



# **‘Information Turned Entertainment’: Images of the Enemy and Conspicuous Patriotic Consumption in Russia**

---

VERA SKVIRSKAJA

*Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies  
University of Copenhagen, Denmark*

*Abstract:* The Russian-Ukrainian conflict [2014-] and concomitant Russian and Ukrainian information wars have given rise to new propaganda languages and images. This paper is an ethnographic exploration of the permutations of images of the enemy and the ways in which they are deployed and consumed in the overlapping realms of Russian social media, fashion and pop art. Alongside top-down propaganda, a number of folk terms and memes has emerged to designate and stereotype the enemy. One of the key terms and memes is *vatnik* (a traditional Russian padded cotton jacket of Chinese origin), which was initially used to designate a xenophobic Russian patriot easily brainwashed by the state propaganda. With time, *vatnik* has become a playground for ironic appropriations that create political commodity brands as well as signal a range of diverse political allegiances present in Russian society. Drawing on the anthropological notion of the assemblage, the paper traces how patriotic branding and the entertainment of stereotyping the enemy unsettle and ‘jam’ patriotic consumption and identification. Here, *vatnik* has become a good example of conspicuous patriotic consumption, indicating not only ‘expensive wastefulness’, but more importantly, the excess of signification attached to this commodity qua brand. The paper argues that while excessive commodification and branding of patriotic images (e.g. leaders, heroes, places, etc.) for mass consumption is indeed very common worldwide, the Russian ironic genre of *stiob* often appears to be an important technology of (non)patriotic consumption in Russia.

*Keywords:* Russia, *vatnik*, enemy stereotype, irony, patriotic branding, fashion, pop art, *stiob*

---

Nowadays, state propaganda in Russia actively promotes patriotism – a patriotism that combines unquestioning love for the motherland with all its ‘shortcomings’ – as the supreme moral ground for collective and individual identification.<sup>1</sup> This is tied up with political circumstances of the last fifteen years or so; patriotism is now called upon to cement an uneasy alliance of authoritarianism and neoliberalism. At the level of the collective, it is a strong contender for representing a new ‘National Idea’, whose task is to unify and unite the multi-ethnic nation of the Russian Federation. Moreover, some Russian observers have noted that besides assuming the role of ‘ruling ideology’, patriotism is also broadly promulgated as a ‘rare’ and exclusive individual moral quality that few Russian citizens have managed to preserve or cultivate since the end of state socialism, falling instead for the dominant values of consumer society.

This vision of the ‘downfall’ of patriotism in Russia is also documented in numerous interviews with ordinary post-Soviets in the 1990s and 2000s by the Noble Prize winner, Svetlana Alexievich (2016): the end of the socialist state is seen as a tragedy involving the sacrifice of Soviet ideals and the USSR for banal consumerist gratification in its broadest sense (e.g. bananas and stylish underwear). But while the pleasures of consumerism are often decried as ‘unpatriotic’, when the commodities consumed are classified as *nashi* (‘ours’), then moralising and nostalgic narratives can recognize consumption as a form of moral mobilization. ‘Our’ products refer to a diverse range of ‘patriotic’ commodities: *otechestvennye* (‘native’) products, such as ‘uncontaminated’ Russian foodstuffs and the Soviet durables still available on the flea market; the ‘unique’ inventions of the Russian mind (by physicists or engineers) now made in China; commodities qua symbols of Russia and specific events and institutions in Russian history (St. George’s ribbon, portraits of Stalin, ‘Putiniana’, etc.); and also ordinary, generic goods brought from the annexed territories that only recently became properly ‘ours’ (i.e. any goods with Crimean connections).<sup>2</sup>

The current emphasis on ‘patriotic’ consumption, which has been exacerbated by Western sanctions imposed in response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and falling oil prices, has an established history in post-Soviet Russia. Nostalgia for Russia’s status as a superpower, and ersatz-nostalgia (Appadurai 1996) that draws on Russian imperial signifiers, have been a guiding thread of patriotic advertising since the fall of the USSR. In the 1990s and early 2000s, when a sharp divide between the haves and have-nots emerged as a new social reality, ‘Russian products’ were similarly extolled and closely associated with attempts at defining ‘the Russian national idea’ (*obshche-rossiiskaia ideia*), highlighting popular anxiety about national identity (e.g. Morris 2005). What has recently become more pronounced is a form of patriotic branding that deploys images of ‘the enemy’ and appeals to explicitly anti-liberal, militaristic and conservative values; this novelty is reflected in the nature and aesthetics of the new symbols that have been commodified, branded and consumed.

This paper analyses one example of recent developments in branding and marketing of political or patriotic commodities in Russia, namely the stellar rise of a humble garment called *vatnik* (a padded workaday jacket made of cotton wool) to the status of identity icon,

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by the ERC Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme no. 669 132. I am grateful to Matthew Carey, Morten Axel Petersen, Lars Højer, Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bunkenborg for their insightful comments on this paper. Thanks to Julie Fedor for directing my attention towards interesting online sources.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the blog by the Russian journalist Mironova (2016).

political symbol and cult object. In so doing, it draws on the contestations and identifications that this patriotic commodity-cum-symbol has set in train in public life. By now, post-Soviet consumers have become accustomed to all sorts of patriotic branding, and many patriotic commodities do not appear to raise anxieties or conceptual issues about their normative, patriotic signification (for instance, the Russian flag or Putin T-shirts). While these commodities do not, of course, appeal uniformly to Russian consumer-citizens, if we follow Billig's (1995) analysis of the everyday ideological habits of Western nations, we can understand them as expressions of 'banal nationalism' (e.g. a flag hanging outside the US post office). These banal object-symbols are explicitly patriotic, but they are also routine and so engrained in the everyday that they may often pass unnoticed and do not provoke intense or violent emotions. Vatnik – the protagonist of this article – is, by contrast, a meme, a symbol, an object, and a commodity whose signification vis-à-vis patriotism and the state is equivocal, inherently ambiguous and far from banal. The article aims to show the ways in which patriotic commodities can create resonance and popular creativity that challenge and blur the boundary between patriotic glorification and ridicule of Russia and Russians.

### **Theoretical frameworks**

Methodologically, this article approaches vatnik as a digitally-enabled assemblage in order to foreground the absence of any unitary logic at play and allow us to comprehend the dispersed aspect of the phenomenon under study. The point about an assemblage is that it is concerned with mapping and tracing ethnographically diffuse relations or connections that are unstable, contingent and can potentially lead anywhere (cf. Ong and Collier 2005; Zigon 2015). In the case at hand, the diffuse relations link different material instantiations of vatnik into a single phenomenon: vatnik surfaced in popular culture as a digital 'unit of culture' – a meme-caricature of a simpleton Russian patriot of the conformist, state-authorized kind – but quickly broadened in scope, being redeployed in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a representation of the ('Russian') enemy and acquiring followers as a newly fashionable garment and source of artistic inspiration. In this way, the production of internet memes intersects with the branding and re-branding of certain political identities, commodities and art objects.

To theorise further vatnik's assemblic and heterogeneous character, I also deploy the idea of 'conspicuous patriotic consumption'. In his classic text, Veblen (1994: 52, 56) linked the idea of conspicuous consumption to the 'wasteful expense' and overindulgence that demonstrate pecuniary strength and afford the norm of reputability in a community (i.e. to be 'reputable it must be wasteful', 1994: 60). To recall, this type of 'classic' wasteful and spectacular consumption was all the rage among the Russian nouveaux riches in the 1990s, resulting in clichéd images of the tasteless, opulent New Russian. In their striving to establish a new cultural identity for themselves, New Russians aimed at outdoing their Western counterparts, simply because they were Russian (Humphrey 2002: 181). While New Russians have largely transformed into a more refined wealthy bourgeoisie interested in 'culturedness', just like their Western equivalents (e.g. Schimpfoss 2014), conspicuousness can now be observed in the realm of Russian patriotic commodities. Vatnik has been embraced by Russian fashion and pop art and as a result has acquired a range of very different significations. Hence, conspicuous patriotic consumption refers here to 'expensive wastefulness' as per Veblen's defi-

dition as well as to the excess of signification attached to vatnik qua brand, to the array of political and aesthetic messages that the brand's surfeit (Nakassis 2013) conveys for different audiences.

Whatever the source of its conspicuousness, patriotic consumption has given rise to digitally circulated and widely shared humour. Vatnik's excessive signification has become a playground for ironic appropriations whereby a particular, indeterminate and ambiguous humorous genre, known as *stiob* (a specific Russian ironic aesthetic), is commonly deployed both on and off-line. In other words, irony or *stiob* has become a key attribute of the vatnik assemblage and a technology of conspicuous patriotic consumption. As will be discussed in this article, in some instances, the coupling of irony with the patriotic commodity is carried out on behalf of the political establishment and/or as a commercial strategy, whilst in others, making fun of vatnik appears politically 'subversive'. Yet, 'subversive fun' may often function as a safety valve for an authoritarian regime (e.g. Wedeen 2013: 865) irrespective of whether or not it effectively produces counter-publics (e.g. Marzouki 2015).

These processes that vatnik both gives rise and owes its ongoing public existence to, such as patriotic branding, stereotyping the enemy, (subversive) irony, aggregation of publics and counter-publics, habitually take place in a digital communicative environment. They illustrate a global trend whereby (political) opinion offers itself as information, and ordinary people participate in promotional culture as consumers and producers of media content and digitally-mediated DIY entertainment (e.g. Turner 2010: 72-73; 158-174).<sup>3</sup> If by 'information' we here mean political and historical references that feature routinely in sombre and didactic propaganda of state patriotism, then the production and dissemination of memes, commercial and folk branding of patriotic commodities, *stiob* and the like point to a more entertaining, but not necessarily non-affective, take on 'love for the motherland'. Drawing on Russian-language digital sources mediated by various Internet platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LiveJournal, VKontakte, Wikipedia) as well as on publications on Russian entertainment and news websites,<sup>4</sup> the article suggests that whilst the vatnik assemblage functions as a catalyst of diverse political allegiances and sympathies, once we shift our focus to its more 'entertaining' dimension, it reflects the increasingly opaque and ambiguous nature of public discursive spaces in present-day Russia.

### **Vatnik as the enemy: the meme and a tale of two origins**

Euro-Maidan in Ukraine (the public protests in Kiev and other cities that took place from 2013 to 2014), the resulting annexation of Crimea by Russia, and the military confrontations in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists supported by Russia have fomented strong feelings of mutual animosity. Political and military hostilities have pro-

<sup>3</sup> Turner (2010) differentiates between authoritarian contexts, where entertainment is used deliberately to politically disengage the public, and the West, where depolitisation is a by-product of a more careless and yet effective use of commercial power. In the context of patriotic consumption and online resources discussed in the article, this differentiation does not play a role.

<sup>4</sup> Anthropological research on-line, in the digital realm, may not be very different from ethnographic fieldwork on the ground. A keyword search, a post or a blog entry can 'snowball', leading the researcher to a range of different new sources/persons, just as one informant in the field can be a source of multiple new acquaintanceships and links.

duced new vocabularies of the enemy: in the mainstream (pro-) Russian mass media (state-controlled TV, radio and social media), the current Ukrainian government is referred to as the ‘junta’ and its supporters are labelled ‘fascists’; in pro-Ukrainian sources, Russians are termed the ‘occupiers’. This rhetoric of the national enemy – the sovereign Other with their different set of values – has not, however, given rise to political categories defined in purely ethnic terms. Instead, the new folk terms, signs, logos and memes that have emerged and gained popularity indicate different political identities and geopolitical allegiances both within and across national spaces in Russia and Ukraine. The two main (heterogeneous) parties of the conflict – ‘Ukrainian patriots’, supporters of Ukrainian unity and/or pro-EU sympathisers on the one hand, and the pro-Russian Ukrainian ‘rebels’, pro-Russian sympathisers and pro-Putin patriots on the other – are labelled *ukropy* (a portmanteau of ‘Ukrainian patriots’ that also translates as ‘dill’ in Russian) and *vatniki* respectively. These terms were nominated ‘words of the year’ (i.e. the most popular or widely used words) in Russia in 2014.<sup>5</sup> Ukropy fall outside the scope of this paper, but anticipating further discussion, let it suffice to say that the term *ukropy*, just like *vatniki*, has become a subject of (self-) appropriation.

As mentioned earlier, the word *vatnik* originally means a padded jacket made of cotton wool (*vata*) inside a tough outer layer that was introduced into Siberia by the Chinese in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (during the Russian-Japanese war) and became a popular item of Russian/Soviet workwear.

**Image 1.** Vatnik pattern



Source: <http://www.istpravda.ru/artifacts/8248>

<sup>5</sup> The competitions for ‘words of the year’ are organised by different agencies. ‘Vatnik’ was nominated by the Russian Internet-portal ‘Vocabularies of the XXI century’ (‘Slovami goda...’, 2014).

In contrast to *ukropy*, *vatnik* emerged as a derogatory label or insult in 2011 (so prior to the civil and military discord in Ukraine) as an internally-produced stereotype of pro-regime, pro-Putin Russians. *Kvadratnyi vatnik* (square vatnik)<sup>6</sup> is a meme created and disseminated on VKontakte (a Russian analogue of Facebook) by Anton Chadsky, a Russian from Novorossiysk and a former member of the pro-Kremlin youth movement *Nashi* ('Ours') with first-hand experience of Seliger youth camps.<sup>7</sup> The meme first became popular during the mass political protests on Bolotnaia Square in Moscow in 2011-2012 but gained further momentum and entered everyday language in both Ukraine and Russia after Euro-Maidan in Ukraine.

### Image 2. Vatnik meme



Source: Anton Chadsky

The original *vatnik*-meme is an example of entertainment media technology par excellence. It depicts a stylized square-shaped image of a drunken man with an angry face, red nose and a black eye. It wears felt boots; its body is grey, dirty and darned. In the background there is a flag of the Russian Federation decorated with Soviet symbols. There are numerous Russian and English language entertainment websites where users can create their own *vatnik* memes and gifs, and discuss the meme's history, cultural references and character traits. *Vatnik*'s original profile is not flattering: the *vatnik* needs a master, it hates migrants, Jews and homosexuals; it is a 'fanatical patriot' (*patriot-fanatik*), it stands for 'plebs' more generally and is highly susceptible to state propaganda ('*Vatnik*,' 2016). Although at the time of writing this paper, the *vatnik* character had been in circulation for five years, discussions about its 'es-

<sup>6</sup> By *vatnik*'s creator's own admission, he drew on the American cartoon character *SpongeBob SquarePants* who first appeared in 1999 (Gorchinskaia 2015).

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed ethnography of the Seliger youth camps and their patriotic agenda, see Hemment (2015).

sence' (e.g. its 'soul' – an important token of 'cultural intimacy' for Russian participants), class-belonging or socio-cultural background still loom large (e.g. Skobov 2016).

Chadsky, who moved to Ukraine to avoid persecution, conceived of vatnik in the image of the 'average' Russian who, in his political commentary, combines patriotic traits from a wide political spectrum: right-wing, left-wing, centrist, nationalist and communist. The theme of a warm padded jacket (also known as *telogreika* or 'bodywarmer', in Russian) refers to the worlds of Gulag prisoners and Soviet collective farm workers, suggesting that present-day Russian society insulates itself from the outside world and imitates a Stalinist camp, taking pride in its isolation. It is thus a critique of patriotism of a particular, xenophobic kind. Whereas the vatnik's visual representation has remained more or less static, its character changes, reflecting ongoing political developments. For Chadsky, vatnik is becoming more and more irrational, stupid and angry at the outside world: 'a real fool' (*nastoiashchii durak*). The author's aim, as he himself points out, is to use mockery or caricature to criticize the current state of affairs in Russia and the nature of state propaganda, and to enlighten the masses.<sup>8</sup> Discussions of vatnik on digital media have expanded its domain of reference to the global arena – vatnik has increasingly become identified with an international social type, referring to xenophobic and retrograde conservatives present in every society, as well as people who are unable or unwilling to think critically or independently.<sup>9</sup>

While vatnik has, in its author's eyes, undergone further mental deterioration, it has also been reclaimed by the intended targets of Chadsky's critique, leading to a symbolic matrix in which 'us' and 'them', 'the patriot' and 'the enemy' change places. Even though the term – especially when it is shortened to *vata* (cotton wool) – is still often used (and understood) as an insult directed at political 'foes', it has also been adopted by people who take pride in it.<sup>10</sup> Digital media has played an important supportive role in this transformation: vatnik has, for instance, become a common alias for online users, including Internet trolls. The reclaimed vatnik has, in turn, further crystallized the image of 'the enemy within' represented by the so-called Russian 'creative class' (labelled *kreakl* in Russian), which carries negative connotations of the 'rotten intelligentsia' (*gnilaia intelligentsia*) of the Soviet period. Anti-liberals describe *kreakl* as a small group of useless and pretentious 'freaks' only capable of creative and absurd protest actions ('Vatnik', 2016).

The transformation of the anti-hero into a 'cult' national character and a 'new' commodity has drawn on different historical references and emphases. Literary works (fiction and memoirs), films, the history of (European) fashion, and ancient uniforms have all been examined in vatnik-dedicated online publications and blogs in order to establish its multiple roots and modifications. Anti-liberal patriots date the final transformation of the Chinese outdoor clothing into an item of Russian 'national clothing' (*natsional'naia odezhda*) to the Great Patriotic War (the World War II), the celebration and commemoration of which have itself become a major recurring propaganda event and a patriotic cult since the 2000s.<sup>11</sup> These

<sup>8</sup> An interview given to Snob.ru, an international project for people 'who speak different languages but think in Russian' ('Sozdatel' "vatnika"..., 2014).

<sup>9</sup> There is also a meme called *vyshevatnik*, the Ukrainian counterpart of the Russian vatnik. The *vyshevanka* is a traditional embroidered Ukrainian shirt.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the changing 'colours' of vatnik and ukrop, see also Granina (2016). Russian linguist, Aleksei Mikheev, links the reclaiming of 'offensive terms' with a decreased level of aggression (not to be confused with confrontation) in society.

<sup>11</sup> Lev Gudkov traces the beginning of this transformation to the 1960s (in Medvedev 2016).

historical and cultural excavations aim at finding and promoting specific ‘mytho-historical self-images’ (cf. Humphrey 2002 on New Russians’ search for identity). The latter is manifest in pronouncements posted by online commentators such as: ‘The fascists were destroyed by people wearing vatniki; Vatnik ... is a worldview that helped us win in 1945 and [is helping us] today. It is what makes fascists hate us then and now’ (juicy-fruit 2015). This ‘victors’ garment’ (*odezhda pobeditelei*) is now firmly linked to the idea of cultural authenticity embodied in Russia’s sacrifices during the war and in the achievements of the Soviet people and Soviet industrialization (i.e. workers’ dress-code on major construction sites) (see Pchelkina, 2015). Moreover, for those who favour the idea of the historically outward-looking Russian ethnos, inclusive of Russia’s ethnic minorities and ‘brotherly nations’, the absence of clear ethnic markers is what seems to make vatnik, alongside a Kalashnikov and sturdy boots (*kirzovye sapogi*), an obvious choice for Russia’s national dress (e.g. Steshin 2016). Many of these positive patriotic associations are underlined by a subtle change in vatnik’s appearance in cartoons and selections of photographs, where the image is clean, sober and heroic; the original grey of the Gulag or prison vatnik is often replaced by military khaki.

In some ways, the domestication of the negative image of the enemy as oneself is not unlike the reclaiming of derogatory terms by some ethnic minorities or marginalised groups: e.g. terms like nigger, queer, gypsy or ‘nonrussian’ (*nerusskii*, see Skvirskaja 2012). In the case of these groups, the reclaiming is commonly analysed as an act of ‘purification’, as long as the terms are reserved for internal use only. In the context of the political identifications in contemporary Russia that I am discussing here, the derogatory term assumes power by virtue of its standing for the absolute majority of Russia’s population, for the Russian ‘people’ (*narod*) or ‘the Russian public’ as opposed to a small and weak liberal opposition at home (‘a counter-public’ of sorts), and Ukrainian ‘fascists’/ukropy across the border, and for some, the largely hostile Western world.

Reclaiming vatnik for positive identifications has opened up new spheres for its circulation that, while discussed and mediated online, have a tangible presence in the off-line world. In tandem with its popularity as a meme, vatnik has gained new prominence as a fashionable commodity on the market. To understand the permutations of the image of the enemy, and its transformation from a slur into a commodity, vatnik has to be acknowledged as a popular brand. As with any aspirational brand, consumers function as its co-creators, shaping the brand’s image with their minds and hands. The possibility of co-creation underpins the brand’s surfeit – the surfeit of social meaning that is constantly produced by idiosyncratic and contextualized experiences of consumer engagement with brand forms (Nakassis 2013: 120-21), as indeed is the case with symbols in general. Play on vatnik’s surfeit creates a sense of mobilisation for a higher cause, whereby negative mobilisation around the image of the enemy gives way to more positive, understated or ambiguous identifications with this new mainstream symbol of Russian popular digital culture.

### **Vatnik trending: ‘patriotic clothing’ and the ‘hot commodity’**

The commodification and branding of vatnik in Russia and Ukraine is yet another instance of the fusion of the new media culture of entertainment, politics and consumption (cf. Hemment 2015). Vatnik has taken on different commodity forms, exhibiting a spectrum of opportunit-



ies provided by its new materiality. Early on, the meme inspired merchandise that replicated the original image in the shape of a small doll. Both Ukrainian and Russian entrepreneurs and craftsmen began offering ‘hand-made’ vatnik-dolls online for roughly 10 US dollars.<sup>12</sup> In Ukraine, these dolls have been marketed as ‘protective amulets’ against Russians and as tourist souvenirs.

**Image 3.** Vatnik doll



Source: <http://bit.ly/2oJe4Dd> (29.04.2017).

The production and marketing of vatnik-dolls have often played with the image of the enemy, and people could use them to humiliate or mock the enemy (for instance, by accessorising vatnik with vodka bottles or making it ‘drunk’ in a bar, and then uploading videos of these rituals of humiliation onto YouTube). By contrast, the actual vatnik-jacket has joined a sea of other patriotic commodities in Russia. Various websites that help novice entrepreneurs with business plans and ventures suggest the manufacturing of vatniki as an idea for commercial start-ups. As one such website explains in an article entitled ‘Starting a business making a fashion vatnik for patriots’:

Many citizens strive to show their love for their country ... by wearing patriotic clothing. Therefore, a business that produces patriotic clothing will be popular with customers, and if you organize it well, you will create a stable source of income... A mini-business deal-

<sup>12</sup> There are numerous online sites and VKontakte pages selling handmade toys, including vatnik-dolls.

ing with the production of patriotic clothing will always be popular, therefore it can be advertised both on the internet and at fairs ('Starting a business...' 2016).

Alongside patriotic marketing of this traditionally low-grade object, as an item of clothing, vatnik has been subjected to different evaluations and ideas of respectability. In some social circles its emergence came to symbolize the end of the era of 'democratic' glamour and conspicuous consumption during the oil-rich 2000s. Since the early 2010s, the purchasing power of the new middle classes and young professionals (and the population in general) has rapidly deteriorated due to the fall in oil prices and subsequent fall of the Russian rouble. Yet, this overall economic decline has not prevented vatnik from becoming an item of conspicuous consumption in its own right. Below, I discuss contrasting takes on vatnik as a commodity, the (non)patriotic rhetoric that accompanies it, and some moral controversies that vatnik brands have generated in Russia.

### *The New Black*

The unbranded vatnik jacket of the original, Soviet design can be purchased in a retail chain belonging to the Ministry of Defence (*Voentorg*), at auction and in various shops specialising in 'workwear' (*spetsodezhda*). This ordinary 'no-name' vatnik functions like a brand and, just like the original meme, it often inspires ironic cultural production and commentary. In 2014, for instance, a group of 'creatives' running an online community hosted by the private media-advertising company 'Look at me' (English in original), published a photo-spread featuring the original, 'Soviet', jacket assorted with upper-end Western high-street brands. In a short article accompanying professional shoots of beautiful male and female models wearing vatniki, the author pondered over impending impoverishment: 'Consumption of domestic products is the new black for every Russian. ...Vatnik is the uniform for the new Russia' ('Vatnik as premonition...', 2014). The photos highlight a contrast between the 'Soviet' jacket with its strong connotations of manual labour and the models' understated yet glamorous make-up, sexy over-the-knee boots, delicate fabrics, and bright colour-coordinated outfits worn underneath. The contrast between the humble vatnik and other featured clothes is further reflected in the price tags – the difference is, on average, ten to twentyfold.

As the users' comments demonstrate, the text and the pictures seem to send different messages to different audiences. The text suggests that the vatnik is a new necessity since it is the only advertised item that is now affordable, but the author is openly critical of the 'patriotic militarism' that the jacket symbolises. Some commentators found the article funny, adding photos of themselves dressed in vatnik and parodying the style of fashion advertising ('Hat – for free from my grandma, Levi's T-shirt – 500 roubles, vatnik – 1000 roubles), others expressed fear because for them vatnik represents the dark side of Soviet aesthetics ('It evokes a prison. I feel uneasy...'), and yet others saw the pictures and the text as a blunt provocation by well-off unpatriotic liberal kreakls and encouraged them to 'move to Kiev'.

In the fashion spread, the khaki vatnik is somehow out of place but is also made to look cool, if only by physical proximity to cool Western brands. As far as patriotic branding is concerned, the brand's surfeit allows multiple interpretations and these kinds of images can be taken in any direction. ('The vatnik is great! But the author of the text should kill himself'. 'Is it a kind of masked irony?' – 'It is not really masked. They arrive in their Bentleys on

Bolotnaia square, laugh at the exchange rate of the rouble and the word ‘vatnik’...). It is not surprising that the idea of a vintage-style, ‘Soviet’ vatnik as the ‘new black’ has now migrated onto pro-government media platforms where one can find stylists’ advice on how to accessorise the jacket: for instance, ‘It looks good with a flower-print pencil skirt... casual hair, cat-eye glasses, bright lipstick. Simplicity is in fashion. Your vatnik will be this fashion item in your wardrobe’ (‘The stylist told...’, 2015). The professional interventions and comments of online users of this kind suggest the idea of vatnik and the actual jacket are not only about moral authority and political positioning but should or could also be made an attractive commodity, a commodity that sells well. The drive towards attractiveness and branding has brought vatnik into the realm of exclusive design and high fashion.

### *The New (small) luxury or deluxe patriotism*

The classic, Soviet style vatnik may look good on professional clothes-horses, but for more mainstream consumption it has been reworked and remodelled by the heterogeneous crowd of well- and less well-known Russian designers, celebrities and ‘creative agencies’. In Russia’s market-oriented economy, consumers’ (patriots or not) aesthetic and socio-economic status sensibilities are taken seriously and marketing of the ‘new’ patriotic commodity takes into account not only its ideological ‘correctness’ vis-à-vis the political regime, but also consumer preoccupations with glamour and/or lifestyle nurtured during the 2000s. Various designer ‘solutions’ integrate vatnik into fashion associated with style, and not only, or (even) not at all, with politics. They manifest a vividly idiosyncratic engagement with the brand’s surfeit, including designs that border on cultural jamming, or work on the multiple borderlines between humour, parody, Soviet heritage and (post-) modern beauty. In new, designer-vatniki, patriotism and self-irony are often seen as a particularly profitable mix.

It is not only designers that can give a new lease of life to the vatnik brand; a new, especially extravagant, vatnik design (whether or not it is commercially successful) may also boost the fame and the brand of its designer, helping it to ‘trend’. A certain Vladimir Ovechkin, an artist and musician from Rostov, improved his visibility online, and outside Rostov, by launching new vatnik designs featuring ‘high quality Italian cotton’, silk lining and a gold print of the two-headed Russian Imperial eagle on the back. The breast pocket is decorated with the word ‘Vatnik’, the name of the designer and a number of digits, with the latter serving to evoke the aesthetics of labour-camp garments. In comments threads, the artist’s followers talk about customised versions they would like to wear – in pink, decorated with handmade embroidery and Swarovski crystals. The price tag (in the range of 200 US dollars for a basic model) adds an aura of respectability (‘A new life of ...’, 2015).

At this and higher price levels, vatniki are offered by many designers. While some, including Ovechkin, refuse to make any political statements about the jacket, and declare that they ‘stay away from politics’ (‘Fashionable vatnik...’, 2015), others are more forthcoming in their pronouncements about the ideology of their brands and marketing of patriotism. For instance, the celebrity wife of a former Russian millionaire, Alena Sterligova, and a creative team involving the writer Zakhar Prilepin and the designer Igor Zaitsev (the son of Viacheslav Zaitsev) have both acknowledged their being inspired by the events in Ukraine. The writer-designer duo emphasises that their ‘vatnik project’ is a way of showing respect for the

culture of the Russian people (e.g. ‘Writer Prilepin...’, 2015). Sterligova’s pitch about her collection includes a reference to women in Donbass who fight on the side of Novorossia (i.e. pro-Russian separatists) and should find vatniki particularly useful. On her catwalk, staged in her residence outside Moscow, women dressed in ‘exclusive’, hand-made fur-trimmed and decorated jackets were accessorised with rifles and machine-guns. ‘I am a mother, I have five children... We, women, we want peace. We do not want a repetition of Maidan here’, Sterligova commented on the catwalk (Nukus 2015).

**Image 4.** RT Vatnik.



*Source:* <http://bit.ly/2pIJfic> (29.04.2017).

Another example of a designer ‘celebrity’ vatnik that made the news and got people talking on social media is the one that the news agency Russia Today (RT)<sup>13</sup> included as part of a New Year VIP gift-bag in 2014, alongside a packet of Crimean tea and a cookie decorated with an image of Crimea (Simonyan 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Russia Today, a Russian government-funded television network and international news agency, broadcasting in foreign languages. It is commonly seen in the West as Russia’s propaganda tool abroad. RT was accused of disinformation by the BBC and lost the court case in 2015.

Here, the vatnik qua designer brand was co-opted by state propaganda in much the same way as more conventional patriotic merchandise (e.g. St. George's ribbons, flags, etc.) and Russia Today's editor-in-chief's, Margarita Simonyan's, Facebook account was used to spread the news and photos of the merchandise. The VIP campaign proved to be an effective trolling strategy and LiveJournal and twitter publics showed support: 'What hard-core trolling by RT!', 'I am dreaming about a jacket like this', 'Super patriotic creativity' (Strajj 2014; Simonyan 2014a). The RT VIP vatnik was later spotted during a public event in Moscow on the film-maker Nikita Mikhalkov (Zub 2015), who is well known for his numerous patriotic ventures (including a 'Russian' fast food chain to combat McDonalds) and anti-'Ukrainian junta' stance.

The RT VIP gift and publicity around it also brought into the limelight an unexpected author of vatnik branding. The jacket adorned with mother-of-pearl buttons and multi-coloured lining was made by the Russian designer and conceptual artist Natasha Drigant, whose 'intellectual' fashion, as she calls it, is notably minimalistic and 'modest'. This kind of fashion is today favoured by both urban intelligentsia, including 'creatives', and Russia's new social upper classes. The latter, in contrast to the proverbial New Russians of the 1990s, with their taste for ostentation, tend to strive for a more refined and cultured self-image in order to gain and maintain legitimacy for their privileged social position (Schimpfoss 2014). In her promotional materials, Drigant states that her brand focuses on rethinking public stereotypes and tired metaphors, and emphasises internationalism, aiming at reaching across national, religious and racial boundaries by means of clothing (<http://drigant.com/index.php?n=4>). In an interview the designer revealed that the RT gift-bag jacket was her unsold stock from 2004 and that she was happy that somebody paid attention to it. In the wake of success of the RT jacket, however, the designer dedicated her whole winter 2015-2016 collection to vatnik ('2000ватник/2000's watt-nick') and explained that her motive was to remove the jacket from the field of hatred and the political context where it is so often denigrated and to highlight its original beauty and warmth (Kaletskii 2015).<sup>14</sup> To achieve this end artistically, the designer deconstructed and reassembled the jacket beyond all recognition.

A number of her designs that still followed closely the Soviet/generic original were decorated with Russian, American, and British flags, which led to questions about the designer's political message. 'Are the NATO flags not a slap in the face to the patriotic consumer?' the interviewer enquired. Staying serious, Drigant explained that these flags were just beautiful and her play with foreign flags was meant to simply provide opportunities for multiple interpretations. 'I am an artist; if I want I put a vatnik on podium. My political views are not related to fashion' (Drigant in Porotikova 2016). If there was an attempt at 'cultural jamming' (i.e. repurposing symbols commonly associated with vatnik brands) in her creations, Drigant refused to publicly acknowledge it; in her own words, she let the vatniki 'do the talking' (see the lead image of design vatniki on sale).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> From reviews of the fashion show: 'Vatnik for ever' – 'it now belongs to fashion, to good taste.'

<sup>15</sup> For her dedication to art and fashion or vatnik above politics, Drigant is called an a-ideological artist (*vneideologicheskaia*) and compared to the Mit'ki artistic movement in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods ('In MV3 gallery...', 2015). Mit'ki aesthetics were, among other things, about looking like good citizens but living *izvne* – inside/outside – of the sociopolitical concerns of the system (Yurchak 2006: 242).



### Tensions of commodification: the sacred and profane of vatnik

The proliferation of ‘no name’ and designer brands of vatnik foregrounds not only distinctive practices of patriotic marketing and commodification but also a diversity of consumer reflections on, and critical interpretations of, these practices. As a new commodity and a brand on the market, it plays heavily on the ‘cultural intimacy’ (cf. Herzfeld 2001) produced by self-irony and shared knowledge about the darker pages of Soviet history. Yet, the vatnik garment is also evaluated as an item of clothing – ‘something you wear on the outside, not the inside’, as one commentator of the Drigant’s designs put it (‘In MV3 gallery...’, 2015) – by different income and social groups. The crowd of metropolitan fashion bloggers is often mobilized in discussing questions of (a)political cultural production and consumption (arguments ranging from ‘this is de-humanising aesthetics’, ‘workwear is workwear, it cannot ennoble, it does not belong to fashion’ to ‘the jacket can be used as a blank canvas to mediate any artistic message’) (e.g. Abolenkin 2015; Porotikova 2015; ‘In MV3 gallery...’, 2015). There are also other patriotically-inclined consumers who are less vocal about the transformative potential of the jacket’s aesthetic. For them, the vatnik-brand operates within a regime of moral evaluation that is critical about the excesses of patriotic consumerism on the one hand, and about the ‘wastefulness’ and (unwarranted) profits embedded in designer brands on the other.

Patriotic branding may have a ‘noble’ cause, but, as posts on digital media testify, conspicuous excessive consumption of the material symbols of the state and the nation is often counterpoised to cultivation of ‘inner (*vnutrennii*) patriotism’ – a genuine, embodied moral commitment to some high patriotic ideals (e.g. Bezborodov 2014). The proponents of this critical vision are concerned with the replacement of patriotism as a structure of feelings and loyalties by superficial (fashionable or profane) patriotic consumption – labelled a ‘simulacrum of patriotism’ (eugene\_df 2016) – that on its own is incapable of producing conscious (*osoznannyi*) patriotism. The excessiveness of patriotic marketing/branding is seen as further exacerbated by the supposedly inappropriate range of commodities that are being branded or decorated with patriotic symbols (e.g. flip-flops, crab sticks, vodka bottles, sofas, strip club posters, public toilets, and so on). This popular discontent spreads across political divides (‘for’ or ‘against’ the regime positions), for while some condemn the utilitarian, propagandistic goals of the Putin’s regime, others see profit-driven patriotic commerce as a source of all evil in its own right.

The conspicuous patriotic consumption that designer vatniki also represent has provoked a degree of popular discontent. A designer brand is seen as undermining the ‘no-name’ classic jacket, which, it appears, had been in short supply due to its ‘weak’ marketability (Gnedinskaia 2014). Ironically, the ‘no-name’ vatnik is one of those rare commodities whose only purpose, to borrow Veblen’s formulation (1994: 62), ‘is to enhance human life’, i.e. the element of pecuniary comparisons or ‘wastefulness’ present in most commodities is virtually absent in ‘Soviet’, original vatnik. Perhaps, ordinary Russian consumers-patriots would not formulate it in this way, but many seem to object to the change in the ‘status’ of this commodity, expressed not so much in designer alterations and elaborations, as in price. ‘For this price [the designer] can wear it himself ... in the same places where Khodorkovsky was sewing mittens’, ‘...the designer just wants to make a quick buck’ (‘A designer from Rostov...’, 2015). As these comments show, the glamorous, designer vatnik marks a transformation of

the jacket from ‘sacred’ and useful into a wasteful ‘profane’ commodity that, in the face of ongoing economic decline, is for many also an unattainable ‘luxury’.

### **‘Totalitarian laughter’ and stiob patriotism**

Marketing professionals have been long aware that patriotic solidarity sells well, especially in (quasi-)authoritarian settings (e.g. Kaynak and Kara 2013: 97-107). Omnipresent commodification and branding of patriotic symbols (e.g. leaders, heroes) and things for mass consumption is, of course, not restricted to present-day Russia; and the effects of such commodification have been extensively addressed in studies of authoritarian and totalitarian societies (e.g. Quinn 2005; Wedeen 1999, 2013). Anthropologists (e.g. Özyürek 2006) have noted that by incorporating patriotic commodities into their private lives, citizen-consumers send a message to critics of the state about their voluntary and individual support of the state. At the same time, people also receive messages about the omnipresent authority of the state via the presence of these same patriotic commodities in their homes and workplaces. While in Russia and elsewhere, the consumption of official patriotic paraphernalia entangles citizens in relations of domination,<sup>16</sup> what seems specific to the Russian situation is the ways in which patriotic branding often appears to be ‘jammed’ by consumers, manufacturers and designers through the ironic genre of stiob.

Irony does not necessarily imply conscious dissimulation of compliance, but may simply bring moral satisfaction to its speaker by creating an illusion of challenging authority or one’s ‘political superiors’ (Herzfeld 2001: 75). During late state socialism and still today, stiob works at the intersection between the modes of parody and political detachment (Yurchak and Boyer 2008). In the context of contemporary patriotic branding and conspicuous consumption, stiob’s reliance on over-identification with the message to the extent that is impossible to tell whether it is supported or ridiculed by interlocutors comes to the fore (cf. Yurchak 2006). Due to the pervasiveness of stiob, patriotic endorsements of vatnik not only signal support for the regime, but also simultaneously question this support; it complicates and blurs ‘us’ and ‘them’ identifications based on political gravitations and geopolitical loyalties. Besides entertaining themselves with memes, YouTube videos, and discussions of patriotic fashions, online commentators express frustration at their inability to sometimes grasp the ‘real’ intent behind the patriotic branding featured in this content, ask each other for clues, and share tips as to how to identify stiob. A commentary on a LiveJournal post ‘Haute Couture vatniki’, discussing a new designer vatnik, illustrates this: ‘... this is a case where it is really difficult to differentiate between earnest grotesque patriots (*potsreot*) and trolling/stiob. Well, the more idiots follow this crazy trend, the better it will be for normal people. It will work like a litmus test...’ (Klyushev 2015).

<sup>16</sup> It is also commonly argued that this consumption is part and parcel of dissimulation techniques deployed by citizens in the absence of an emotional commitment to some ruling ideology. See Wedeen (1999) and Kharkhordin (1999) discussions of the politics of ‘as if’ in Syria and Russia respectively. Following Vaclav Havel, Wedeen shows how exhibiting official iconography and paraphernalia in private spaces (shops, taxis), is not only about internalised control, but also a strategy of discouraging regime agents from interfering in people’s lives. Wedeen and Kharkhordin highlight enforced public dissimulation of compliance, suggesting a sharp public-private divide in people’s expressions of loyalties. Hence the ambiguous effects of the leader’s cult and authoritarian domination more generally.

Yet, in the genre of *stio*b, people who follow the *vatnik* trend may not work ‘as a litmus test’. A video clip called ‘VATA fashion (shoot) to mark the anniversary of the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine’<sup>17</sup> posted on YouTube showing young people modelling Putin-T-shirts, badges and *vatniki* raised similar questions: ‘The border between a norm and a deviation in the *vata* world is so delicate... Are these young people joking (*stebutsia*)? Or is it serious?’ ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyznHot-OfU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyznHot-OfU)). The conspicuousness of brand *vatnik* has provided fertile grounds for the cultivation of *stio*b by means of different media.

**Image 5.** Vata heart.



*Source:* Vasilij Slonov

A Russian artist from Krasnoyarsk, Vasilij Slonov, has introduced the padded jacket into the realm of pop art, producing a range of art objects and installations using the appearance and texture of *vatnik*. In line with mainstream state patriotism, Slonov pitches *vatnik* as the dress-code of Russian civilization. In an interview with Radio Liberty,<sup>18</sup> he stated that ‘cotton wool (*vata*) is the sacred substance of the Russian Idea’ (Slonov in Laprad 2015), that it is a national symbol that has to be embraced. On social media, the artist is often accused of producing vulgar and evil caricatures of Russia (e.g. *stary-sibiryak* 2016), but he is also held in high regard by local officials who support his patriotic art and humour. In addition to a high profile exhibition entitled ‘*Vatniki of the Apocalypse*’, Slonov’s gigantic black *vata* heart

<sup>17</sup> It first appeared on 14.04.2015, on the Facebook page of ‘Open Russia’ (an oppositional platform supported by Mikhail Khodorkovsky) and then was reposted on YouTube.

<sup>18</sup> Radio Liberty describes itself as ‘Free Media in Unfree Societies’. A Cold-War era broadcaster whose Russian branch has become a platform for post-Soviet oppositional voices in Russia (and in Russian).



was installed in a square in Krasnoyarsk. The heart and the blurb to this installation encapsulate the indeterminacy of stioib:

The big vata heart of our motherland

Everybody has a Motherland. And our Motherland is undoubtedly a Mother. And every mother has a heart. But what is this heart? Of course it is of vata, of course it is big and warm. It turned black from the sweat and blood of previous generations. It turned black from our moral confusion. ... The heart of our Motherland is like a silent reproach to us for wasting our life with foreign Valentines (*chuzhestrannymi valentinkami*) ... ('Vasilij Slonov podaril...', 2015).

Playing with the ambiguity created by stioib opens different ways of engaging with brand *vatnik*'s surfeit without 'taking sides' publicly. Similar to the 'totalitarian laughter' of the Soviet epoch (e.g. Žižek 1989), this strategy allows people to push at the limits imposed by the climate of de facto political censorship and new ideas of appropriate public performance. This dynamic of post-Soviet stioib does not operate in an isolated field of what I called conspicuous patriotic consumption, but is also present in other forms of cultural and political identification in Russia. Gabowitsch (2009) in his study of Russian fascism, has shown how ambiguous 'stioib fascism' is predicated on the ironic use of fascism by artists and political activists. Any criticism can be fended off by arguing that the critics simply lack irony and do not understand that what they see is not a political programme of fascism but an artistic statement. A more complex example is offered by Noordenbos (2011) in his discussion of Russia's 'new imperialist literature', including ultra-national and fascist discourses, where patriotic fanaticism and neo-totalitarianism deploy stioib to create an illusion of ironic distance. In this way, self-proclaimed 'counterculture' movements can claim the mixture of political commitment, ideological enthusiasm, irony and play as legitimization of their agenda even though they offer political support for the regime. Branding of new imperialist literature by respectable publishing houses brings propaganda of radical ideas into the field of mainstream consumption.

## Concluding remarks

The stioib-patriotism and conspicuous patriotic consumption that I have described in this article, not unlike the stioib-fascism and ambiguous radicalism of Russian neo-imperialists, tell us about ongoing shifts in the nature of public communication and communicative strategies in Russia. There is a profound change in stioib practice today compared with the Soviet example and the first post-Soviet decade. During late socialism, stioib was largely reserved for interpersonal communication and was never a discursive strategy of power, whereas cynicism and a 'postmodernism of poverty' (Kliamkin 2000; Noordenbos 2011) reigned during the 1990s. A turn towards a more authoritarian rule wedded to neoliberalism has made stioib not only present, and magnified by digital media, in various spheres of cultural and political life, but also a genre used and endorsed by power and the powerful. The end result of these appropriations is a pervasive uncertainty about the social and media environment, for irony and

trolling have become engrained into ‘normal’ public communication. This situation is familiar to anthropologists from the classic scenario of joking relationships in small-scale societies where communication and interactions are centred on the question: ‘Is this play?’ (Berthome et al. 2012: 132). Whereas in some ‘traditional’ settings, the uncertainty of joking is a powerful social resource that enables people to negotiate relationships, in present-day Russia, the commercial and pragmatic uses of the uncertainty of *stio*b lie on the surface. If the transmutation of *vatnik* from a political caricature by means of memes into new patriotic commodities and designer brands is part of a global trend of ‘information turning into entertainment’, a particular Russian take on the trend, as *vatnik* assemblage shows us vividly, is in ‘entertainment turning into *stio*b’.

## References

- ‘A designer from Rostov wants to introduce new fashion, *vatnik*’ [Rostovskii dizainer khochet vvesti novuiu modu, na *vatnik*] (2015) <http://www.yaplakal.com/forum2/topic1014581.html> (20.01.2015).
- ‘A new life of *vatnik*’ [Novaia zhizn’ *vatnika*] (2015) <http://bit.ly/2pIPzq5> (04.03.2015).
- Abolenkin [abolenkin] (2015) ‘Pro *vatniki* i modu: pokaz Natal’i Drigant osen’-zima 2015/16’, LiveJournal, 30 March, <http://abolenkin.livejournal.com/97786.html> (30.03.2015).
- Alexievich, Svetlana (2016) *Second-hand time*. Fitzcarraldo Editions.
- Appadurai, Arjun (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Berthome, François; Bonhomme, Julien; Delaplace, Gregory (eds.) (2012) ‘Preface: Cultivating uncertainty’, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2 (2): 129–37.
- Bezborodov, Vladimir (2014) ‘Pochem kilo patriotizma?’, *Politrussia.com*, 20 November, <http://politrussia.com/society/pochem-kilo-patriotizma-514> (20.11.2014).
- Billig, Michael (1995) *Banal nationalism*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Boyer, Dominic and Alexei Yurchak (2010) ‘American *Stio*b: Or, What Late-Socialist Aesthetics of Parody Reveal about Contemporary Political Culture in the West’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 25 (2): 179–221.
- eugene\_df [eugene df] (2016) ‘Eeee... sizhu v nekotom okhrozenii, esli chestno...’, *LiveJournal*, 10 May 2015, <http://eugene-df.livejournal.com/1024142.html> (10.05.2016).
- ‘Fashionable *vatnik*’ [Modnyi *vatnik*] (2015) <http://coolidea.ru/2015/02/01/modny-vatnik/> (01.02.2015).
- Gabowitsch, Mischa (2009) ‘Fascism as *stio*b’, *Kultura* 4: 3–8.
- Gnedinskaia, Anastasia (2014) ‘A vot komy *vatnik* za 10 tysiach?’, *MK.ru*, 12 September, <http://www.mk.ru/social/2014/09/12/a-vot-komu-vatnik-za-10-tysyach.html> (12.09.2014).
- Gorchinskaia, Aleksandra (2015) ‘Avtor kvadratnogo *vatnika* Chadskii: Vyshivatniki – liudi kotorye ne khotiat meniatsia. Eto uzhe problema dlia Ukrainy’, *Gordonua.com*, 3 July, <http://bit.ly/2qirSSi> (03.07.2015).

- Granina, Natalia (2016) ‘“Vatnik” i “ukrop” pomeniali okrasku’, *Lenta.ru*, 8 January, [https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/01/08/slova\\_goda/\(08.01.2016\)](https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/01/08/slova_goda/(08.01.2016)).
- Hemment, Julie (2015) *Youth Politics in Putin's Russia*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Herzfeld, Michael (2001) ‘Towards a Politics of Mockery in Greece’, in James W. Fernandez; Huber, Mary T. (eds.) *Irony in Action*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 63-83.
- Humphrey, Caroline (2002) ‘The Villas of the ‘New Russians’: A Sketch of Consumption and Cultural Identity in Post-Soviet Landscape’, in *The Unmaking of Soviet Life. Everyday Economies After Socialism*. New York: Cornell University Press, 175-201.
- ‘In MV3 gallery A3 there was an exhibition 2000’s Watt/nick 2000 Ватт-ник’ [V MV3 Galereia A3 proshla vystavka 2000’s Watt/nick 2000 Vatt-nik] (2015) <http://bit.ly/2qq7f-Db> (14.09.2015).
- Juicy-fruit [juicy-fruit] (2015) ‘Vatnik odezhda pobeditelei’, *LiveJournal*, 15 January 2015, <http://juicy-fruit.livejournal.com/190171.html> (deleted journal).
- Kaletskii, Glabezundr (2015) ‘Natasha Drigant «2000ватник/2000’s watt-nick» osen’-zima 2015-16’, *Intermoda.ru*, 30 March, <http://bit.ly/2pIHQZ4> (30.03.2015).
- Kaynak, Erdener and Ali Kara (2013) ‘Reinforcing Cultural Identity by Appealing to Local Cultural Cues: National Identity Formation and Consumption in High-Context Cultures’, *Journal of Promotional Management*, 19(1): 86-113.
- Kharkhordin, Oleg (1999) *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Kirillova, Ksenia (2016) ‘Sladkii iad propagandy’, *Svoboda.org*, 28 March, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/27607748.html> (23.03.2016).
- Kliamkin, Igor (2000) ‘Postsovetskaia politicheskaja sistema v Rossii’, *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, Tomus XVII: 172-221.
- Klyushev, Anton [anton klyushev] (2015) ‘Vatniki ot kutiur’, *LiveJournal*, 11 July, <http://potsreotizm.livejournal.com/6174225.html> (11.07.2015).
- Laprad, Tatiana (2015) ‘Kosmos russkoi vaty’, *Svoboda.org*, 25 February, <http://www.svoboda.org/a/26869204.html> (25.02.2015).
- Marzouki, Mohamed El (2015) ‘Satire as counter-discourse: Dissent, cultural citizenship, and youth culture in Morocco’, *The International Communication Gazette*, 77(3): 282–296.
- Medvedev, Sergei (2016) ‘Khotiat li russkie voiny? Kul’t pobedy kak novaia ideologija’, *Svoboda.org*, 4 May, <http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/27716179.html> (04.05.2016).
- Mironova, Anastasia (2016) ‘How to sell patriotism’. [Kak prodavat’ patriotism], <https://ru-fabula.com/author/mironova/1073> (15.03.2016).
- Morris, Jeremy (2005) ‘The Empire Strikes Back: Projections of National Identity in Contemporary Russian Advertising’, *The Russian Review* 64: 642–60.
- Nakassis, Constantine (2013) ‘Brands and their Surfeits’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 28 (1): 111–126.
- Noordenbos, Boris (2011) ‘Ironic imperialism: how Russian patriots are reclaiming postmodernism’, *Studies in East European Thought*, 63 (2):147-158.

- Nukus [nuk18] (2015) 'Modnyi vatnik ot-kutur', *LiveJournal*, 25 December 2015, <http://nuk18.livejournal.com/1575786.html> (25.12.2015).
- Ong, Aihwa and Gollier, Stephen J. (eds.) (2005) *Global assemblages, technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing.
- Özyürek, Esra (2006) *Nostalgia for the Modern. State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Pchelkina, Natalia (2015) 'Vatnik', <http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/5224156/post357257055/> (23.03.2015).
- Porotikova, Natalia [Robotesse] (2015) 'Dachnyi luk: dve veshchi, dve sud'by', *Robotesse.com*, 11 May, <https://robotesse.com/2015/05/11/дачный-лук-две-вещи-две-судьбы> (11.05.2015).
- Porotikova, Natalia [Robotesse] (2016) 'Interview s Natashei Drigant', *Robotesse.com*, 5 February, <http://bit.ly/2oIXFPi> (05.02.2016).
- 'Putin uchredil premiiu za vklad v ukreplenie edinstva rossiiskoi natsii' (2016), *Meduza.io*, 26 April, <http://bit.ly/2qpXtRs> (26.04.2016).
- Quinn, Malcolm (2005) *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol*. London: Routledge.
- Schimpfoss, Elisabeth (2014) 'Russia's social upper class: from ostentation to culturedness', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 65 (1): 63-81.
- Simonyan, Margarita (2014) 'Podarki ot RT na novyi god', *Facebook*, 26 December 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/margarita.simonyan.5/posts/10152910043992305> (26.12.2014).
- Simonyan, Margarita [@M\_Simonyan j] (2014a) 'Podarki ot RT na novyi god', *Twitter*, 26 December 2014, <http://bit.ly/2oSGV3a> (26.12.2014).
- Skobov, Aleksandr (2016) 'Poniat' dushu vatnika', *Grainiru*, 5 May 2016, <http://mirror597.graniru.info/blogs/free/entries/251146.html> (05.05.2016).
- Skvirskaja, Vera (2012) 'At the City's Social Margins: Selective Cosmopolitans in Odessa', in Humphrey, Caroline; Skvirskaja, Vera (eds.) *Post-Cosmopolitan Cities: Explorations of Urban Coexistence*, Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 94-119.
- 'Slovami goda v Rossii mogut stat' "ukrop", "vatnik" i "kolorad"', (2014), *Kommersant.ru*, 24 October, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2598375> (24.10.2014).
- 'Sozdatel' "vatnika" Anton Chadsky: Kak ia stal rusofobom' (2014), *Snob.ru*, 14 October, <https://snob.ru/selected/entry/82278> (14.10.2014).
- 'Starting a business making a fashion vatnik for patriots' [Proizvodstvo modnoi vatnoi odezhdy dlia patriotov kak biznes] (2016) <http://bit.ly/2oVpv76> (7.4.2017).
- Stary\_sibiryak [Stary\_sibiryak] (2016) 'K glavnomu khudozhniku goroda', *LiveJournal*, 31 January, <http://stary-sibiryak.livejournal.com> (31.01.2016).
- Steshin, Dmitrii (2016) 'What it means to be a Russian'. [Chto znachit byt' russkim], <https://cont.ws/post/256850> (26.04. 2016).
- Strajj [strajj] (2014) 'Zhestkii trolling ot RT', *LiveJournal*, 28 December 2014, <http://strajj.livejournal.com/3014255.html> (28.12.2014).
- Strukov, Vlad (2016) 'Digital Conservatism: Framing Patriotism in the Era of Global Journalism', in Suslov, Michail; Bassin, Mark (eds.) *Eurasia 2.0. Russian Geopolitics in the Age of New Media*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 185-208.

- ‘The stylist told how to accessorise vatniki put up for auction by the Ministry of Defence’ [Stilist rasskazal, s chem nosit’ vystavlennye na auktsion Minoborony vatniki] (2015) <http://govoritmoskva.ru/news/42000/> (10.06.2015).
- Turner, Graeme (2010) *Ordinary People and the Media. The Demotic Turn*. LA: Sage Publications.
- ‘Vasilii Slonov has gifted a vata heart to Krasnoiarsk’ [Vasilii Slonov podaril Krasnoiarsku vatnoe serdtse] (2015) *Sibnovosti.ru*, 28 September, <http://bit.ly/2pvE1FD> (28.09.2015).
- ‘Vatnik as premonition: the most of relevant item of clothing of the new Russia’ [Vatnik kak predchustvie: samyi aktual’nyi predmet garderoba novoi Rossii] (2014) <http://bit.ly/2oS-BTE4> (12.11.2014).
- ‘Vatnik’ (2015) [www.liveinternet.ru/users/5224156/post357257055/](http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/5224156/post357257055/) (23.03.2015).
- ‘Vatnik’ (2016), <http://ruxpert.ru/Ватник> (22.11.2016).
- Veblen, Thorstein (1994) [1899] *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Wedeer, Lisa (1999) *Ambiguities of Domination. Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wedeer, Lisa (2013) ‘Ideology and Humour in Dark Times: Notes from Syria’, *Critical Inquiry*, 39: 841-873.
- ‘Writer Prilepin and fashion designer Zaitsev will engage with vatniki’ [Pisatel’ Prilepin i model’er Zaitsev zaimutsia vatnikami] (2015), *Lenta.ru*, 6 November, <https://lenta.ru/news/2015/11/06/vatniki> (06.11.2015).
- Yurchak, Alexei (2006) *Everything was forever, until it was no more: the last Soviet generation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zigon, Jarrett (2015) ‘What is a Situation? An Assemblage Ethnography of the Drug War’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 30(3): 501-524.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London & New York: Verso.
- Zub, Asia (2015) ‘Nikita Mikhalkov prishel na otkrytie memorial’noi doski Natal’e Konchalovskoi v vatnike’, *Komsomol’skaia Prava*, 18 January, <http://www.kompravda.eu/daily/26330.7/3213329/> (18.01.2015).

VERA SKVIRSKAJA is Associate Professor at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She holds a PhD in social anthropology from the University of Cambridge, UK. Her research interests include economic anthropology, post-socialist society and culture, urban coexistence, kinship, markets and migration, authoritarianism and grass-roots propaganda. She has conducted extensive field research in Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Denmark and Turkey. She is a co-editor of *Post-Cosmopolitan Cities* (Berghahn Books 2012) and *Black Sea Currents* (Focaal, Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 2014). [bdq883@hum.ku.dk]