



Object Nationalities: Connecting Nations and Commodities, or: Using Things to Talk about People

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Abstract: Growing qualitative sociological and anthropological literature on nationalist feeling (e.g. patriotism) and non-consumption, especially work from post-socialist countries, focuses strongly on citizens, as do two older, quantitative approaches to patriotic non-consumption: country-of-origin effects and consumer ethnocentrism. These three approaches overlook non-consumption on the basis of commodities' country of origin amongst migrants and non-citizens, a significant gap in advanced capitalism, which is characterised by high mobility of people, capital and commodities. This paper addresses that gap, suggesting that patriotic non-consumption is a specific form of wider non-consumption practices linked to consumers' social representations of other peoples and places (e.g. national stereotypes). Drawing on qualitative research with affluent migrants in urban Russia, this paper suggests the first steps toward a conceptual approach that explains how national stereotypes anchor unfamiliar goods. This process, alongside commodifying ethnicity, opens possibilities for passing moral judgements on people, practice, and cultures as well as goods.

Keywords: affluent migrants, anchoring process, consumer ethnocentrism, country-of-origin effects, object nationalities, patriotic non-consumption, social representations

Despite growing interest amongst qualitative consumer culture researchers on various forms of non-consumption and patriotism amongst a country's citizens, comparably little attention has been paid to the influence of countries of origins of goods on migrants' and non-citizen's consumption practices.¹ This has produced a somewhat lop-sided view, in

¹ During the preparation of this paper, I experienced a serious, and prolonged, period of illness. I am deeply grateful to the sensitivity and good will of the editors of this special issue, and the journal, for their support and encouragement. The research that informs this paper was supported by a post-doctoral fellowship from the Laboratory for Studies in Economic Sociology, in the Department of Sociology at the Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russian Federation). Whilst in Moscow, I benefited greatly from the scholarly interest and

which patriotism, or affect toward *one's own* nation, risks becoming the main lens through which social scientists think about relationships between nations, commodities and consumption practices. By focusing on non-consumption and patriotism amongst citizens, we may miss how national stereotypes—especially social representations of a country other than one's own—are used more widely to make unfamiliar goods into known, comparable commodities. Rather than a binary of us and them (e.g. 'my country' versus 'foreign countries') I propose a more nuanced set of relationships between individuals (and perceived groups such as 'my country') and multiple others. I argue, drawing on qualitative research with affluent western migrants in urban Russia, that patriotic non-consumption is part of a wider phenomenon in which consumers associate qualities of people—drawn from national stereotypes—with commodities, with the aim of turning unfamiliar goods into known, comparable items. But beyond the importance of these practices in consumption practices, this grafting of human qualities onto objects creates a slippery terrain, an ambiguous space where discerning the quality of commodities—an ostensibly 'economic' activity—can very quickly shift into highly morally charged evaluations of peoples, cultures and societies (see also Ross forthcoming on similar phenomena related to money use).

There is evidence from anthropological work on post-socialist consumer cultures that the national origins of goods are significant in drawing boundaries around moral and inappropriate consumption that may, or may not, be explicitly patriotic (e.g. Humphrey 1999; Patino 2003, 2008; Rosenberger 2007; Vann 2005; Wilson 2012). But empirical findings in this literature are often presented in the context of national historical developments, leading to deep and nuanced accounts that focus on shared histories or practices between countries, rather than attempts to develop a common theoretical approach that applies to diverse empirical materials. However, quantitative marketing research has two distinct concepts describing consumption practices linked to the origin of goods: country-of-origin effects, and consumer ethnocentrism (for overviews, see Bilkey and Ness 1982; Peterson and Jolibert 1995; Papadopoulos 1993). Drawing on parallels from these two approaches, I argue consumers use ideas about the peoples who live where a commodity was manufactured—e.g. national stereotypes—in what social representation theory (Moscovici's 1984, 1988; Bauer and Gaskell 1999; Parker 1987) identifies as the 'anchoring process' (Moscovici 1984, 2008).

Simply put, social representations of familiar entities—e.g. impressions of 'German people' or 'Russian culture'—are bundles of qualities from which consumers select relevant attributes that they apply to goods manufactured in particular countries. Grafting these 'known' qualities onto unfamiliar goods turns previously unknown things into comparable commodities. Thus, a commodity takes on a 'nationality', but at the same time, ethnicity is commodified. Giving goods a nationality facilitates decision-making or justifies a purchase, but for affluent migrants, speaking of commodities in terms of national representations creates an opportunity to discuss, criticise and reflect upon experiences of living in urban Russian society as well. In such discussions, boundaries between the ostensibly 'objective' economic valuation of goods—a 'good quality' frying pan—and much less objective moral evaluation of cultures and peoples, becomes blurred.

collegial support of Vadim Radaev, Olga Kuzina, Reuben Flores, Ben Lind, Chris Swader and Denis Strebkov among others. I am also grateful to everyone who shared their experiences with me.

Under the cover of talking about commodities, affluent migrants are able to make sometimes very explicit moral judgements about Russian people, culture and society. Thus, anchoring unfamiliar commodities with images of countries and nations is not only about deciding what to purchase; these practices also accomplish other ends. Alongside stereotypical condemnation of economic ‘corruption’, physical and psychological ‘danger’, and environmental ‘contamination’, there are also Romantic, bucolic images of the Russian peasant, pristine rural areas, and the need to ‘salvage’ (cf Clifford 1989) authentic Russian foodways. This paper draws on qualitative fieldwork with middle class migrants in urban Russia, with traditional in-person interviewing, cooking and shopping trips, as well as online discussion in specialised ‘expatriate’ forums, Facebook groups and other platforms.

Finally, though we recognise the biographies of things (Kopytoff 1988) and their agency (see Elder-Vass 2008 for a thoughtful review), whether goods may have a nationality—how commodities may be identified with ideas about the countries where they were made—has not been widely considered. The commodification of ethnicity is an undeniable aspect of contemporary consumer capitalism, in which cultural variation provides opportunities for the commodification of difference. bell hooks (2000) and Ghassan Hage (1997) have powerfully demonstrated the symbolic violence inherent in appropriations of material culture, and ways of life, such as the recent transformation of feathered headdresses associated with First Nations Plains dance societies into casual summer headgear popular amongst young, white attendees of popular music festivals. But in this paper, we will examine another entanglement of cultural difference and commodities: nationalities attributed to commodities. We can identify moments when objects are perceived as having a nationality, which is based on knowledge, or assumptions, about their country of origin. These associations may not always be ‘correct’ in terms of where commodities were produced, but their veracity is not always as important as the social representations that they reveal, and the rhetorical work these connections are called upon to perform.

Research methods

This paper draws on part of a wider project on the daily shopping practices of affluent migrants in urban Russia. This qualitative research was conducted in the Russian Federation, largely in the Moscow metropolitan area. Research participants were predominantly affluent migrants, but some middle-class Russians also shared their experiences. However, this paper discusses only the research with migrants, as non-consumption was not emphasised by Russian participants. Fieldwork comprised a range of activities, including grocery shopping trips, cooking, shared meals and participation in online forums and social media groups for ‘expatriates’. Some respondents were part of tightly-knit, nationality-based networks in urban Russia, necessitating extra measures for maintaining anonymity, and confidentiality.

Most of the fieldwork for this project occurred between September 2012, and July 2014, whilst I was living in Moscow. Since August 2014, there have been follow-up discussions via Skype with three affluent migrants. Participants were initially recruited through personal contacts made at events organised for westerners living in Russia, through online message

boards for ‘expatriates’ and through professional networks. Snowball sampling from this initial group yielded further contacts, for a total of twenty-three migrant participants.

Most respondents lived in the greater Moscow metropolitan area, but several lived in St. Petersburg. Six participants were living abroad for the first time, while three participants had lived away from their country of nationality much of their adult lives. The remaining participants had lived abroad at least once before. Several discussions were conducted in French; two were in Japanese, supplemented by some English; but the majority of fieldwork was in English. All translations are my own. Respondents were between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, though most were between thirty and forty. There was almost an even split between men (n=11) and women (n=12).

Fieldwork included participating in a range of provisioning activities; informal discussions at home or in public places; semi-structured interviews one-on-one, or as family groups; and monitoring food and provisioning-related conversations on English-language forums, social media groups, mailing lists and message boards for migrants. These methods provided access to a wider range of consumption sites and practices than interviews alone. Semi-structured interviews in participants’ homes afforded opportunities to talk through cupboard contents and explore how cooking and household goods are used, stored and discarded. Some at-home interviews including cooking meals and eating together, discussing local foods and the challenges of meeting special dietary needs in urban Russia. Grocery shopping trips offered discussions about topics like differences between potentially substitutable goods; discovering what kinds of goods are routinely rejected; and why commodities are refused or classified as ‘unsafe’. Not all shopping trips were successfully recorded. Security personnel occasionally attempted to confiscate recording devices, phones, or cameras, or insisted that the equipment be turned off. No one was harmed by security staff, but on one occasion both my friend and I felt quite intimidated and left the store. We went to a coffee shop to discuss the incident and visited a different store a few days later.

Several affluent migrants introduced me to Russian online grocery retailers with English websites that sell organic foods and Fairtrade products. On grocery store websites we made orders together; reviewed past shopping purchases; and compared the availability of non-Russian branded products in online and offline shops. The other online component of this research was participating in, and regularly reading, sub-forums on ‘expatriate’ websites about everyday shopping, eating out and cooking. Such discussions included requests for help finding elusive ingredients, like vanilla extract; or goods made for particular needs, such as laundry detergent suitable for sensitive skin; discussing locally available substitutions for ingredients not commonly found in Russian supermarkets; or sharing ‘authentic’ Russian recipes.

Online discussions were important sites for circulating and re-circulating information and rumours about urban Russia and locally made goods. Some oft-repeated ideas were more or less factual: potential dangerousness of tap water in Moscow; problems with finding special ingredients to cook foods from home; or frustration with lack of recycling facilities. Other frequently mentioned information was a bit more dubious, such as the ‘certainty’ of food poisoning from frozen and processed foods; re-sale of goods beyond their best before dates in supermarkets; allegations of mass counterfeiting of well-known branded food products; and a perception that versions of foreign goods available in Russia are somehow poorer quality than those sold abroad. Similar perceptions, especially of Russian markets as a dumping

ground for poorer quality goods, have been documented amongst middle-class Russians (Humphrey 1999; Patico 2003).

Some respondents were recruited through snowball sampling and others were part of small, nationality-based networks in which most members are well-known to one another. Although pseudonyms are used, this is not sufficient for preserving anonymity and confidentiality for people in tightly-knit social groups. Some details about interviewees have been changed to make speakers less easily identifiable within their communities (Tolich 2004; Saunders et al. 2015). When nationalities have been changed, a country within the same broad region has been used. If a participant's profession was quite unusual amongst affluent migrants, I have specified only the industry in which they work or used the broad category 'professional' to describe their employment.

Finally, an important note about terminology. Some affluent migrants from western countries referred to themselves as expatriates, rejecting the terms 'immigrant' and 'migrant' in self-descriptions. Despite this preference, which was especially pronounced online, I have not used this term. 'Expatriate' has obvious colonial connotations, as it was previously used to describe citizens from the *metropole* who administered and lived in colonised territories (Croucher 2012). For some affluent migrants, choosing the label 'expatriate' is a moral-boundary drawing effort separating western, usually white and wealthy people—or at least more prosperous than the average local person—from other foreigners in urban Russia, specifically non-white people, especially Central Asian migrants. Affluent non-Russians in Russia are no less migrants, despite attempts to escape this label by identifying themselves with different, more prestigious-sounding term. By choosing not to use the word 'expatriate', I have decided not to reinforce such moral boundary drawing and the hierarchies it produces.

Conceptual background

Qualitative research on consumption in sociology and anthropology does not yet have a coherent conceptual approach to account for how commodities' countries of origin influence consumption decisions and practice. Key insights from this literature are echoed in quantitative marketing research on consumer ethnocentrism and country-of-origin effects, but such research also lacks an explanation for how the processes it describes occur. This paper suggests the first gestures toward a conceptual approach to understanding how commodities and their geographical origins are understood with the aim of stimulating interest in new convergences between diverse fields of research whose similar concerns are often overlooked, by drawing on social representations theory, particularly the anchoring process (Moscovici 1984, 1988).

There has been significant attention to ethical non-consumption, especially based on environmental sustainability (e.g. Evans 2003; Johnston 2008) or Fairtrade (e.g. Adams and Raisborough 2008, 2010). In such literature, themes about the 'exoticism' of 'foreign' and FairTrade goods (e.g. Barnett et al. 2005) reveal how the imagined glamour and difference of distant others who may, or may not, have produced such goods, can be transferred onto commodities. Similarly, interest in the origins of goods within cross-cultural consumption research has focused on domestication, normalisation, and hybridity, of commodities (e.g.

Howes 1996; Vann 2005), or how the ‘foreignness’ of other places that has been transferred to goods is interpreted, mitigated and embraced. In marketing, consumer ethnocentrism research examines citizens’ feelings of obligation to consume locally produced goods, and support domestic industry (Shimp and Sharma 1987: 280). This field presents a crude dichotomy—domestic versus foreign—that collapses many different distant others into a single category.

Post-socialist consumer research also includes work exploring moral consumption dilemmas organised around themes of patriotism, nostalgia and beliefs about ‘foreign’ countries (e.g. Caldwell 2002, 2004; Patico 2003; Rosenberger 2007; Wilson 2012), with nuanced, historically contextualised accounts of commodities that become associated with the qualities of peoples, imagined pasts and places. These literatures share an interest in outcomes and consequences of what we might call ‘object nationalities’, but they do not explain how commodities took on these qualities from national stereotypes or representations of distant others in the first place. It is this common thread—how objects take on the qualities (real or imagined) of nations and cultures—that remains unexplained.

What is significant, for our purposes, is that these diverse research strands, across multiple disciplines, when considered together, contain the repeated discovery, across multiple consumer capitalist societies, over several decades, that information about where goods were made is used, though with varying degrees of intensity, by people to attribute perceived qualities of states, or nations, to commodities (see Bilkey and Nes 1982 or Peterson and Jolibert 1995 for overview). Thus, an emerging area of interest in post-socialist anthropology, patriotic non-consumption, is connected to significant substantive areas in other fields. This suggests that post-socialist consumers’ non-consumption practices, especially those linked to the origins of goods, are not necessarily unique. Thus, it is not the act of distinction between domestic and foreign goods that is important, but rather how these boundaries are drawn and the underlying processes that enable transferring ideas about people to things, and the wider understandings of one’s own society, and myriad other cultures and societies reproduced and maintained by these practices.

Patiko (2003; 2008) has explored more nuanced dynamics of ‘our’ goods and imported, foreign commodities in post-socialist countries (for further outstanding examples, see Caldwell 2002, 2004; Humphrey 1999; Rosenberger 2007; Vann 2005). In Patiko’s (2003: 33) work with school teachers in St. Petersburg, Chinese-made chewing gum was believed to be less tasty, while an international brand of gum was more delectable when purchased abroad, presumably because the Russian version was made in another post-socialist country. Here we find a more complex dynamic than simply ‘Russian’ and ‘non-Russian’, as the school teachers have presented groupings of countries: Russia, other post-socialist countries and a broader category of ‘international’ that encompasses perhaps western countries in the global north. An ‘international’ brand of gum made in an ‘international’ country will be tasty; the same gum made in Russia, or in another post-socialist country, will not.

Amongst Patiko’s interlocutors, poor quality was imputed to goods produced in Asia, or post-socialist countries other than Russia (cf Humphrey 1999), linking an image of poverty and lack with goods made in such countries. She documents several categories—most commonly *nash* (ours)—that apply to people or things, which are opposed to the ‘foreign’ category (cf Rosenberger 2007). Though Patiko (2003: 32-34) notes that many Russians with

whom she spoke did not connect patriotism or supporting domestic industries to their preferences for *nash* or domestic goods, her findings, and those of the wider literature on post-socialist non-consumption, echo the central axiom of consumer ethnocentrism research: the association of goods with in-group/out-group distinctions made on the basis of nationality (cf Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004; Shimp and Sharma 1987). *Nash* and similar terms are powerful boundary-drawing words that separate a Russian ‘us’ from non-Russian others, especially non-Slavic, Eurasian others (Caldwell 2002: 311; Humphrey 1999).

Patico suggests that associations between the quality of commodities and their country of origin indicate her respondents’ perceptions of the Russian state’s declining power upon the world stage.

Sub-standard food products evoked the humiliation of what the teachers perceived to be their subordinate and increasingly exploited position vis-a-vis the world’s more privileged populations. Stale cakes and tasteless gum appeared, then, as reflections of the speakers’ own inferiority, as they imagined it might be seen through the eyes of powerful others. (Patico 2003: 34)

These few sentences evoke social representations of several types of countries and relationships between them: high status western countries with tasty foods and good quality commodities; low status post-socialist countries with ‘tasteless’ food and defective commodities; and Russia as a place of ‘inferiority’ and lack, looked down upon by both groups. This representation of Russia and Russian markets, especially food, is one of a dumping ground for the rejected, substandard commodities of the world. Thus, evaluations of commodities—on the basis of qualities they share with people—is presumed to reflect the moral status and worthiness of those people.

Humphrey (1999: 34) documents similar descriptions of a ‘Great Trash Road’, a sardonic sobriquet comparing historic Silk Road trade with contemporary floods of poor quality goods flowing from China, and Eurasia, into Russian shops. Both Patico (2003: 34) and Humphrey (2002: 44-46) connect this image of dumping—only being able to purchase what is ‘chucked out’ as unwanted by higher status others—with socialist systems of provision. As in the socialist era, when ordinary citizens were the recipients of goods rejected by well-connected elites, in contemporary consumer capitalist Russia, consumers again perceive that their consumption options are constrained, or shaped, by what is deserving for people in a ‘Third world’ (Patico 2003) country. Again, we see how ideas about a particular country—the ‘worthiness’ of its people, its perceived status in global society—shape and inform perceptions about commodities made there. However, these impressions are not confined to local citizens. Affluent migrants also believed urban Russia was a dumping ground for goods, particularly consumer durables, that were unsaleable elsewhere, as indicated in Louis’ and Joseph’s comments below. Similar rumours were relatively common in online discussions as well.

Though diverse literatures share this insight that qualities attached to national stereotypes can become attached to goods and thus strongly influence consumption and non-consumption practices, and this phenomenon, in myriad forms, has been described and analysed in highly nuanced and sophisticated ways, there remains no conceptual underpinning that would help to make connections across quite disparate scholarly fields and empirical terrain. This paper proposes a tentative gesture toward such a framework, using concepts and processes from so-

cial representation theory, which is used by a range of social science disciplines. Social representations (Bauer and Gaskell 1999; Moscovici 1988; Parker 1987) and the anchoring process (Moscovici 2008: 104-107) offer a theoretical account for how qualities of one type of entity—in this paper, a nation, a culture, a society—can become attached to another type of entity, such as a commodity. This approach also breaks down the broad category of ‘foreignness’ into specific impressions, which may or may not be broadly shared, about specific countries, places or peoples, which moves beyond ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomies.

Social representations ‘make something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar’ (Moscovici 1984: 24), and are used in two ways: objectification or anchoring. The former, as its name suggests, reifies intangible concepts and ideas. The latter ‘draws new information into an existing system of categories’ (Parker 1987: 448; cf Bauer and Gaskell 1999; Moscovici 2008). Anchoring is best observed in situations where unknown, new, unfamiliar things, people, or ideas, must be made comprehensible, comparable, or related to, known entities (Moscovici 1984), which is almost an ideal typical description of how affluent migrants use national stereotypes to evaluate and compare unfamiliar commodities. Quantitative research on country-of-origin effects (or non-consumption on the basis of where goods are manufactured) has found stronger connections between national stereotypes and evaluation of goods when consumers have less information about a product category, manufacturers, brands (e.g. Maheswaran 1994: 362; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004). Thus, the influence of social representations of the country where a commodity was made—or its object nationality—is likely to be greater when there is more uncertainty, or unfamiliarity.

When consumers associate goods made in a country with national stereotypes—when they anchor unknown goods by attaching familiar representations of one entity to a new entity—new stories can be told about these objects. Suddenly, through association with representations of the place where it was made, an alien object takes on a nationality, it shifts from having no qualities, no history, to possessing myriad features. Social representations of a commodity’s country of origin can provide tremendously detailed and imaginative biographies that turn apparently mundane objects into key interpreters, or markers, of difference. Below, we will see that representations of European nations are used by affluent migrants to compare, explain and justify provisioning purchases. But in these same conversations, evaluation of objects on the basis of qualities (real or imagined) that they share with people from a particular country becomes a means to articulate moral judgements about people and cultural differences.

Rejecting goods: flimsy spatulas, ‘toxic’ pans, and ‘gritty’ toothpaste

Few affluent migrants could completely avoid goods made, grown or processed in Russia, but many claimed to avoid domestic goods, hygiene products and food, especially dairy and seafood, from Russia or other post-socialist countries. Local goods were usually rejected in favour of commodities manufactured in European countries or North American brands. We will explore three typical encounters—toothpaste, a spatula and a frying pan—where objects were attributed qualities on the basis of their perceived national origins. Each instance demonstrates how social representations of a particular country—e.g. national stereotypes of

Russia, the Netherlands, Germany—anchor commodities in a familiar system of classification. Giving a nationality to an object gives it ‘known’ qualities beyond those claimed on its packaging, or suggested by its appearance. This superadditum, derived from grafting the (imagined or real) qualities of nations onto things, that make goods comparable and comprehensible.

Affluent migrants’ provisioning is characterised by considerable uncertainty. For many affluent migrants who spoke with me, limited language skills make evaluation, and occasionally even identification, of goods rather difficult. Scepticism about the safety of local goods compounds the difficulty of quality judgements, especially for those living abroad for the first time, who are also bereft of entire categories of familiar goods, as well as accustomed manufacturers, labelling, and brands. Joseph, an American educator, wryly described his grocery shopping as ‘choosing between Rumsfeldian unknown unknowns’.

Shopping talk amongst affluent migrants is rife with boundary drawing, with varying degrees of explicitness, between Russia (or post-socialist countries in general) and a variety of other, mostly European, countries. Such talk seems to have three parts or elements. First, a category of people with certain qualities, values or propensities, is imagined in whole or in part: such national stereotypes are ideal typical social representations. Second, particular qualities are drawn from these representations and ascribed to objects believed to have the same origins: this anchors the commodity, enabling evaluation and comparison. Third, justifications are presented for provisioning decisions that employ the anchored qualities. Sometimes there is a fourth component: once a sympathetic frame has been established in the conversation, the underlying logic of stereotypical thinking about people—though the conversation is ostensibly about objects—shifts the topic from things to people, particularly Russian people. This is not so much a sudden shift as a slippage between levels of vernacular analysis, from the anchored category (commodities) to the underlying social representations (countries and their peoples).

Over many grocery shopping trips, I began to notice that some of my friends—particularly Americans—were quite keen on produce from the Netherlands, which they perceived as delicious, hygienic and grown with minimal pesticides, as compared with vegetables from Russia. These arguments often relied on the health and necessity of avoiding ‘chemicals’ and ‘contamination’. Such pollution is at once bodily and chemical—ingesting pesticides, real or imagined—as well as almost spiritual, an undesired ingestion of Slavic others in the form of Russian produce. However, when Phil, a banking specialist, took me to a middle-class Russian grocery shop, he applied these same logics to toothpaste.

Phil remembers he needs toothpaste. I suggest one with Roman alphabet logo and Cyrillic fine print. Phil demurs, ‘I wouldn’t buy that one. Likely gritty.’ Suggest another one with more Cyrillic lettering, but this is worse: ‘Could be, like, anything in that.’ He points to text on the box, ‘Made in St. Petersburg? Look, Russian is not good. Don’t get that.’ He describes ‘how things are done’ in Russia, cites driving licence flyers, suggests ‘chemicals banned in the US’ in toothpaste, which he read on an ‘expat forum’. Phil takes a C--- brand box. Rummages through several, reading labels: ‘they’re all the same brand. But made in different places.’ He finds two, gives one to me, ‘Dutch! Much safer.’ I ask what he means by ‘safe’. Phil notes ‘Dutch’ cleanliness, EU regulations, ecological concerns. (Field notes, October 2013)

This brief extract evokes images of several countries—the Netherlands, Russia, the United States—which confer certain qualities to commodities manufactured (or believed to be made) there. Phil imagines the European Union, and the Netherlands, as ‘safe’ and clean places and, by extension, whose people are morally respectable by virtue of implied environmental responsibility and industrial safety. Dutch toothpaste becomes ‘clean’ and, like Patico’s school teachers’ gum made abroad, a more attractive commodity, especially when compared to the same brand of toothpaste that looks like it was made in Russia.

Though Phil manages with some spoken Russian—he has many Russian friends from work and his years living in Moscow—he does not read the language well. Though he correctly identified ‘St. Petersburg’ on box two, it was a company address, not a manufacturing location. Toothpaste with Cyrillic letters on the packaging, whether made in Russia or not, became ‘Russian’ by association. Explaining his rejection of ‘Russian’ toothpaste, Phil draws directly on social representations of contemporary Russia, and Russian business, which include metaphorical and material ‘dirtiness’: corrupt business practices that permit dangerous ingredients or unhygienic manufacturing conditions. Such representations of Russian business were not uncommon amongst interviewees.

Affluent migrants like Phil are not looking for a ‘trustworthy’ manufacturer alone, they also require a suitable country of origin. It is not uncommon in Moscow shops to see identical items—same product, same manufacturer—from different countries; sanctions, changing policies and regulations make domestic provisioning, especially for western branded goods, somewhat unpredictable. Phil’s search for a European manufactured tube of branded toothpaste was not unusual. When shopping with French professional, H el ene, examining most of the available items to find one from Germany or France was a usual requirement. H el ene, who reads and speaks Russian very well, occasionally rejected goods after purchase, if she discovered undesirable ingredients, or packaging problems upon closer inspection at home.

Like Phil, American undergraduate, Sebastian, and Michael, a British postgraduate, also drew on social representations of countries when purchasing kitchen equipment. In a shopping expedition transcript extract from late August 2013, Sebastian buys some cooking utensils, while in October 2013 Michael was buying a new frying pan. Both men visited branches of the same cookware shop, Gipfel. This company presents itself as German, with multilingual packaging and website but, although its products may be designed in Germany, the company itself is Russian.

Sebastian: So, I want some spoons. A cheese grater. A little knife. Basic stuff. But cheap ones will break. The supermarket stuff is gross. Badly recycled, rough plastic. Doesn’t even look food safe. This [shop] is better. I asked on Facebook. A girl in my class said this is good. I looked at their website. Like, this is basic. [He takes a spatula.] It’s German design. Well made. Good colour, feels nice. [He hands me the spatula.] Comfortable handle. Practical.

SR: Good grip!

Sebastian: I know, right? Good quality. Silicone, definitely food safe. Not plastic.

Gipfel with Michael. Looking for non-coated frying pan, [he] said supermarket had none. He mentions ‘toxic gas’ from Teflon, and use of banned chemicals... ‘They’re poorer here [in post-socialist countries]...factories just use whatever they can...EU-banned chemicals

are used here, they don't care'. His info comes from 'reddit and forum posts'. He got advice to buy Gipfel from an 'expat website'... Michael picks a few steel pans, checks weight, and bottom thickness. Points to text on base, 'Look! Made in Germany!' Praises 'German design', thinks 'sustainability awareness' accounts for absence of non-stick coating: 'they're serious about green issues in Germany'. He says steel pan is 'safer, and healthier, even if you use more oil'. (Field notes, March 2014)

Sebastian wanted to avoid 'cheap', potentially unsafe items, while Michael was primarily concerned about poisonous fumes from non-stick coatings. For both young men, identifying Gipfel as a German company allowed them to make judgements about safety, ecological impacts, and manufacturing quality. High quality manufacturing, product safety, and environmental concern are attributed to objects because of their ostensible German origins, while Russian-made goods are positioned as dangerous, potentially harmful. Yet, this entire series of associations rests on imagined relationships, as Gipfel is actually a Russian company.

Attributing qualities—positive or negative; real or imagined—of people to a commodity accomplishes more than qualification of goods. The transposition of moral judgements of nations to the realm of objects applies a veneer of objectivity; evaluations of things, commodities in a store, are legitimated by appeals to what 'everyone' knows about their countries of origin. But there is more at stake here than nice, broadly stereotypical thinking about Germany's industrial base or the unpleasant texture of 'cheap' Russian plastic. In these arguments, commodities are used to objectify and neutralise judgements about people, cultures, and societies, making morally charged evaluations appear as 'facts'. Under the ostensible cover of talking about what 'everyone knows' about Russian business practices and the quality of Russian-made goods, some affluent migrants can voice their fears, frustrations and cultural discomfort with life in urban Russia and Russian people.

Though Phil made explicit criticisms of local business practices—as did a minority of respondents—most were more circumspect. Michael speaks of poverty, which he half-heartedly posits as a reason for using chemicals that are now considered unsafe elsewhere. He then suggests 'they', an ill-defined category encompassing a range of Russian others—manufacturers, retailers, consumers—do not care about safety or environmental pollution. By first citing 'common sense' knowledge—low levels of affluence on average in post-socialist countries, when compared to western European countries—Michael establishes that he and I, equally foreigners in Russia, are having a (relatively) reasoned and informed, but liberal and sympathetic, discussion about challenges facing post-socialist manufacturing enterprises. Having established good intentions—our western, ostensibly 'well-informed' and liberal position—Michael can then confide that 'they don't care'. He has drawn a careful boundary between those who 'care' about safety and the environment and those who do not, presenting a very negative view in which Russian manufacturers are unscrupulous and possibly dishonest, as an ostensibly 'objective' evaluation.

Encompassing Russia: 'dirty' carrots, authentic peasantry, and 'eating Russian'

A small number of affluent migrants were enthusiastic about some Russian commodities. Amongst those who embraced Russian-made goods, consuming locally demonstrated suc-

successful adaptation, cosmopolitan *savoir faire*, as well as historical and cultural knowledge (cf Ross forthcoming). Joseph, a Canadian friend, was quite enthusiastic about ‘eating Russian’, and introduced me to a number of traditional Russian dishes, including *grechka*, various pickles and soups. His emphasis on knowing the ‘true’ Russia through traditional foodways was echoed by other affluent migrants, such as Louis, a French chef, and Renate, a linguist. Renate argued that shopping at street markets was the best way to find tasty, and safe, food, because ‘this is how Russians shop’. Such provisioning choices were important parts of affluent migrants’ attempts to become part of, and demonstrate appreciation for, Russian society. Put another way, encompassing locally made goods—quite literally by ingesting the other—one can become less of an outsider (for a critical view, see hooks 2000).

Joseph had been living in urban Russia for a year when we first met; he was an enthusiastic student of Russian language, taking lessons with a private tutor. We often enjoyed meals at a cafeteria, or nearby restaurants. Whilst queuing one day, I complained about the preponderance of meat in local restaurants, even in salads. Joseph explained that I was eating ‘Russian-style European food, not traditional Russian food’. He agreed that contemporary dishes in restaurants seem to have meat in everything, but argued that traditional peasant dishes, without meat, are still part of Russian cuisine.

Kasha is a staple peasant food. Buckwheat, oat, any grain. Most people eat it...dumplings with fruit, or mushrooms. You can have blinis with butter, or jam...traditional cooking has meatless recipes. Peasant cooking is healthy, lots of vegetables—where would serfs get meat anyway? In restaurants, traditional food is hard to find. But our cafeteria has *grechka* every day. Smaller restaurants, where people eat every day, still serve Russian food.

Rather than considering the country of origin, Joseph distinguishes between different representations of two Russias: an inauthentic, urban Russia, and its restaurants that imitate ‘European’ food, and an authentic countryside. This contrast is neither unique to affluent migrants, nor to images of Russia, and draws upon western images of the ‘rural idyll’ (Mingay 1989), in which the fresh countryside is set against the filthy city (cf Corbin 1986). This bucolic representation of rurality, which becomes Russian with the inclusion of ‘serfs’ and reference to local dishes, offers a range of positive qualities that anchor otherwise unfamiliar dishes—porridges, dumplings, crêpes—by giving them known, desirable features: wholesomeness, healthiness, and cleanliness.

Louis, a French gourmet chef, also drew on a representation of rural Russia to argue that traditional Russian foods were both delicious, and constitute a vanishing heritage. Though his work involves European *haute cuisine*, Louis showed great appreciation for the ‘qualité rustique’ of Russian foodways. Like Joseph, he juxtaposes two social representations of Russia, and compares the rural favourably against the urban. But Louis also criticises his *nouveau riche* clients for failing to appreciate their own food culture.

But you see, there is so much Russian food that is fantastic...So many dumplings, sweet, sour, meaty, soft, creamy...and soups...This is rustic food. Flavours, textures, seasonal changes, regional variety. *Kasha*: a simple idea, but many types. So many people—even some Russians—think Russian food is caviar...Or herring salad. No, no. Even Russians

are not appreciating their own traditions. Our customers, all they want is steak frites, or sushi...So many restaurants, but all the same, boring dishes...Traditional Russian cooking with local ingredients, it's a precious tradition, the real Russia...

For Joseph and Louis, authentic Russia is found in a representation of rural ways of life. For Joseph, meatless Russian foods are anchored by qualities of health, and freshness that are drawn from his representation of the Russian peasant life, while Louis' version of the Russian countryside anchors previously unknown dishes by highlighting highly valued qualities: situating the dishes in a long-standing culinary 'tradition'; emphasising seasonality; and breadth of local, and regional, variations.

Louis' complaint that his wealthy customers ignore their own culinary heritage is more than the usual criticism of *nouveau riche* gaucheness. More than praising Russian foods, Louis offers names of specific dishes, and lengthy descriptions—omitted for brevity—that reflect his professional expertise. He contrasts his own knowledge and cultural appreciation with that of affluent Russians, who only want foreign foods. In lamenting some Russians' lack of enthusiasm for traditional dishes, Louis positions himself as both a stranger in urban Russian society—he speaks little Russian, his friends are mostly Europeans—but also an insider who is more appreciative of authentic, local culture than many Russians. Louis, like anthropologists of earlier times, presents a salvage narrative of a precious world ('authentic' Russian foodways) that must be preserved before they disappear.

From Louis and Joseph, we have two representations of Russia, one relatively wholesome, the other less so, that can be used to anchor different commodities, depending on their presumed rural or urban character. This reminds us that social representations can be multiple, and that images of a country are not monolithic. Joseph and Louis happily shop at weekend farmers' markets, and street stalls for food, but neither would purchase clothes, or consumer durables in Russia. Louis was dismayed when I bought a camera, advising me that 'many electronics that fail quality tests are sold here'. Joseph spoke of putting off buying a new pair of shoes until his next visit to Canada, 'clothes and shoes are badly made here, even the imports'.

This impression that imported goods are also somehow poorer quality in Russia echoes both Humphrey's 'Great Trash Road', and Patico's school teachers' views. Within the scope of sociological research, which does not involve product testing, it is impossible to know whether versions of a commodity sold in Moscow are somehow different, let alone worse, than those sold in Paris, Madrid, or Toronto. But it is very curious that middle class Russians—whose views Patico connects to the decline of Russia's role on the world stage, and diminished social status—express similar views to those of affluent migrants. The forums, message boards and groups I joined during my research included some Russians as well as migrants. These spaces may be a conduit through which affluent migrants 'learn' about rumours and beliefs that circulate amongst some urban Russians, through the posts and advice of Russian users. However, the extent and significance of such contacts was beyond the scope of this project.

Even for affluent migrants who purchased food grown in Russia, domestically grown vegetables, fruit or berries were much more likely to be acceptable under conditions where their provenance was clear. Produce with clods of earth still attached, purchased from street markets, kiosks, stalls or informal pitches outside Metro stations, were deemed delicious and

safe because of their connection with ‘authentic’ rural subsistence. Despite positive associations with wholesome rurality, there is a Romanticisation of poverty, or at least marginality, in some affluent migrants’ views of elderly people selling home-grown produce, pickles or jam spread on plastic mats, small rugs or the low walls around subway entrances. When associated with bucolic representations of Russian rurality, an elderly woman selling foraged mushrooms for what amounts to pocket change on a middle-class salary becomes a picturesque, enterprising individual, rather than an individual struggling to survive in the gaps of patchy social welfare provision.

Renate introduced me to a cluster of stalls outside her local Metro station, where she shops for most of her everyday requirements. This market has many itinerant vendors who travel into the city, alongside semi-permanent wooden frame stalls, and a row of permanent, but tiny, kiosks on cement foundation slabs.

Renate: There’s the mushroom seller! [She waves to an elderly woman.] I buy from her as much as I can.

SR: She has carrots too?

Renate: Still dirty! Wonderful! She grows them. Here is the spice man. [She negotiates in Russian, buying some spices.] And now the cheese lady. [We join a queue.] We wait a bit, but this is better than Auchan. I do not like it there at all. Fruit in plastic. Sometimes it is rotten underneath. People are not very nice. The environment is bad. But kiosks are good. You can see everything. You can talk, and there are bargains!

SR: It’s unusual to find foreigners shopping in kiosks.

Renate: Well, this is how Russians shop... Things are very good, especially home-made or home-grown. It takes time, but people are friendly.

Whereas many affluent migrants with minimal language skills find some comfort in the relative smooth anonymity supermarket transactions, Renate’s Russian fluency permits haggling and small talk with stall holders. She has become a *habitué* of this marketplace, as evinced by gentle nod she received from the elderly produce seller; a little present of raisins from the spice seller; and her easy conversations with stallholders.

For Renate, the clean freshness of Russian rural produce is evident in the earth clinging to ‘dirty’ carrots. However, she also distinguishes between the national origins of shops as well. The slick plastic surface conceals a ‘rotten’ underside. In another conversation, Renate described French hypermarket, Auchan, as an ‘ugly wasteland’, a site where excess waste is produced through excessive packaging, but also where she does not know anyone. Renate provides another duality, contrasting the hypermarkets of advanced capitalism—faceless, global companies—and the everyday practices of Russian provisioning through the informal economy and small shops. At a more fundamental level, Renate distinguishes between the *Gemeinschaft* of the Metro station market—genial stallholders and Russian sociality—against the *Gesellschaft* of the consumer capitalist supermarket, an empty non-place, characterised by its anonymity and transience contacts between people (cf Auge 1995).

Knowing the ‘real Russia’ through its food, as Louis aspires to do, or healthily ‘eat[ing] Russian’, as Joseph advocates, or shopping like local people as Renate does, is an effort to encompass the other, to understand and internalise it. In her reflections on ‘eating the other’, bell hooks argues that

... whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization. (hooks [1992]2014: 31)

The commodification of cultural difference is not in question. Even the most casual perusal of contemporary fashion, food, and lifestyle magazines reveals how 'ethnicity becomes spice' (hooks [1992]2014: 21) for white western consumers. But what is essential here—fundamental to my argument—is how affluent migrants make sense of Slavic others through commodities. Social representations of the countryside or 'traditional' life, attempt to place Russian produce and foods into various known, familiar schemes. These efforts may not always be successful. The veracity of respondents' social representations is, at times, quite dubious. But there is a need to adequately theorise positive attempts, even if they become encompassment rather than understanding, as well as negative appropriations.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated how the qualities of one entity, drawn from a social representation like a national stereotype, can be grafted onto a second entity to anchor it within a scheme of knowable and comparable people and things. Specifically, we have seen how qualities, real or imagined, of people living in a country—a nation—can become features of commodities. We have seen that these practices are attested in existing literature on consumer culture in post-socialist countries (e.g. Caldwell 2002, 2004; Humphrey 1999; Patico 2003, 2008; Rosenberger 2007; Vann 2005; Wilson 2012), and have explored the findings of Jennifer Patico's work (2003, 2008) in some detail. Moreover, we have seen that this use of national stereotypes in assessing commodities according to their country of origin is not unique to post-socialist countries. Similar phenomena also have been studied extensively using quantitative research methods, under the name of consumer ethnocentrism research (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos 2004; Bilkey and Nes 1982; Gürhan-Canliand Maheswaran 2000; Peterson and Jolibert 1995).

This analysis suggests that patriotic non-consumption in post-socialist countries is part of a wider phenomenon, and can make a valuable contribution to understanding consumption practices in advanced capitalist societies as well. Rather than being informed by, reacting to, or taking western consumer culture as a model, post-socialist research on consumption practices as potentially valuable, and theoretically important, contributions to make to anthropological and sociological understanding of advanced capitalism. But to make these connections, a shared conceptual framework is needed, or at least a common set of terms. I have attempted to open precisely such a conversation through this paper.

However, affluent migrants' shopping practices suggest there is more at stake in connecting ideas about places and peoples to commodities than simply making purchasing decisions or product evaluations. Affluent migrants' accounts in this research suggest that we must not lose sight of the conceptions about human beings that lie beneath discussions of frying pans, packets of noodles, Dutch toothpaste and so on. Elsewhere I have written about how affluent migrants' complaints about the Russian rouble and everyday money practices in urban Russia are often metonymical critiques of the Russian state, its people and Russian culture (see Ross

forthcoming). Connecting countries, or regions, and commodities offers similar opportunities. Phil's rejection of Russian toothpaste leads him into discussing his belief that Russian society and people are characterised by corruption and dishonesty. Such transitions between evaluations of things and morally judging peoples, cultures and societies were not uncommon in interviews and requires further study.

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