organizations.

national surveys are used to assess the generalizability of my findings to the rest of Russia. Kaluga is not statistically representative of urban Russia; such a vast and diverse country has no representative locales. Nonetheless, the city does not stand out demographically or economically from other mid-sized cities in Central Russia, and is a reasonable place to investigate cultural consumption patterns. Kaluga is only 200 kilometers from Moscow, yet far away economically, with average reported wages similar to other provincial cities (around \$100 per month in 2002). The province's most important industries include machine building, metal working, food processing, and wood processing. The population is slightly older, more educated, and more ethnically homogenous than elsewhere in provincial urban Russia. Data come from the following sources.

Archival Research and Informational Interviews: These sources were used to investigate the systems of production and distribution of consumer goods,. Archives and newspapers were consulted for information on relevant Soviet policies, and informational interviews were conducted with key figures in the consumer economy, including current and former government officials in charge of planning and economic policy; civil servants in the trade, retail, housing, and planning/statistical administrations; and managers and owners of establishments manufacturing or selling food, clothing, and advertising. Images of consumption in popular media such as magazines and film were also gathered.

Survey research: In spring 2002 I fielded an original survey in Kaluga of 986 adults about their past and present consumer tastes and practices, political attitudes, and positions in stratification hierarchies. The survey includes questions on housing, durable

goods possession, diet, dress, and leisure activities on everyday and special occasions, as well as tastes in clothing, food, literature, music, and film. Other questions measure age, gender, household structure, income, employment, education, types of help given and received, communist party membership, and current political values. Retrospective questions were asked about life in 1985 for topics for which memory is reliable (depending on the respondent's age).

In-depth Interviews: While the survey findings are suggestive of causal pathways, qualitative research helps to theoretically ground causal arguments and to better understand the subjective meanings of consumption. I conducted 52 in-depth interviews with a quota-based convenience sample of Kaluga residents, varying on age, gender, education, living standards, and housing conditions. Interview topics included: biographical life history; general sense of what has changed for better and worse since the collapse of Soviet power; memories of diet, holiday celebrations, clothing, housing and home interior, shopping/acquisition strategies in the late Soviet period; parallel questions on lifestyle in the post-Soviet period; current tastes in books, film, music, and leisure activities; and impressions of lifestyles in the West.

Ethnography: To gather data on interactions in daily life, I befriended and received consent to observe four non-overlapping sets of people. I visited these people in their homes, and also went shopping, celebrated holidays, and participated in various leisure activities with them. The groups included: 1) a family network centered around two middle-aged sisters with divergent economic fates. 2) A downwardly-mobile middle-aged single mother and her wealthy friend, a successful entrepreneur. 3) An elderly, professional couple, nostalgic for Soviet times, whose children are enthusiastic supporters

of capitalist transition. 4) A network of young working-class friends who grew up in the same building and do not have the means to move out of their parents' apartments.⁶

Additionally, over the course of two summers I conducted extended, repeated ethnographic research at 5 dacha sites, and single visits to 26 other sites owned by families with varying living standards.

The first part of the book describes the institutional environment affecting consumption. Chapter 2 outlines developments in consumption-related policies from in the Soviet period, while Chapter 3 explores how the state relaxed its control over consumption in the post-Soviet period. Chapter 4 compares the distribution of living standards in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. The second part of the book is concerned with consumers' experiences of change. Chapter 5 details how people interpret changes in living standards, as evidenced in discourses of class identity. In Chapter 7, I analyze how status claims are articulated in lifestyle preferences related to fashion and leisure. Then in Chapter 8, I examine the politics of consumption through the lens of consumers' comparisons of Russia and the West. Finally, the conclusion takes up the question of whether Russia is a capitalist society, considered through the lens of consumption.

⁶ See Pilkington for a description of Russia's "unspectacular" courtyard youth subculture (1994: 110-111).

Chapter 8: The Politics of Western Goods: A Civilizing and Polluting Force

Domestic and foreign commentators alike describe Russians as politically apathetic. Opinion polls suggest that Russians are more concerned with their economic problems than with their political rights. When I asked my respondents to describe the most important changes in their lives since the collapse of the Soviet Union, few mentioned new freedoms of speech, association, movement, and enterprise. Most talked instead about changes in living standards, contrasted reduced shortages of goods for sale with consumers' acute shortage of money, lamented increasing crime and declining moral values among youth, and described greater anxiety about access to housing, education, healthcare and retirement security. Even those who enthusiastically support recent reforms rarely mention political freedoms, instead emphasizing new possibilities to earn money and buy goods.

Russians are, however, interested in politics, in particular the politics of inequality. In the previous two chapters, we saw how political dispositions are expressed through divergent judgments of both the fairness of the new distribution of living standards and the prestigiousness of lifestyle practices that had been essential to Soviet conceptions of cultured behavior. Those chapters illustrated people seeking status honor by (favorably or unfavorably) comparing life before and after Soviet power within Russia and contrasting socialism with capitalism. A related axis of comparison is Russia versus the West. Following decades of posing Russia as an alternative to Western capitalism, the new regime's stated goal of transition to capitalism suggests Westernization as well. The sudden arrival of imported goods and cultural products, combined with the prohibitive expense of foreign travel, means that most Russians' primary contact with the

West, or what they imagine the West to be, takes place through consumption.⁷ Consumer discourses about the nation also function as distinction strategies in the context of unstable and rapidly changing principles of stratification.

In opinion polls better-off Russians are more likely to support capitalist transition. Yet even the well-to-do are conflicted about recent transformations. Conversely, poor people do not necessarily staunchly defend the old regime. This ambivalence is most evident when people frame recent changes in terms of Russia versus the West, rather than socialism versus capitalism. Quantitatively, it is difficult to classify people as clearly pro- or anti-imports because nearly everyone is ambivalent. If 95% consider Russian sausage to be superior to imported sausage, nearly as many prefer imported detergents. Consumers must make sense of two conflicting advertising discourses on imported and particularly Western goods: the civilizing effects of imported goods such as hygiene and personal care products, versus the purity and patriotism of Russian goods, particularly food products. People try to resolve this tension by drawing national boundaries between Russia and the West – in that process, they also draw boundaries against one another. Tastes are stratified not in a clear division between Slavophiles and Westernizers, but through variation in how people connect shared national preferences in goods to contrasting images of honorable behavior.

DISCOURSES ON THE WEST IN RUSSIAN HISTORY

Since Peter the Great moved the capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg to open a window onto the West, the Russian intellectual and political fields have been divided between “Westernizers” and “Slavophiles.” Westernizers pose Russia as a backwards

⁷ Only 4% of respondents to the 2002 Kaluga survey had traveled outside of the former Soviet Union since 1992.

society that needed to be modernized and civilized, and Slavophiles insist on the necessity and superiority of a unique “Russian idea.” Timothy McDaniel defines that idea as “...the conviction that Russia has its own independent, self-sufficient, and eminently worthy cultural and historical tradition that both sets it apart from the West and guarantees its future flourishing” (1996: 11). The “agony” of that idea is that its meaning comes from what it claims *not* to be, that is, from opposition to the West (McDaniel 1996: 26-27). Likewise, Russian images of the West since the nineteenth century have been an inverted vision of the self, “a reflection of one’s own troubles or hopes” (cited in Diligensky 2000; Levada 1993: 180-181).

This tension persisted in Soviet ideology, which claimed a unique role for Russia as a bastion against the vulgar and unjust West, in a country that Marx had declared too backwards to lead a communist revolution (which he predicted would happen first in the most advanced capitalist countries, i.e. England or Germany). To be consistent with Marxist theory, Bolshevik Russia had to quickly modernize and in a sense becoming the leading edge of Western civilization.

As the Stalinist state began to construct the West as “the antithesis of the USSR,” the West became increasingly equated with capitalism, an identification that was less important before the revolution (Bonnett 2002). In the post-Stalin era, consumerism became another defining attribute of ‘the West’ in official discourse. Soviet media and advice literature frequently contrasted the “socialist way of life” with Western consumerism.⁸ The following example from Kaluga’s main newspaper is typical:

According to research by American sociologists, acquiring private property and unlimited consumption are among the highest values for most American youth.... In contrast, a variety of sociological research demonstrates that the typical

⁸ See the section entitled “Malicious Consumption” in Chapter 3 for more evidence on this point.

socialist individual is oriented towards higher moral and social values. But one must not forget that not all people have achieved this orientation. Values inconsistent with communist ideals have been spreading among some of our youth. Among these are...a thirst for riches and 'thing-ism'....

According to sociological surveys, more than 50% of parents would rather get prestigious, deficit goods for their children than satisfy their own personal needs.... Experts find that up to 40% of women strive to obtain clothing which doesn't look good on them at the expense of things they actually need. The problem is not things per se, but the place things have in the hierarchy of values.... The ideology of consumerism is extremely dangerous. It not only deforms the value orientations of the individual, but spreads principles alien to socialism that contradict the socialist way of life.⁹

Imported goods were often portrayed as instruments of bourgeois propaganda, intended to corrupt Soviet society into a consumer society. For example an article criticizing the fashionableness of imported jeans warns:

We are living in a time when it's possible to dress from head to toe in decent clothing in our own department stores. I don't have a problem with a person wearing jeans because he finds them comfortable, even if they are imported. But it's disturbing when an imported thing ceases to be simply pants and becomes a person's calling card. Some even sew imported labels onto perfectly good domestic clothing.... And on the street one can see people wearing shirts with American army patches and carrying satchels adorned with the flags of unfriendly countries.

This is not simply a question of fashion. It's no accident they want to supply us with such things. The logic is simple: today a Soviet boy wears a shirt with American symbols, tomorrow he'll move on to rock-and-roll, and the day after tomorrow he'll conclude that everything is better in the West than here.... Pardon my harshness, but before covering your ass with overseas pants, you should consider what you'll be propagandizing. In adorning your body, you may sell your soul to look fashionable, and betray your Soviet pride.¹⁰

The ideology of *kul'turnost'* worked to distinguish the Soviet way of life from Western consumerism, avarice, and injustice. Nevertheless, fascination with Western goods was widespread, as people coveted everything from imported clothing to plastic bags with Western logos.

The collapse of the Soviet Union provoked a national identity crisis. The mass

⁹ Sokolov, V. "hto v zhini glavnoe? (What's most important in life)," *Znamia* 10/20/85.

¹⁰ Evseev, V. "Kto i kak 'stroit' dzhinsy (Who is 'making' jeans and how)," *Znamia*, 7/22/1984.

arrival of Western consumer goods in Russian markets symbolized both the loss of the cold war and the promises of the post-Soviet regime. How far Russia should go in its embrace of capitalism, and thus ‘the West,’ has been a point of public debate among political elites. For example, in debating whether Russia should join the World Trade Organization (WTO), Duma members reference Russia’s lost glory and need to protect itself from a predatory West on the one hand, and the need to join the modern world economy on the other. Putin has tried to integrate both points of view – by arguing that economic integration is the only way for Russia to regain its great power status and rightful place among world powers (but not necessarily Western nations) (Dyker 2004).

Putin has also played on anxieties over national identity in his response to the events of September 11. By drawing analogies between 9-11, Chechnyan terrorism at home, and Nazi atrocities, Putin “relocated Russia within a community of states led by Western states and institutions,” as part of a civilized world fighting a common enemy of “barbarians”, “parasites,” “vermin,” and “viruses” (O’Loughlin, O Tuathail and Kolossov 2004). Yet Russia’s refusal to sanctify the American war on Iraq was marketed at home as evidence of national integrity and a source of national pride. The war in Iraq has destabilized the concept of “the West” -- as leadership in the United States discursively divided Europe into “New” and “Old.” That conflict has solidified the ongoing differentiation of the West in Russian political discourse between the United States and Western Europe, capitalism versus social democracy (or market socialism, as Russians often characterize Scandinavian societies) (Diligensky 2000).

These two examples show that Russia/West remains an important opposition in political discourse. In the daily lives of ordinary Russians, the WTO and the war on

terrorism are distant sites for encounters with the West. They are more likely to encounter the West through consumption. Advertisers have sharply focused Westernizing and Slavophile discourses that already existed in Russian culture. Having replaced state propaganda as the primary means of mass cultural education, advertisements encourage consumers to articulate their national identities through their consumption habits.

Perhaps the most powerful missionary for the civilizing virtues of Western goods is Proctor & Gamble, the largest marketer of home and personal care products in Russia, including the top selling dishwashing liquid, bleach, shampoo, and toothpaste. By 1996, Proctor & Gamble had become the largest TV advertiser in Russia, and remained so through 2002. In 1999 the company's advertising budget comprised one-third of total expenditures on advertising in Russia. Given that nearly everyone watches TV regularly in Russia, and most regions still have only a few channels, virtually the entire population has been exposed to their messages. While its market share in some product markets has been declining, it is still number one for many products, for example as of 2000 it had 17% of the market for shampoo, 22% for laundry detergent, and 12% for toothpaste.¹¹

Their ads educate consumers about cleanliness through illustrative images of Western lifestyles. For example, in a television advertisement for Ace bleach, we see a mother and daughter making a bed with freshly bleached sheets – the floor plan of the apartment is modest and apparently Soviet, but the apartment has clearly undergone so-called “Euro-renovation,” and the sheets are spread on a full-sized bed, a rarity for the many Russians who still sleep on Soviet foldaway couches. A voiceover says: “At first it

¹¹ “Procter & Gamble tops list of advertisers in Russia,” *RBC News*, 19 July 2002; “Russia company: Procter & Gamble on TV,” *EIU – Country Economic News*, 13 March 2001 (accessed through ISI EMERGING Markets, www.securities.com).

was hard to believe that linens can become ideally white without boiling them, but after the appearance of Ace on the Russian market in 1996, the age-old ‘pleasure’ of stirring boiling linens for hours on a stove was ended. Besides whitening spectacularly, Ace is also a remarkable means of disinfection.”¹²

Proctor & Gamble also plays on women’s fears of being unfashionable, and therefore, presumably, un-Western. In a cosmetics ad, the consumer is asked: “Have you already heard about Covergirl cosmetics? No? That’s strange! It’s made especially for young and stylish girls, that is, for you! It appeared in the USA in 1961, and thanks to its continual development through leading technologies, Covergirl has already been wildly popular in the Western world for over 20 years.”¹³

In contrast, advertisers of Russian-made goods, especially foods, tout *their* superiority to unwholesome imports. Food importers, noting widespread Russian preferences for domestic foods, have begun to “...attach Russian names to their products sold in Russia: thus Finnish producers peddle Kumushka sour cream and Vologda butter, New Zealanders distribute a butter called Doyarushka, while Lipton sells Beseda tea” (Ioffe and Nefedova 2001: 406). Sausage advertising particularly emphasizes Russianness. For example, Kaluga’s sausage factory uses the slogan “*Try it! Don’t diet!*” with an image of a hearty young peasant woman, a stark contrast to the impossibly thin models in many imported ads. These sausages have “*No dangerous additives, are 100% natural, and are 100% “ours.”*” This promise of purity taps into widespread rumors

¹² Television advertisement aired on NTV, March 2002.

¹³ From Procter and Gamble Russia website, accessed January 2003. Procter and Gamble is one of eight foreign companies who collectively control more than 30 percent of the cosmetics market. While Russian brands of cosmetics have been gaining popularity, imports accounted for an estimated 54% of cosmetics on the market in 2002 (Kenneth, Christopher, “Russia’s World of Cosmetics and Fragrance,” *The Russia Journal*, 15 May 2003).

that Western meats are contaminated with antibiotics, pesticides, preservatives, and diseases. Other foods are also marketed as distinctively Russian: advertisers associate Russian chocolate with pre-revolutionary imperial glory, and Russian dairy products with idealized rural Russian lifestyles.

Advertisers continue to emphasize the foreign origins of those imported goods that were most coveted in Soviet times, such as clothing, furniture, appliances and toiletries.¹⁴ In contrast, Western foods and cultural products such as films and books were less transportable and thus less familiar; the foreign origin of such goods is more likely to provoke ambivalence or even hostility among consumers, since their mass arrival in Russia coincided with massive political and economic transformations. In the early 1990s, Snickers candy bars and the television show “Santa Barbara” became symbols of post-Soviet social change, with both enjoying enormous initial popularity, followed by waning interest and increasingly critical comparisons with domestic candy and films.

As one of my respondents puts it, “It all started with Snickers.” Roman, a 32-year-old lawyer, recounts his first taste of capitalism:

Roman: In 1992 my father went to Moscow and brought back eight Snickers bars, and on March 8th [International Women’s Day] we had a party and neatly cut them into little pieces. Everyone took a little bit and tried it. At that time those candy bars were very expensive. In 1992, when commercial trade was just taking off, the first New Russians who made money were not called “New Russians,” they were called “Snickersmen” (*snikershchiki*). “What does your husband do? He’s a snikershchik.” Or, “He could afford to buy her a fur coat; her husband is a snikershchik.” This was a person who had set up a kiosk. The state stores had not yet been reconstructed and were simply not functioning. Small traders who set up shop on the street started to get rich, and some built up large chains of stores. In general, everything started from there.”

¹⁴ Imported jeans and radio equipment were particularly popular. But Americans who traveled to the Soviet Union found that things like dishwashing liquid, toothbrushes, and tampons also made excellent gifts.

Jane: You were describing the first time you tried a Snickers. Did you like the way it tasted?

Roman: Yes. I ate so many Snickers. But now I don't eat them anymore. The last time I bought a Snickers was probably a year ago – out of nostalgia, I guess. In 1993 I was working as a school teacher, and we lived very modestly. We only ate what we grew at our dacha. And then I fell into money [as a business partner of an entrepreneurial friend]. So for the first time I ate in a restaurant, and the second thing we did was eat those Snickers all night. But now they're no so tasty. It has become just a piece of candy. Simply ordinary.

Jane: What other kinds of chocolate do you like?

Roman: I don't really like sweets that much in general. But of course when it comes to chocolate, I prefer Russian chocolate. (K25 I 3/2002)

Roman's opinions on Snickers are shared by people with much lower living standards and much more nostalgia for the Soviet era. Nevertheless, tastes in domestic versus imported foods are stratified, both in terms of the probability of saying one prefers one or the other, and in the way that tastes are expressed. Political attitudes influence those probabilities, and discourses on taste express political attitudes.

THE POLITICIZATION OF NATIONAL TASTES

Market researchers in Russia report strong consumer preferences for domestic food products. At the same time, Russians “flock toward branded imports” for durable products like cars, clothes, shoes, electronics, and cosmetics, preferring imports even if they cannot afford them (Zagvozdina, Moisseev and Tskhovrebov 2003). Survey respondents in Kaluga overwhelmingly prefer Russian-origin products for several types of food, as reported in Table 8.1. Imported versions of cheese, pasta, and soda are readily available in Kaluga's shops; sausage on the other hand is not, although consumers have a choice between local and national brands. Respondents were asked, “With regard to *quality*, whose products are the best?” Although there is considerable variation in response patterns for the different foods, even the most popular imported food, cheese, was still preferred by only 22% of respondents.

Table 8.1. Preferred National Origin of Food Products (%)

	Imported	Other Russian	Kalugan	All the same	Don't Know	All
Cheese	22	39	30	5	4	100
Pasta	17	15	63	4	1	100
Soda	8	19	45	17	11	100
Sausage	1	10	85	3	1	100

Source: Kaluga Consumption Survey, 2002

Russians are certainly not alone in their patriotic preferences. The “country-of-origin” literature in market research has identified tendencies toward “consumer ethnocentrism” in countries such as Russia, Poland, the Czech Republic, China, Turkey, Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos 2004; Baughn and Yaprak 1993; Good and Huddleston 1995; Han 1988; Kaynak and Kara 2002; Klein, Ettenson and Morris 1998; Orth and Firbasova 2003; Sharma, Shimp and Shin 1992; Shoham and Brencic 2003). “Consumer ethnocentrism,” which varies cross-nationally, increases with age and decreases with education and income in most countries. The expression of ethnocentrism in preferences and purchases depends on the particular type of product, and the country-of-origin of alternatives.

In Russia, national-origin preferences have a political dimension. People with favorable attitudes toward capitalist transition are about three times more likely to favor imported cheese, pasta, and soda as are those who are nostalgic for the Soviet system (Table 8.2). The apparent effect of politics holds up even in multivariate analysis (unreported here) – political values strongly influence the odds of preferring imports, even after controlling living standards, education, and age.¹⁵ However, the majority of

¹⁵ Detailed statistical results can be found in Zavisca (2004). To test whether political preferences have an independent effect on food preferences, or whether this correlation is driven by the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that also influence politics, I performed a set of logistic regressions on the probability of preferring foreign-origin foods. Even after controlling for education, living standards, and age, compared to those who are nostalgic, supporters of post-Soviet reforms are estimated to have nearly

reformists are still more likely to prefer domestic versions of each of these foods.

Education, higher living standards, and youth also bring higher chances of preferring imported foods, but again no group is highly likely to express a preference for imports.

These simple descriptive statistics hint that political meanings are embedded in national origin preferences, but also reveal widespread distaste for imported foods across all groups. Qualitative evidence on national origin preferences better illustrates the complex correspondences between consumer tastes and political tastes.

Table 8.2. % Preferring Imports by Selected Attributes

Politics	Cheese	Pasta	Soda
Nostalgic	13	11	3
Conflicted	22	17	8
Reformist	38	28	14
Education			
< high school	11	12	6
High school	16	11	7
Technical degree	24	17	7
Higher degree	32	24	9
Living Standards			
Very poor	11	14	5
Poor	23	15	9
Average	26	17	7
Good	33	26	11
Age			
21-34	28	22	17
35-54	26	17	6
55+	14	12	3

Source: Kaluga Consumption Survey, 2002

DISCOURSES ON NATION AS DISTINCTION STRATEGIES

Advertisers' conflicting discourses on the national origin of goods resonate strongly with consumers. Across classes and generations, Russians view Western influence as simultaneously a civilizing and contaminating force. Hygiene has been

triple the odds of preferring imported cheese and soda, and over double the odds of preferring imported pasta. Reformers are also significantly more likely to like imports than those who are ambivalent.

touted as a path to civilization in Russia since at least the Stalin era (see Chapter 2). Ads today associate Western hygiene products with the civilization to which Russians should aspire. Most respondents in in-depth interviews asserted that Western hygiene products more effective, and many said that Western countries themselves were cleaner. Yet most also claimed that the mass arrival of Western goods in Russia – particularly food products and media -- has had polluting effects.

Discourses on national origin are differentiated not so much in terms of wholesale embrace or rejection of the West, but in how similar discourses are tied to competing status claims with varying political implications. To illustrate these differences, I follow the logic of earlier chapters in classifying people into three groups based on their holdings of economic and cultural capital, and comparing discursive utterances within and across these groups.

Pragmatic Tastes and Moral Distastes for Western Goods

Poor and less educated Russians subscribe to the nearly universal view that Western hygiene products are more effective. For example, I asked Tatiana, a 72-year-old retired seamstress if she buys any imported things. She replied: “Well, little things: toothpaste, detergent, things like that. For example I buy Fairy washing up liquid because it’s cheaper and it works; I don’t care who manufactures it” (*KI Int.*). Fairy is a Proctor and Gamble product, and its ads cater to such consumers with the slogan: “*Fairy - The most economical way to wash dishes.*” Similarly Stepan, a 30-year-old construction worker, says: “When it comes to ordinary household chemicals, we buy whatever is the best quality for at the price. Everyone knows that will almost always be an imported product. For example Russia has never been able to manufacture normal

laundry detergent” (*K9 Int.*).

Articulating preferences for Western products in pragmatic rather than aesthetic terms leaves room to frame the West as a generally corrupting rather than civilizing force. In particular, imported foods are widely considered to be contaminated. Especially dangerous are the notorious “Bush legs” (*nozhki Busha*). In the early 1990s under George Bush Sr.’s administration, the U.S. began exporting cheap chicken drumsticks to Russia as a form of food aid, so Russians started calling them “Bush legs.” After extolling the wholesomeness and ecological cleanliness of Russian meats, Oleg, a communist party activist, said to me:

Oleg: You’re an American, you must know why they send us those Bush legs.

Jane: Well, I’m not sure, maybe it’s because Americans prefer breast meat, so drumsticks are cheap and available for export.

Oleg: Aha! But why do Americans prefer breast meat?! It’s obvious that when they inject the chickens with antibiotics and preservatives, they do it in the leg, so Americans won’t eat them. But your government thinks it’s fine for Russians. (*K11 Int.*)

This is not the raving of a single paranoid person, but a common suspicion that the Russian poultry industry helps propagate. For example, a news article entitled “US Makes Russia Buy Low Quality Food” quotes a spokesperson for the Razgulyah-Urkrros group, a poultry producers’ organization, as saying: “Americans themselves practically don’t eat chicken legs, which is where hormone injections are made. They prefer ecologically purer chicken breasts. It’s a fact that American hens are raised on enormous amounts of biological protein additives (hormones). And it is in the legs that most of them are concentrated.”¹⁶

Fear of contamination does not stop people from buying imported chicken. A 2001 survey showed that 62% of urban Russian women with below average incomes buy

¹⁶ *RBC Commentary*, 5/26/2003.

“Bush legs” for reasons of superior packaging, availability, and price. But almost all also claimed to substitute Russian chicken when comparable price for quality is available.¹⁷

Poor Russians may harbor distaste for imported foods even as they continue to buy them. Thus analysts cannot infer the meaning of goods simply from decisions to purchase them.

Imported cultural goods, particularly television programming, are also seen as dangerous, polluting the soul rather than the body. Anton, a 52-year-old carpenter, laments:

Of course I like the way we lived before better. Maybe now some people live better materially. But the consequence is moral degradation of society. Our Soviet films taught people to be honest, honorable, and kind. Now if I turn on the television, they constantly show us American films. Killing, horror, sex. I doubt they even show them in America. (*K28 Int.*)

Such programming is seen as symbolic of and responsible for the other ills that arrived in Russia with capitalism. People of all social classes frequently cited homelessness, drug addiction, violence, and sexual promiscuity as uniquely Western problems unknown in Russia before 1991. Among my interviewees, less educated people more commonly framed these problems as the result of deliberate anti-Russian policies as opposed to unfortunate side effects. Anna remembers being shocked by images of homelessness in the West during the Soviet period, and is even more shocked to see it closer to home now. In her view, homelessness is but one example of the pernicious effects of Western culture on Russian society.

Anna: They used to tell us all the time that the West was rotting. Rotting capitalism. I always thought, my god, why can't they just have a revolution like we did and live like us? Why do those poor people keep suffering? They used to show poor Americans crawling all over garbage dumps. It was shocking! And then they started appearing here, people who have no place to work and no place to live. Yes, all of that came to us specifically from the West. At demonstrations there used to always be enormous banners saying: “We’re going to overtake the

¹⁷ http://www.romir.ru/market/potreb/08_2001/poultry.htm

West.” Well, look how we caught up with you – in drug addicts and homeless people. We didn’t know back then how you live.

Jane: Do you have more information now?

Anna: We watch the news. Before they would show us the same thing over and over, the corn harvests, it was boring. And now they show us the same thing over and over, horrible incidents. Someone shot someone. Or all your films, all this sex on TV. Even worse, this artist Vidov, he somehow bought up our cartoons and sold them to America, and now our children can’t see those wonderful cartoons that we made. It’s horrible to think about how our children are growing up, what influences them. My son sits and watches all this garbage. That’s why we are angry with you. All of America is watching our wonderful “Cheburashky” cartoon, and our kids are watching Teletubbies. They take the best we have, and give us the worst. Isn’t that true, Jane?

Jane: I don’t have kids. I don’t know what American children are watching.

Anna: Well go home and find out. Oy! The next generation [of Russians] will be completely abnormal. (*K32 Int.*)

If capitalism’s arrival provides more means for personal hygiene, it’s also created greater collective uncleanliness and disorder. People commonly perceive the city as having become dirtier, and public disorder as a sign of the collapse of government control, and the takeover by selfish “New Russians” who prioritize the individual over the collective. This is also true among those with higher educations, who tend to be less unequivocal in rejecting the West. For example, Tamara ties the arrival of Western culture marvels at the vast variety of goods available in local shops. But she sees a darker side to this.

Of course many people can’t afford all these new goods. People of my generation, maybe we had less materially, but we had more spiritually. Youth already look at life differently. They are only interested in making money and having lots of things. I don’t like the moral cast of mind of our society today. I remember that we used to think that over in the West they have AIDS, drug addition, homelessness, and we don’t have any of that. But since we opened the borders, all of that has come to us. That of course is horrible. And if you look around the city, before it used to be so clean and everyone helped out and planted flowers and swept the streets. Now the city is filthy and disorderly, and there is no sense of social responsibility. You never know when your child may take a wrong turn. It’s impossible not to worry about them all the time. (*K50 Int.*)

Suspicious that Western goods are poisoning Russians both physically and

morally may form the basis for rejecting the West as a model for political organization. In the examples provided so far, older people contrast their own upbringing with that of youth today to underline the moral hazards of capitalism. What do young people have to say about this? Even those who perceive themselves as disadvantaged have more favorable attitudes toward imports than most older people. Yet at times they employ discourses that are strikingly similar to those of the older generation.

Marina, 22 years old, has a vocational education in clerical work. Now she works as a salesperson at a firm selling “plastic windows,” an expensive apartment upgrade for Kaluga’s more affluent consumers. Earning less than \$100 per month, she lives with and helps support her unemployed mother, grandmother, and younger sister. Marina is enthralled to meet me as an American, and says she loves watching films about life in American and the soap opera “Santa Barbara.” She says she imagines that life in the West must be wonderful. I ask her to be more specific.

Jane: How do you imagine life in the West? What attracts you to it?

Lena: I imagine a small town with two-story homes. I know that if here both women and men must work and do everything at home, in the West a woman looks after the children and the man works, and on the weekends they all go someplace fun. If I lived there, I would live like that. But here, the only women who don’t work are the wives of New Russians, and I wouldn’t want to be one of them.

Jane: Why not?

Lena: Because I meet such people through my work, and they are not honest people. They are offensive. There in the West you can get a loan to set up family life and get a house, and then the husband can find a job and pay the money back. In Russia it is not possible to both have a Western lifestyle and live an honest life. We do not aspire to live like that, we do not expect to shop in rich people’s stores with expensive imported things....In winter we eat preserves from what we grew in the countryside in summer. We are satisfied with our Russian foods, which we love. We don’t like all those dried, preserved things. We buy Russian chicken and fry it. We make Russian salads on holidays. It’s not that we think all imports are bad in principle; we just don’t want them because they are not ours. (*K51 Int.*)

To Marina, whose job brings her into contact with Kaluga’s economic elite, post-

Soviet conditions make Western-style consumption morally suspect, even if in principle she herself has a taste for what she perceives as Western lifestyles.

Interestingly, another young woman goes even further in condemning the “plastic window” set in Kaluga. Natasha is a 20-year-old student from a small town in Kaluga oblast. In a twist on the “Bush legs” discourse, Natasha believes European lifestyles can be dangerous for one’s health. One day we are walking through town and she points out apartments with plastic windows and air conditioners, saying: “Those are the signs of people with money.”

I’ve always liked European style, even when I was a little girl. For example Italian windows and doors. Although that style of life requires ingesting a lot of chemicals. There are strange smells when you enter such apartments, and it’s difficult to breathe. There is a high mortality rate in new luxury buildings. People don’t survive because the materials are unnatural. It looks nice, Euro-renovation, but it’s dangerous. (*K47 Obs.*)

Yurii, a 19-year-old electronics repairman, also finds Westernization to be dangerous to Russians’ health (moral rather than physical). Like Natasha, Yurii prefers styles he perceives to be Western and cultivates a “rapper look,” traveling to Moscow to buy imported rapper-style clothes. In 1999 he traveled to Latvia to visit relatives, and opines that “they have really Europeanized. Both the streets and the people were cleaner and sharper than here. What I saw there three years ago, we are just barely approaching – they already had 24-hour-shops and I heard Western music that just arrived here” (*K36 Int.*). He also prefers the modern, “Japanese” style of spacious, uncluttered home interiors.

However, he is not a whole-hearted Westernizer. Patriotism plays an important role in his decisions as a consumer. “As a person who is trying to help the economy of my country, I buy only Russian foods. If before Russian firms worked only for quantity,

now they try to work for quality; therefore food products now really are good. For example, I buy 'Miller' beer, it's made in a factory near buy, so in principle it's Russian." He resents Western films that portray Russia as a "snow-covered backwater where the only people are peasants in giant hats and boots and KGB-men with machineguns." He was particularly offended by the movie Independence Day's portrayal of the Mir space-station as a ramshackle bucket-of-bullets. "America," he says, "perhaps is freer, perhaps has been more successful in certain aspects of its development because it is a country without the rich history and culture of Russia, and therefore without the complexity" (*K36 Int*).

That same Western culture whose music and clothing he admires has corrupted the youth, including himself, he says, leading them to drink, smoke, fight, and think only of themselves and not of country. He notes that while the military was once prestigious, no one wants to go into the army because of the hazing induced by materialism. If in the past hazing was a good-natured form of discipline in the interest of the collective, now it takes the form "of two older guys with cell phones who beat up on the younger guys for money to pay for their phones" (*K36 Int*).

Like two-thirds of Kalugans under 35 (based on survey results), Yurii does not wholeheartedly embrace recent reforms. He even believes the country would be better off if it reverted to a planned economy, as long as the government did not meddle too much in people's private lives or punish them for trying to improve their living standards. The experiment with a market economy has proven to him that given the chance, everyone, including himself, will think only of themselves and not of the collective. "Planning is better for the country; industry and the military blossomed under it – it's

better not for each of us individually, but for the country as a whole” (*K36 Int.*). Yurii’s nostalgia may be driven by his father’s downward mobility. A Soviet military officer, his father tried his hand at entrepreneurship after being laid off, but fell into a pyramid scheme and lost a lot of money. Yurii’s own class position is ambiguous – although he makes a decent salary of \$200 a month at his job, he sees no prospects for acquiring a separate apartment and feels there is no point in pursuing a higher education since “a degree doesn’t guarantee a professional career these days, unless you have connections.”

Yurii combines a taste for Western styles and goods with a Slavophile insistence of Russia’s uniqueness and the moral superiority of the Soviet system. Although older people are the most suspicious of the West and of Russians who embrace it, young people, particularly those who lack economic and cultural capital, echo the discourses of their elders in questioning the moral and physical hazards of Western lifestyles.

Cultured Consumption Calls for Cautious Embrace of the West

In expressing preferences for the national origins of consumer goods, downwardly mobile but educated Russians seek to preserve the value of their cultural capital. To do so, they must distinguish themselves both from the large poor strata in society whom they have joined economically, but not culturally, on the one hand, and the wealthy winners of capitalist transition on the other.

Recall that in discussing preferences for imported hygiene products, respondents without higher educations emphasized the effectiveness and affordability of such goods. In contrast, the highly educated but recently impoverished members of the Soviet mass intelligentsia of teachers, doctors, and scientists embrace Western hygiene products for their civilizing as well as practical effects. For example, a middle-aged acquaintance

with a PhD introduced me to a less educated neighbor so I could “see how peasants live in the city.” Afterwards, he said:

Did you see how filthy her apartment was? This is not a well-brought-up person. We’ll know that Russia has become a truly civilized country when such people understand cleanliness.... I visited Germany and Czechoslovakia [in the 1980s]. I liked the way people dressed, how they kept up their homes and public spaces. My friends tell me that in Switzerland they even wash the streets with soap. Well now we have capitalism, we have imported soap, but for some reason we still haven’t become clean like in the West. (*K106 Obs.*)

In a similar vein, Lena, a retired schoolteacher, complained about the failure of uncultured people to adopt new, more hygienic practices in handling and packaging of bread: “Before there were long lines in bread shops, and everything just lay there exposed and everyone could poke the bread. Now bread is packaged in individual plastic bags like in the West. But some people persist with old habits – they smash the bread, put their dirty fingers all over it. It’s completely uncivilized” (*K20 Int.*).

For Raisa, a laid-off chemical engineer now working in a bread kiosk, hygiene is a way for her to maintain a superior sense of status over her working class clients, many of whom treat her quite rudely. She, like many of my other female respondents, is fascinated with American styles, which she gleans mostly from reading translated romance novels, “something light to distract me from real life.” It seems to her that the women in these novels are “simply gorgeous, they carry themselves like royalty, even the poor ones. When I read about them, I feel that I, and Russia in general, are way beneath them” (*K104 Obs.*). As she says, she could never afford to dress like a movie star. Her 7-year-old son jokes he hopes he’ll win the lottery so he can buy her new clothes so that Arnold Schwarzenegger will want to marry her and take them to Hollywood. “My son, we will be staying in Russia. Look at me, I can’t afford a dentist and am missing half my teeth, I don’t have long blonde hair and huge blue eyes. Anyway, Schwarzenegger

already has a wife!” (He proposes Van Damme as a suitable alternative.)

Even if she cannot afford to dress like idealized Western women, she can maintain her sense of dignity by choosing classical styles and fastidiously attending to personal hygiene. She wears the same drab track suit every day while working: “When I’m here, no one treats me like a respected lady, so why should I look like one?” But when she leaves work she changes into immaculately cleaned and pressed clothes. As she says, “I do laundry practically every day because I want my son to be clean and to value cleanliness. I will not let my son deteriorate into a hooligan like so many youth today. He knows to wash his socks and underwear and to bathe every day. He knows that if he uses something, he must put it away. He knows to say thank you. He is a gentleman.” Her kiosk clients, on the other hand, are targets of her frequent under-the-breath criticisms for having dirty hands, chipped fingernail polish, and foul breath (not to mention improper grammar and poorly behaved children).

By embracing Western hygiene, educated, downwardly mobile people distinguish themselves from what they perceive as the uncivilized masses. But to preserve the value of Soviet cultural capital, downwardly mobile people must also distinguish themselves from the suddenly wealthy “New Russians.” They do so by expressing tastes for classic Europe, and distastes for vulgar America. For example, as we were shopping for clothes, Vera told me apologetically:

No offense, but I prefer European to American styles. Why do Americans, who have so much money, dress so badly? I particularly don’t like American sportswear. That’s how New Russian bandits dress....The trouble is I can’t afford the classic, tailored European imports I see in finer stores in Moscow. I’m forced to wear cheap shoes that say made in Italy but I know full well were made in China. (*K107 Obs.*)

Max, the young highbrow reader we met in the previous chapter, echoes Vera’s

implication that having money doesn't necessarily mean knowing how to dress.

I prefer imported clothes. I especially like chic American jeans. I remember my first pair of jeans was brought to me from America.. An American came to visit a colleague of my mother's in 1996 and brought some jeans as a gift. They weren't the right size, so they gave them to me. Before that I didn't like jeans because they were all poor quality from Pakistan or Vietnam. But these were real, with all the signs of authenticity: a real label and special buttons. If I could afford it I would only buy American jeans, but sometimes I buy Turkish ones. (*K7 Int.*) Of course there's a lot more choices in clothing now. But I don't like a lot of the new styles, especially for women. A lot of the girls at my institute dress too flashy and provocatively, even those with money who can afford the best imports. It's the same in Moscow. I visited Petersburg recently, and I thought the girls looked better there, more European. More classical and yet more modern. Elegant. (*K6 Int.*)

Max also prefers European design for interiors. "By the way, we have a lot of Italian things. Italian dishes, an Italian washing machine. We can't afford Italian wallpaper, but we found some Russian-made that looks European and we're redecorating now." Like most Russians, however, he prefers Russian food – first, he says, because only poor-quality imports are available for sale in Russia, and second, because naturally locally produced food is fresher.

This group is less prone to conspiracy theories that the West is trying to poison Russia, but they do reject those Western foods that have appeared in Russia. A quote from Nina is typical:

Nina: Concerning food, on the one hand, the selection for sale now is much wider. But everything has become much more expensive and there have been changes for the worse, because before there were few imports, only bananas, raisins – essential imports that don't grow here. Now there are a lot more imports, but given our salaries, they sell a lot of low quality foods now.

Jane: What kinds of foods have become worse?

Nina: There was a brief period of enthusiasm for your Snickers and Mars bars. But then we asked ourselves, why are we buying this? Everyone I know started to say: the chocolate of our Moscow manufacturers is better and has more cocoa. I also don't like those tall, cold, carbonated drinks because they don't give you anything but toxins. And I drink less juice – before there were lots of cheap juices in glass containers, but now they only sell it from concentrate or in paper boxes....

The west views us as poor people, and so they only sell us the worst quality at the lowest price. Fortunately my family is in a position to choose, so we choose Russian foods, even if they sometimes cost a little more. I don't buy imported meats; we are scared by all those rumors about mad cow disease and anthrax. I also don't like and have never bought those famous "Bush legs." We only buy domestic, natural meat, which is better. (*K4 Int.*)

The post-Soviet intelligentsia does not reject the West wholesale, but rather the sudden flooding of markets with cheap imports for the poor, and the restriction of access to quality imports to the new rich, who, to add insult to injury, don't even know how to spend their ill-gotten money. Correspondingly, this group doesn't reject Western political forms wholesale, but is more likely to embrace the "European-style" socialism of Scandinavia, or to advocate adopting only the best elements of Western political culture. After expressing her distaste for cheap imports, Nina ruminates:

I don't believe that we have normal capitalism now; I don't know, we have some kind of aberration. Those mechanisms that should work are not working, those market mechanisms. I don't know why. Our leadership unjustly and incorrectly introduced those reforms and we weren't prepared. Nothing could be worse. It's necessary to take an evolutionary route, to allow the society to develop for itself, and not to interfere in that process. (*K4 Int.*)

Framing Russian capitalism as abnormal or makes it possible to criticize the situation in Russia today (and its beneficiaries), without necessarily rejecting Western politics or culture. Kirill, a photographer, calls Russian capitalism "wild" and "primitive," which allowed "certain people to get rich without having any particular talent other than standing on the street and trading" (*K33 Int.*). He himself engaged in petty entrepreneurship in the early 1990s, selling commercial paint, and recounted one day in which he made a thousand dollars because of a sudden currency change and the temporary lack of competition in Kaluga. However, he quit doing that to get back to his art, both because it became less profitable once the commercial retail sector developed, and because he found it dull:

It was stupefying interacting with all those traders, they have no thoughts in their heads except how much will they make today. It started to feel like being in the army or working in a mine, totally boring. It's better to have less money, but a more interesting life. I wouldn't go to a regular job now even for \$500 a month....This mentality, it seems to me that it comes from America. My impression of Americans is that they are only concerned with how to make more money so as to live better and better. I couldn't live there. (*K33 Int.*)

Nevertheless, Kirill insists that whatever the defects of the status quo, life is categorically better than in Soviet times. He cites access to imported technology: "Could I ever have bought an imported computer, a printer? Thank god I have these instruments for my artistic work." Other types of consumption opportunities have also improved.

As a consumer I'm very happy I can find normal quality goods and can shop in Western format, 24-hour shops....People say that vodka used to be better quality. That's stupidity. It could not have been better because there was a monopoly and nothing to compare it to. When there is more competition, quality is higher. People don't realize that things are better because they quickly got used to improvements and forgot about them. (*K33 Int.*)

When I ask him if there are other types of goods for which he prefers imports, he says, "Such things are not so important to me. For example I've always been indifferent to clothing. If I cared about having imported clothes, I would be somewhere scheming to make money, not sitting here without money." He is poor, he says because Russians, unlike Europeans, have lowbrow taste and don't appreciate his surrealist photographs.

Western art of course is much better, because there is not such an obsession with realism. As one Moscow artist says, "Why are Russians so attracted to realist art? You have no money, your husband is a drunk, where is there room for more realism?" Most Russian artists are also stuck in realism. They lack creativity. Overseas, in Europe, to the contrary the situation is normal. Artists can earn a decent living. People will buy surrealist art. Perhaps when living standards improve in Russia, people will not be so concerned with reality and their tastes will improve. Recently demand in Kaluga has increased a little. Although there is a lot more money in Moscow, and even there good artists have difficulty selling their work. (*K33 Int.*)

Kirill distinguishes himself from the poor by maligning their tastes in art and their nostalgia for the consumer economy of the past. And he distinguishes himself from the

rich by criticizing their “American” obsession with material gain. In all of the examples given, discourses on the West serve as distinction strategies to preserve the value of cultural capital acquired from the Soviet period.

Western Possibilities, Patriotic Preferences

Many so-called “New Russians,” also inherited cultural capital from the Soviet period. But what sets them apart now is their new wealth. Well aware that others see them as immoral and uncultured, they defend themselves as cultured consumers and patriotic defenders of the Russian economy, who thereby deserve both Western living standards and status honor.

New economic elites assert tastes in Western, and particularly European, clothing and décor to preempt suspicions that they are uncultured New Russians. Their success in a Western-style market economy entitles them to a Western middle-class life, whose primary emblems are a large suburban house and an imported car. Masha, a former pattern designer turned prosperous shop owner, is building a new house. She wistfully says:

How I long for domestic comfort. In this room there’ll be a parquet floor, a soft imported sofa, and the finest European wallpaper. When we’re done, everything will be clean, spacious, thoroughly in the modern style. Others refuse to work in trade because they think it’s beneath them, yet still it’s a new dress at the market and sausage every day, and then they complain they can’t save or get an apartment. But for now I deny myself, we’re renovating so slowly because we have to invest our capital in the business. Other people see our house and say Oh! New Russians! Speculators! They have no idea. (*K12 Int.*)

By embracing a Western work ethic and emphasizing her capacity for self-denial, Masha rebuffs the New Russian label. Another way to appear cultured is to join the previous group in embracing Western hygiene products as civilizing agents. Witness this exchange at a birthday party for a teacher whose husband is now a wealthy entrepreneur.

The hostess uses her purchasing power to try (not altogether successfully) to appear as an ambassador for Western lifestyles. As the women gather in the kitchen to wash dishes, she says: “Ladies, I have an important announcement. Stop buying Fairy. It will ruin your hands; because it contains harsh chemicals to keep it cheap. Buy this new import instead [showing off a bottle of Palmolive]. I got it in Moscow at Stockman’s [Finnish department store], but I heard you can find it in Kaluga. It costs more, but isn’t it worth it to keep our hands pretty?” Her cousin, an educated but poor single mother, nods politely, but continues using Fairy. When I visit her later at her modest apartment, she jokes as she washes dishes: “Oh my! I’m ruining my exquisite hands using Fairy! I’d better be careful or people won’t know how rich I am!” (*K108, K2 Obs.*)

Travel opportunities provide wealthy people with stories about the hygienic West, through which they assert their own cultured tastes. Nellie, a wealthy student, recently traveled to Germany through the private university she attends. The “value of cleanliness” in Germany, she says, makes the country more civilized.

Of course I liked it there. Everything seemed as if it was from a fairytale. It was very pretty, flowers everywhere. They value cleanliness more there; in Russia that’s not the case. And the roads are better quality. When you drive on our roads there’s no comparison....When I came back from Germany, I told my mother: “I’m going to move there and live.” I wanted to live like that. Here they don’t look after the streets; there are lots of poor people on the streets. There’s nothing like that there. There is civilization, cleanliness, order. That’s how I felt at first. Then the feeling passed. Foreigners differ from Russians, and they say it’s hard for us to live there. There’s not such hospitality, that is if two families become friends, they don’t visit each other at home; that’s not the way they do things in the West; they go to a café. (*K44 Int.*)

Kristina also cites her trips to Europe to speak with authority on how life there really compares with that in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.

We really believed that we were building a socialist way of life, and that Westerners were dimwitted people who don’t understand how wonderful it is to live under socialism. My opinion started to change when we visited the GDR and

Czechoslovakia in 1984. They didn't let us go to capitalist countries, but even going there it was obvious they lived better. And when we marveled in the GDR at how people had everything, people there said no, we live badly, in Western Germany people live well. We couldn't understand how that was possible. That's when I started to have doubts about what they told us, that people live badly in the West. And now we frequently go overseas. We see that there, anyone who wants to can work and live normally; those who don't want or can't work, they can live badly or well. They live in various conditions. Of course our relationship to the West has changed materially, and also politically. (*K27 Int.*)

Kristina rejects others' paranoia about the quality of Western goods as sour grapes. "It's true that many Russian products taste better here simply because they are fresher. If it's something preserved, then I don't care. To be honest, I prefer American drumsticks. Some people suspect that something in those "Bush legs" is bad for the organism. But they're bigger and tastier, and anyway Russian chickens are probably also bad for the organism, judging from their bluish, scraggly appearance."

Yet if the quality is acceptable, Kristina says that she always buys Russian foods out of a sense of patriotism.

I try to buy Russian foods; it's necessary to support our entrepreneurs. Before they correctly instilled a sense of patriotism in people. Maybe they told us more bad than good about the West, but they taught us to love our country and to build cities and factories. We sang songs about our motherland, and that was good. And now it's very bad that youth believe that everything in Russia is bad, that everything is for sale, that we have rich and poor, and the poor will never be able to earn money, and so on, and therefore we should move to the West. We know many people who emigrated for such reasons. But we stayed here to raise our children to love even our broken, ruined Russia, to do what they can so that there were fewer drug addicts and easy women, and so that everyone worked instead of drinking vodka all day. If every person would live like that, then our country will rise up again. It's a shame that patriotic discipline is so weak now. (*K27 Int.*)

This passage mixes Soviet collectivism and post-Soviet individualism – individual producers (like her family) who haven't defected to the West should be patriotically supported by consumers. Individual patriotic sentiment is the solution to collective problems, but the state must help instill it.

Many well-to-do Russians believe that a market economy is the correct path, but the strict hand of the state is still necessary to reshape people into productive capitalist citizens. For example, Alexei's father is a rich businessman. Alexei is a strong supporter of capitalist transition, and attributes the anti-Western sentiment he senses among a lot of youth to ignorance and jealousy. The prospect of emigrating to the West is tempting, he says, because "there aren't the proper conditions for a normal life here." But he is afraid there he would "...be seen as a second class person, while here I can be a first class person." He is also a "patriot" – the reason he only buys Russian foods ("One has to support Russian producers"), although he dresses only in imported clothing bought at brand-name stores in Moscow (*K42 Int.*).

Alexei believes that Russia would be better off if the Bolshevik revolution had never happened, pointing out that "England still has a monarchy and it's not a problem – it's a beautiful tradition and it hasn't prevented modernization." He supports Putin for "restoring pride in the motherland" – by supporting a market economy in which "people are forced to work if they want to live well" on the one hand, and for restoring social order by strengthening law enforcement on the other.

CONCLUSION

In keeping with my focus on consumer inequalities and stratification processes, this chapter has focused on differences in tastes by social class. Shared tastes across classes are also striking. Most Russians are ambivalent toward the West. Even the poorest people have exposure to and some limited access to imported goods now. Nearly everyone buys Proctor & Gamble's cleaning supplies, and most believe Western hygiene products are the best. Perceptions of the hierarchy of clothing quality (European >

American > Russian > Other) – are also broadly shared. Preferences for Russian foods in general are universal (even if imports are preferred and/or bought for specific items).

Widespread concern with the national origin of consumer goods is revealing of the extent to which Russians are anxious about the place of their country in the world today. Variation in how that concern is expressed reveals anxiety about the place of individuals in post-Soviet society. Lines of class distinction in Russia are drawn using the language of nationalism. Table 8.4 summarizes modal dispositions by “capital holdings.” The first group declares certain imported goods, particularly foods and cultural programming, to be morally and physically dangerous. By implication, those who support and/or benefit from the arrival of Western culture in Russia are morally reprehensible. Members of the second group are less hostile to Western goods, perhaps because many valued and had access to them in the Soviet period. They criticize less educated people for not recognizing the civilizing possibilities of contact with the West, yet also criticize the rich first for not distinguishing from cultured and uncultured elements of Western culture, and second for creating a system which denies most people the resources needed to consume better imports. Finally, the third group employs defensive discourses that suggest they are aware of the criticisms of others. Sharing Soviet era cultural capital with the second group, they employ similar discourses on the superiority of certain Western goods. By expressing preferences for Russian foods more in terms of patriotism than quality, they suggest that they deserve respect for building capitalism in Russia.

Table 8.4. Homologies between Consumption Tastes and Political Tastes

Capital Holdings	Tastes		
	<i>Western goods</i>	<i>Russian goods</i>	<i>Political system</i>
Economic: low Cultural: low	Pragmatic tastes (useful, affordable). Moral distastes (polluting, corrupting).	Morally and physically safe.	Soviet socialism.
Economic: low Cultural: high	Civilizing force. Europe = cultured. America = crass.	Superior to crass imports, inferior to cultured ones.	Democratic socialism; evolutionary adaptation
Economic: high Cultural: high	Market=civilization. Reward for market success.	Patriotic duty to support local business.	Market + strong state

Discourses on imported consumer goods are simultaneously discourses on imported political and economic systems, which vary by class position. Those connections are produced by what Bourdieu calls “class habitus,” the subconscious coordination of beliefs and practices that arises from shared location in a given social structure. Because Russian political discourse has long revolved around contrasts with the West, and because consumption is the site where Russians most frequently encounter the West, it is not surprising that discourses on Western goods are so politicized. The study of consumption makes more comprehensible the relatively broad appeal of nationalist political discourse in Russia today, which resonates in different ways and for different reasons with various sectors of a society which for three centuries has equated the West with both civilization and corruption, a simultaneously sanitizing and polluting force.

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