

# Authentic Anachronisms

**Abstract:** This article explores the relationship between Soviet and pre-Soviet histories in the reinvention of traditional foods in Latvia, with particular attention to how these products are transformed into new commodity forms. It focuses on regional home-baked breads and local wines produced from grapes grown in western Latvia. Both of these revivals of culinary heritage engage in complex and contradictory processes of “authentification” by taking an historical artifact—such as a recipe, a piece of equipment, or an ancient tale—and consciously crafting the missing pieces around it to produce an authentic food product, one that includes seemingly anachronistic elements of different eras. The result is a material and symbolic bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966) that represents both producers’ and consumers’ innovative efforts to preserve or redefine livelihoods in times of change, and to negotiate complicated cultural memories of various pasts. Rather than dismissing seemingly out-of-place

elements as “tampering with tradition,” I show how they are the very foundation of authenticity. I argue that the authenticity of homemade foods, like bread, is based on acknowledging the seemingly misplaced Soviet elements of the processes alongside the “ancient” recipes and modern European infrastructure, while in the case of wine we see an effort to forget the Soviet past and leapfrog to a European future. The fate of such claims, however, depends on the social networks through which the products circulate, as informal networks for home-baked breads become professionalized, and entirely new networks of connoisseurs are created who are interested in following the fate of attempts to grow “real” European wines in Latvia.

**Keywords:** Latvia, bread, wine, authenticity, postsocialist, material history, culinary heritage, Baltic.

THE SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY in food is nearly always doomed to disappoint, as “traditional” products include hybrids of old and new, local and global, layers of indigenous and colonial, and lingerings of other seemingly inauthentic elements (Heldke 2005; Freidberg 2003; Wilk 1999; Caldwell 2004; Appadurai 1988). Attempts to preserve food as cultural heritage or protect its authenticity have often resulted in its essentialization, reification, and standardization (Grasseni 2011; Bowen and De Master 2011; Brulotte and Di Giovine 2014). In some contexts, however, such (re)inventions of tradition (Hobsbawm 1983) represent a protest against and alternative to industrial food systems, and signal a new imagined future (Paxson 2010). In countries of postsocialist Eastern Europe, nostalgia for foods from pre-Soviet eras enforces national boundaries of belonging (Caldwell 2002) or invokes narratives of historical relevance on the periphery (Mincyte 2011b), while the reinvention of Soviet foods is a way to critique the present (Klumbytė 2010), connect to lost pasts, and combat the sense of dislocation without leaving home that accompanied the end of the socialist era (Berdahl 1999).

Here I explore the relationship between Soviet and pre-Soviet histories in the reinvention of traditional foods in Latvia, with particular attention to how these products are transformed into new commodity forms. How do producers

incorporate the material artifacts and symbolic meanings of different historical periods into their constructions of “authentic” local or traditional foods in postsocialist Latvia? How is the authenticity of these products intertwined with the social networks through which they circulate?

Seeking to trace the process of “authentification,” or “identifying those who make claims for authenticity and the interests that such claims serve” (Jackson 1999: 101)—as well as the potential fate of such claims of authenticity as these products circulate—I focus on regional home-baked breads and local wines produced from grapes grown in western Latvia.<sup>1</sup> The two foods represent a staple and a luxury, respectively, and thus tie into entirely different supply chains and consumer bases. At the same time, they also signal broader economic patterns of consumption, divergent visions for the countryside, and divisions among the people who inhabit, cultivate, and visit rural Latvia. The chronologies of each of these food products are punctuated by ruptures of history, and neither can boast of continuous, uninterrupted practices.<sup>2</sup> Home-baked bread was previously considered part of the private sphere, and local wine existed in a completely different form, yet both now circulate through local and tourist economies. Both of these revivals of culinary heritage engage in complex and contradictory processes of “authentification”

by taking a surviving historical artifact—such as a recipe, a piece of equipment, or an ancient tale—and consciously crafting the missing pieces around it to produce an authentic food product, one that includes seemingly anachronistic elements of different eras. The result is a material and symbolic bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966) that represents both producers’ and consumers’ innovative efforts to preserve or redefine products and livelihoods in times of change, and to negotiate complicated cultural memories of various pasts.

I deconstruct the multiple material bases and symbolic meanings of these food reinventions not to challenge their authenticity, but instead to understand their complex foundations (Theodossopoulos 2013). Rather than dismissing seemingly out-of-place elements in these stories as “tampering with tradition,” I show how they are the very foundation of authenticity. The fate of such claims, however, depends on the social networks through which the products circulate, as informal networks for home-baked breads become professionalized, and entirely new networks are created of connoisseurs interested in following the fate of attempts to grow “real” European wines in Latvia.

I argue that the authenticity of homemade foods, like bread, are based on acknowledging the seemingly misplaced Soviet elements of the processes alongside the “ancient” recipes and modern European infrastructure, while in the case of wine we see an effort to forget the Soviet past and leapfrog to a European future. Together these two cases reflect a broader debate over Latvia’s current rural identity politics: whether to reclaim and legitimize the material history of the Soviet era that has shaped current realities, or to discount it as symbolically backwards in order to claim a rightful place in European modernity.

## Latvian Local

Local food abounds in rural Latvia. Most country homes have a large vegetable garden and many city residents have summer homes, similar to the dachas that play a complex role in mediating social and natural worlds in rural Russia (Caldwell 2011). People grow enough potatoes to get through the winter, and use their summer vacations to preserve dozens of jars of pickled cucumbers, pumpkins, zucchini, cabbage, tomatoes, and many other vegetables. They make not only jam but also wine from fruit as diverse as apples, black currants, rowan berries, and wild strawberries. Foraging for wild mushrooms, blueberries, and other forest fruits is a national pastime. Such foods are brought as gifts to friends and relatives in the city and sometimes used as barter, but they rarely have a price. As

Smith and Jehlička (2013) have suggested, such gardens in postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe are not just about food or subsistence, but also represent a set of reciprocal social networks and a wider way of life that could be recognized as “quiet sustainability.”

This foodscape reflects a range of postsocialist, European Union (EU) rural development realities that have taken shape since Latvia gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and joined the EU in 2004. Private farms were collectivized in the Soviet Union, but when people regained land during de-collectivization in the 1990s, a multitude of small farms were relegated to producing at the subsistence level due to lack of equipment or other support (see Verdery 2003 for similar processes in Romania). While EU funds to encourage modernization have been available to mid-size farms, small-scale subsistence farmers who make homemade products are often excluded from markets by strict EU hygiene regulations (see Aistara forthcoming; Mincyte 2011a; Dunn 2008). Recently Latvian legislation has created a space for producing and selling homemade value-added products, which for many are the only way to survive in the countryside. Select products that function as icons of tradition, such as home-baked breads, and exclusive or innovative products such as Latvian wines, can be purchased at seasonal craft fairs and festivals or have reached city shops. Some, like the bread, are old products revalorized, and others, like the wine, are entirely reimagined.

## Baking Bricolage

Driving through the sleepy towns of Kurzeme in western Latvia, one passes numerous bakers with roadside stands selling the traditional bread called *saldskābmaize*, each a different material manifestation of the culinary icon, with its characteristic sweet and sour taste. Consider these two versions of the same traditional bread, one using a recipe inherited through a Soviet-era informal social network and baked in a modern facility built to meet EU hygiene standards, and the other using a family recipe and a bakehouse rebuilt to look as old as the oven it houses, while still fulfilling hygiene requirements.

In 2011, a regional tourist website featured this description of the product of one baker, Daina:

For over a year we have been baking the traditional [regional] *saldskābmaize* following an ancient recipe. It is a unique product that is characteristic specifically of the region. The bread lives its life in a wooden *abra* [bread trough] and is prepared only with natural ingredients with no preservatives or enhancers. Each loaf has its own “face” because it is hand-made, and from a design point of view, is just as individual as you.

This savvy marketing emphasizes the traditional aspects of the product and process: the old recipe, hand-formed loaves, the wooden bread trough or *abra*. Traditionally, an *abra* was carved from a whole log of a linden tree, large enough to knead dough for fifteen or more loaves at a time, in order to fill the brick wood-fired ovens that were common in every country home. Many bakers consider the *abra* to house the soul of the bread. It is never washed, and the interaction between the microbes in the wood and the sourdough are thought to give each family's recipe its individual taste (Aistara forthcoming).

This story leaves out a number of other fascinating details later revealed to me by Daina herself. Contrary to what one might expect, she did not grow up baking bread, and the recipe is not a family heirloom, but rather inherited from an old neighbor who used to bake bread in the Soviet years. The neighbor did not have her own bread oven, but she did have an *abra*. In the winter, the old lady would tie her wooden *abra* onto a sleigh and drag it to neighbors' houses to bake the bread. She shared the bread with them, and they in turn helped her stockpile scarce ingredients. Daina and her husband sometimes helped the woman by driving her in their car. After Latvian independence, they hired a mason to build a brick oven for the old woman, who was living next door, but the neighbor died before a single loaf could be baked. Daina inherited her recipe and the *abra*, as the woman had no family of her own, but did not start to bake until nearly two decades later. After Daina's husband died, she worked at other jobs but then decided to try baking because she still had the recipe and oven, and another neighbor who knew how to make a sourdough starter helped her bake the first loaf.

Daina attended a "business incubator" workshop organized by a local development agency that encouraged her to take out a loan and apply for EU funds to start a small bakery. To meet EU hygiene regulations of a certified, easy-to-clean facility, her son reconstructed an old barn, installing white tiles over a concrete floor and new stainless steel sinks. Daina bought a used commercial Soviet-era electric mixer, which she calls her "friend to help knead the dough," a used commercial Soviet-era electric oven that she describes as "neither good nor bad," and ordered a new wooden *abra*. The old *abra* was split, and while she still has the brick oven, she only shows it to visitors as the "romantic oven." Renovating that building would have been too expensive, and she insists that only specialists can taste the difference between bread baked in the two ovens.

Daina tells her story with pride at having started a new business as a widow in a small town where many people emigrate. She hosts tourist groups who, for a small fee, try



FIGURE 1: *Daina's electric oven.* PHOTOGRAPH BY GUNTRA A. AISTARA © 2013

making their own loaves. While the bread is baking, sometimes the local female folk ensemble entertains guests with their traditional singing and colorful folk costumes. This is an enactment of traditional baking despite the post-Soviet/EU modernity of the facilities.

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In Lejupes farm in the next village, Līga tells a different story of bread-baking. She took over from her mother-in-law, Valērija, and still works under her watchful eye. When I ask how long they have had their *abra*, which has been repaired with a steel band where it had begun to split, both exclaim in unison, "Oooooo..." Valērija offers: "Mother's mother and then nine mothers..." They still bake in the brick wood-fired oven; the bottom half dates from before World War II, and the top half was reconstructed in Soviet days. The oven itself thus embodies the layers of history represented by the bread. Valērija boasted that in Soviet days when her mother could not get flour for baking, she stole ingredients from the *kolhozs* (collective farm). Valērija became the underground baker for all local birthday and wedding celebrations, but whoever ordered the bread also needed to secure the scarce

ingredients. Thus, the social connections in the *kolhozs* were maintained by the exchange of favors and bread, baked from illicit flour (see Aistara forthcoming for more detail).

In the early 1990s Līga took over the baking, kneading by hand and using the old *abra* and oven. Līga has built up her business through word-of-mouth informal connections, and now bakes up to thirty loaves daily. The bread is now relatively expensive, but locals still buy it for special occasions. When I first interviewed Līga, they were not legally allowed to sell the bread, because the oven was in a small, soot-covered bakehouse, much like Daina’s “romantic oven,” that did not meet EU hygiene standards. Put off by the requirements of cold and sterile tiled surfaces, but nervous about selling the bread illegally, they tore down and rebuilt the bakehouse around the old oven last year, using specially ordered salvaged bricks, some of them still bearing date stamps from the 1800s. They paneled the interior with wood they had ordered specially cut to give it a rustic look, much to their carpenter’s annoyance. For Līga, it was important to preserve the feeling of history in the bakehouse; “otherwise,” she said, “I can’t bake.”

Due to historic ruptures, we see that, while certain elements of these recipes are old, Latvian producers must re-create or invent the rest, and what gets patched into the puzzle is not necessarily old or local, but rather what is possible due to economic means or necessary according to EU legislation. In the corner of Līga’s old-new bakehouse is a refinished wooden dowry chest, or *lāde*, where they store the ingredients. The rustic exterior houses sacks of conventional commercial flour and other ingredients, delivered by truck on a pallet. This is evidence that while Līga’s rustic bakehouse may look more “authentic” than Daina’s white tiles, it is also a bricolage of old and new, local and distant.

## Sour Wines to Sweet

In another nearby town, we encounter different practices and narratives of culinary heritage surrounding the surprising traditions of the local “wine hill.” The wine hill once held the distinction of setting the Guinness World Record as the northernmost open-air vineyard in the world (later broken by Finland). The town, which has a coat of arms bearing a bunch of grapes, celebrated its fifteenth annual wine festival this year. A tourist brochure notes that legend has it that wine-making dates back to fourteenth-century Livonia, and in the 1600s the Duke of Courlandia was producing “sour wine” for his court as well as for export. The rebirth of the wine hill came at the behest of President Ulmanis of

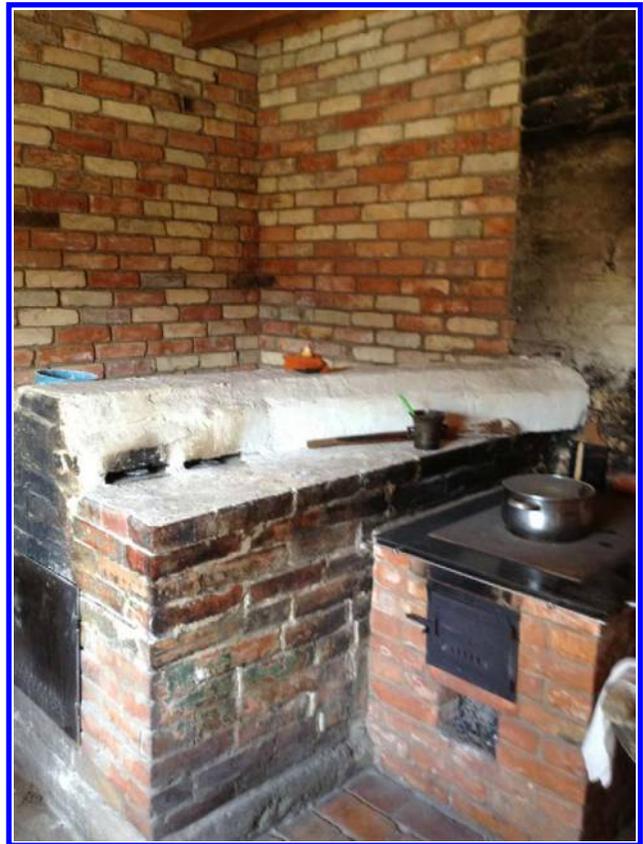


FIGURE 2: Līga’s renovated bakehouse.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GUNTRA A. AISTARA © 2013

independent Latvia in 1936, a time recalled as a symbol of prosperous smallholder agriculture. The most recent awakening came in 1989 during the pro-independence movement, when students and a professor from the agricultural university replanted the vines once again. Thus, in every major time of hopeful transition, the wine hill has been reimagined as a unique symbol of potential prosperity.

The one and a half hectares of the southern slope of the 34-meter-high hill are cared for by Ilva, a weathered, athletic-looking gardener. Both the grapes and the wine are the property of the municipality, and schoolkids and visitors eat at least half the grapes, leaving little for wine. Ilva understands that visitors who come from all over the country “have never been in a vineyard, and will want to taste the grapes.”

Grapes have been grown in Latvia as fruit for generations, but Latvian growers have what is considered a “climatic challenge” in relation to wine production. *Vitis vinifera*, the European wine grape, is notoriously difficult to grow in the short, wet seasons, with harsh winters and late frosts. Therefore the majority of the grapes are hybrids developed by Latvian breeders during the Soviet era based on a *Vitis*



FIGURE 3: “Wine hill.” PHOTOGRAPH BY GUNTRA A. AISTARA © 2013

*amurensis* or *Vitis labrusca* base, which can tolerate extreme temperatures, and thrive in the local climate.

In addition to caring for the vines, Ilva also makes the wines, although she does not care much for wine herself. She makes separate wines from each individual variety, fermenting them in large glass jugs. The wines are not for sale, but rather are presented by the city council at receptions and as the centerpiece of the annual wine festival, an embodiment of the town’s unique source of pride. These sweet wines are reminiscent of the “house wines” made in many farmsteads from other fruit and berries. Foreign tourists are fascinated by the Guinness record and visit the hill to taste the wines, characterizing them as “good, but too sweet,” and joking that Ilva’s production processes are “how we did it fifty years ago.”

## Cosmopolitan Vines

Until recently, Ilva was nearly alone in her grape wine production in Latvia, and her wines were considered authentic due to their uniqueness, which has put the town on the map and in the record books. In the last five years, however, a handful of new winemakers have emerged in the region, hoping to create a market niche distinct from that of the wine hill. One such winery planted its first vineyard four years ago, dedicated to the four hundredth anniversary of the birthday of Duke Jacob of Courlandia. Legend has it that the duke planted wine varieties from the Rhine Valley; therefore the owner Dāvis purchased nearly three thousand vines in Germany in 2010 to plant in Latvia.

The first bottles of Riesling, featuring a picture of the duke on the label, are available for tasting: “a bit acidic but

with potential,” as described by the vineyard manager, Jānis. Jānis is a gardener by training, who worked in Austria until he was hired by Dāvis to return to Latvia to manage the vineyard. As rain began to threaten, Jānis quickly showed me around. He explained that they “chose wine varieties not according to those that would be the most resistant or adapted, but from which you can make the best wines.” The vineyard includes Riesling, Chardonnay, yellow Muscatel, Spätburgunder (a German version of pinot noir), and Frühburgunder (an early mutation of pinot noir) grapes. Jānis emphasized with pride that this is “the only *pure* vineyard” [emphasis in original] in the Baltics, with only *Vitis vinifera* grapes.

Unlike Ilva’s hardy grapes, these are a constant struggle, and as many as a third have frozen. Every winter the vines are completely cut back and the rootstocks covered with soil. Even when the grapes overwinter, they might not have enough sun to fully ripen and develop their sugar content. The result is the wine of sweat and tears. Jānis said these wines will never compare to Western ones of the same varieties, though it seems their prices might, owing to the effort involved. Why such great exertion, then, to grow “real” wines in Latvia’s harsh climate?

The map of the Duchy of Courlandia in the tasting room reveals part of the reason. Jānis told me that during the reign of Duke Jacob, the Abava Valley went through an historical upswing with a booming economy of multiple factories. He explained, “That was such a time of flourishing, if you compare it to today . . . when nothing is happening.” The duchy was run as an independent government at the time, and taken to symbolize the only other point of self-rule in Latvian history besides a brief interwar independence.<sup>3</sup> “This is the history that ties it [the region] to the whole world,” says Jānis. The veracity of these histories is reinforced by their telling. They re-create the imaginary of Latvia as significant within European history, much like the Zepelini dumplings in Lithuania symbolize its place in European aviation history (Mincyte 2011b). Jānis concluded that if Latvia could produce and even export wine *then*, why not *now*? Other new wine producers inspired by this history take it less seriously, yet also share a vision for a more prosperous future in the countryside.

Another new grower, Andrejs, is experimenting with both foreign *V. vinifera* varieties and with Canadian, German, and locally developed hardy hybrids to make dry, high-quality wines. He was inspired to make wines during his honeymoon trip to Tuscany, has spent time studying in the United States, and peppers his speech with witty English phrases. Andrejs explains that he wants to find ways to make the countryside “sustainable” and make more profit per unit of land than one can growing potatoes and cabbage. He took advantage of his

“mid-life crisis” to turn away from his media career in the capital city of Riga to combine his interests in “chatting with people, drinking good wine, and living in the countryside.” Andrejs was frustrated to find that local wine-making knowledge was scarce. He claims that “the wine hill is like a beautiful cow that does not give milk.” He learned about wine-making from US extension service bulletins, YouTube videos, and by visiting producers in Germany and elsewhere. His first bottles have won prizes in the national wine competition judged by internationally recognized sommeliers. His modern tasting room in a reconstructed stone barn is indeed reminiscent of Tuscany, and he aims to “create the consumer” who will discover the new wines and buy them at top dollar in gourmet restaurants in Riga. Yet he simultaneously attracts volunteer grape harvesters *qua* consumers through his Facebook page and degustations at hip new markets, and makes sweet and dry apple ciders and berry wines to satisfy a range of palates.

Many Europeans turn up their noses at non-*vinifera* wines. Andrejs made a dry sparkling white wine from a hybrid grape, but laments that no matter what you do, “it still has the aroma of *labrusca*.” He concludes that this poses a fundamental dilemma for the North: to produce something “interesting” from non-*vinifera* grapes, or to follow what the Western world has decided “counts” as the aromas and tastes of good wine, where even all the fierce Old versus New World debates take place within the confines of *vinifera* varieties. Ilva observes that these new growers, like the European wines, are “transplants,” as locals do not much care about European wines. She wonders what success they will have with European varieties, but suspects her own wines would be “judged undrinkable by the ‘foreign judges’” and therefore does not participate in the wine competitions.

## The Puzzle of Authenticity

These breads and wines have all been positioned by their producers as authentic by drawing upon historical traditions, but bring together different combinations of material practices and symbolic pasts, and have divergent implications for local social networks and commodity trends in the countryside.

Authenticity can be defined as being “original, genuine, real, [or] true to itself,” but in the realm of food is often defined in opposition to modern industrialized mass-culture (Pratt 2007: 293). Evaluations of authenticity, however, risk falling into the trap of re-creating binaries of the authentic versus the inauthentic or of offending groups by characterizing them as “inventing” traditions (Theodossopoulos 2013). We must acknowledge instead the multiple bases of authenticity that

coexist simultaneously in any given context and to follow how they are negotiated (*ibid.*). In the case of the bread and wine, the material and symbolic bases of authenticity are negotiated through local ingredients, historical equipment, traditional recipes and practices, and incorporation into particular social networks. Here I have focused more on attempts to produce food “authentically,” while the consumers’ experience of the taste of “authenticity” is a separate question (Heldke 2005) and may embody both cultural memories or future imaginaries of various eras (see Aistara 2014).

While the *saldskābmaize* is baked locally, the ingredients are not, and may well be bought from supermarkets or wholesalers. In fact, possibilities for local production and consumption contradict each other here. When Līga began baking again in the 1990s, no local flour was available, but now it is, as part of the trend and need for farmers, in order to survive, to package and sell value-added foods to private customers. While buying grains or flour directly from producers in neighboring areas would support the local economy, it would also make the bread too expensive for local consumers to buy, even on special occasions. New economies of niche products price the goods out of other producers’ reach, making cooperation unfeasible unless the final product is to become entirely a luxury item, solely for export. This reminds us that changes in practices do not necessarily reflect merely aesthetic or value choices, but also larger structural and historical processes and possibilities.

Ideals of authenticity are also negotiated in the equipment and process. While Līga still uses the old *abra* and oven and kneads by hand, her bakehouse is new; the technologies used by Daina are late Soviet, and the facilities new. But both draw upon a cultural memory of the process, valued by city consumers. One customer told me she wanted to “buy their story,” not just the bread, implying the assumption that the old recipe is more authentic than supermarket versions.

The sensory experience of taste can also legitimize the past (Seremetakis 1996). While bakers cite an “ancient” recipe from an unspecified era, in their modernized facilities they revive practices that draw upon vague childhood memories from the Soviet social context that no longer exists, which in turn represented practices carried over from the previous independence period that the Soviet regime attempted to unmake. Yet for consumers the production details pale in comparison to the taste. One consumer of Līga’s bread told me that “this recipe, and this bread—its form, its color—is exactly like what *Ome* [grandmother] used to make. . . . I buy it because it reminds me of my childhood. . . . She died when I was in high school, and no one else has ever made anything like this since.”



FIGURE 4: *Līga's bread*. PHOTOGRAPH BY GUNTRA A. AISTARA © 2011

Yet the source of the distinctive sweet-and-sour taste of *saldskābmaize* is also debated. Both bakers add sugar to balance the acidity of the sourdough, but a farmer who produces malt for beer told me that this is historically “incorrect.” She insisted that the sweetness used to come from sprouted, malted grains rather than sugar. Both bakers, however, use recipes they inherited from relatives or neighbors from the Soviet period, when malt was not available, and neither had used malt or heard of this tradition. Would these recipes be more “authentic” if they now used malt instead of sugar, as commercially produced “traditional” *saldskābmaize* sometimes does? Or perhaps such experimentation, based on historical speculation rather than actual passed-down recipes, would constitute even more tampering with tradition than the current versions (see West and Domingos 2012)?

In sum, the composite picture of the bread is eclectic at best. One baker uses a recipe inherited from a neighbor but commercial electric equipment from the Soviet era. Another uses an old family recipe made with commercial flour and sugar delivered by truck, and bakes in a building that has been transformed with new wood paneling to make it look as old as the oven it houses. Like Heather Paxson’s (2013) stories of American cheesemakers combining pastoral ideals and working with “the machine,” the authenticity invoked by these bakers is a mix of old and new. But there is also a particular post-Soviet, European Union bricolage that makes up these material practices. The various elements of this mosaic, though seemingly anachronistic, in fact more authentically reproduce all of the various eras lived by the producers than would a speculative exercise in re-creating an “authentic” recipe and practices reaching back to earlier historical times. Used Soviet ovens and costly European Union

hygiene regulations are real elements of the post-Soviet transition, and these anachronisms are a lived part of the material reality of these women’s traditional products.

To give another example, a recent regional cookbook based on interviews with local women included recipes emphasizing childhood memories, including blood sausage, sour porridge, and sauerkraut soup with pig’s head, yet a few recipes revealed how the women cook today. One woman born in 1928 ended her recipe for a fresh forest mushroom sauce with a sprinkle of *Vegeta*, a bouillon-like powder enhanced with monosodium glutamate, developed in Croatia in the 1950s and exported to the USSR. One of the only spice products circulating until the 1990s, it became a key ingredient in every soup, salad, and pork chop in the country. Should the editor have sanitized this unseemly reference and thus censored the cookbook? Indeed, did she even notice it, or did she accept it as a well-known fact that many rural kitchens still use *Vegeta*? The reader who cringes at the mention of *Vegeta* in a historical “authentic” recipe book should perhaps reflect on it as an important part of the social history of the post-Soviet kitchen. *Vegeta* was a real element of the post-Soviet transition that is gradually becoming an anachronism, but is a lived part of the material reality of these women and their refashioned authentic food products.

The complexities of this lived history make it difficult to re-create the material practices of traditional foods in any other way. It is, I would argue, precisely these diverse layers of memories and current practices that make the breads authentic. Daina lamented that the baking traditions in the region are old but that most of the bakers, as well as the masons who knew how to make the ovens, are already below ground. This cultural revival, in its piecemeal way, is as real as it gets, mimicking history in today’s circumstances, where bakers must choose between hygienic surfaces (stylistically modern industrial or modern traditional) and illegal sales. Regional identity is maintained not solely through folk singing traditions, but through the bakers, farmers, and ordinary people who continue to live and work there. This is what keeps the region alive and dynamic, similar to the “living tradition” of cheesemakers in Auvergne, France (West 2014), rather than becoming a “museum of production” (Bowen and De Master 2011). Indeed, this may protect the bread from the same fate that has befallen the *abra*, now decontextualized and emptied of its dough, for sale on Pottery Barn’s website for a few hundred dollars, paradoxically as a “brand new vintage East European dough bowl,” recommended for US suburban homemakers’ arrangements of fall vegetables, eucalyptus sprigs, and votive candles.

## New Wine in Old Bottles

Historic ruptures of wars and revolutionary changes in political systems have segmented people's interpretations of history in terms of which periods "count" as eras for authenticity. Postsocialist historical and memory discourses at times see the Soviet era as a break from normality, despite the fact that people's individual memories and material practices stem from this era and form an important part of their lived experiences (Eglitis 2002; Fehérváry 2002; Yurchak 2005). Now these omissions have become a strong basis for postsocialist nostalgia (Todorova and Gille 2010).

All the wine producers I met draw upon the same historical legend of wine production in Latvia dating back to the seventeenth century, yet the new winemakers relate differently to the Soviet past than do Ilva and the bakers. Unlike the bread, where ingredients are almost taken for granted, in wine-making the grapes are of utmost importance. Ilva's wine is truly local, as the grapes and wine are produced locally from locally adapted varieties, selected by local breeders. Furthermore, for national tourists who come to visit, it is the most "authentic" vineyard in the country, as it is the oldest and was, for so long, the only one. Similarities in taste between Ilva's sweet wines and those made from fruit and berries by rural residents lend a sensory authenticity as well.

The new generation of winemakers, however, defines authenticity differently, according to the aroma and taste of the wine or the lineage of the grape. In contrast to the bread, where producers authenticate the post-Soviet material realities of the production process, in the wines, the socialist materialities of hybrid grapes and sweet wines are denied by the new winemakers' grape varieties and production processes. Rather than relying on generations of labor by Latvian and Soviet breeders who created hybrids of hybrids best adapted to local conditions, or on educating Western consumers about the potential of "interesting" Northern wines, the new growers speculate about varieties grown four hundred years ago and undertake expensive and laborious experiments to adapt foreign varieties to local soils and to educate local consumers. The historical legend of regional wine production thus becomes the empty vessel of potential authenticity to be filled with new European wines. The growers develop new practices that justify both Latvia's genealogy and renewed presence in Europe, but simultaneously risk discounting historical hybrids, the local material practices of Ilva's wine, and the symbolic significance of the wine hill. Like Latour's (1993) modernity, which aims for purification and the elimination of troublesome hybrids, this is a vision of

European and historical purity to replace the hybrid lived realities of Soviet and post-Soviet life.

## Relocating the Social

Finally, these mixed material realities and symbolic histories of bread-baking and wine-making also reflect the social networks out of which they have grown, and have important consequences for such networks in the future. Daina inherited her business from a reciprocal Soviet-era social network, composed of one neighbor who left her the recipe and *abra*, and another who helped to make the sourdough. Unlike the old lady, who baked and shared bread with locals in return for other favors, now Daina's bread is sold largely outside of the region to tourists and visitors.

Similarly, Līga's network of consumers was built up in part as a continuation of Soviet informal networks, but has slowly shifted, as the new bread is too expensive for locals or even local restaurants, but tourists come by the busload. Her husband makes a weekly delivery to urban journalists and others who "buy the story of the farmer" and "value the connections of trust." These opportunities have professionalized her business. She now carefully weighs, prices, and packages each loaf, with a special label designed by her husband. As these networks shift further from home, they begin to replicate more distant commodity structures. The city consumers know her husband, but have never met Līga, unlike her mother-in-law Valērija's career as the locally renowned baker in the town. If they expand further, perhaps consumers will only know the label. The commodification of authenticity has at least in part a dislocating effect, as foods become less available for the networks out of which their value was created.

Yet the case of the new wines complicates this story of loss, and indicates that perhaps these wines are also "unfinished commodities," like the artisanal American cheeses of which Paxson (2013) writes. Their values and value are undetermined. The current lived experience of the winemakers and their material practices of attempting to invent high-quality wine on Europe's northeastern periphery is in no way less "real" than the Soviet and post-Soviet experiences of the bakers trying to re-create the regional specificity of a bread. And the vintners believe in creating a more viable lifestyle in the countryside as much as the bakers do. The luxury status of the product raises questions about the social groups for whom it will be accessible, however. This will depend largely on the social networks that may be formed around these new products. Andrejs uses Facebook to announce to his growing

group of followers the sugar content of the grapes and to invite volunteers for the grape harvest. Through this, these volunteers-cum-customers may become just as invested in the wines as were the customers bringing ingredients to Valērija for baking bread several decades ago. These new friends, helpers, and consumers wrapped into one will also perhaps use these wines for their special occasions, as in former times Valērija's bread graced the tables of celebrations.

## Embodying the Past, Tasting the Future

What, then, are the relationships between the material practices and symbolic geographies of these products, and between the local and the authentic? Choosing certain products legitimizes certain pasts and simultaneously discredits others. If the product resonates with the cultural memory of taste, the customer embodies that past by consuming it. In the bread, the cultural memory of taste links consumers back to the recent Soviet past, and thus not only legitimizes the material Soviet practices of which it is made, but embeds them into the longer-term local and regional traditions the bread represents symbolically. Similarly, Ilva's wines, through their resemblance in taste to homemade berry wines, link the otherwise exotic product back to the home and thus appropriate wine-making as a local tradition. These anachronistic material practices are incorporated into the symbolic geographies of these products to define their authenticity. In the new wines, however, the local is separated from the authentic, by skipping over the local Soviet history of grape breeding and adaptation. Instead, authenticity is created by linking a historical legend symbolic of a prosperous past to an imagined hopeful future. Since there is no cultural memory of a taste for this product, consumers must be taught to appreciate it for its symbolic value.

Bruno Latour (1987) has argued that the "truth" of a statement must be evaluated by its incorporation into other statements and that the making of facts is a collective process. So too is it with authenticity: one cannot evaluate the authenticity of a single isolated product without viewing it in relation to those who produce and consume it. The bread and Ilva's wine are judged local and authentic by consumers based on the sensory character of their flavor and the symbolically important cultural memory of bread-baking in former eras. Because the winemakers, like the European vines, are "transplants," they must grow new roots and establish new networks. They must not only invent new material practices in their wine-growing, but must also embed these in the landscape, in people's social networks and sense of taste, so that they become part of the cultural and sensory

memory of generations to come. If they succeed, then the new wines will also become authentic anachronisms in the larger puzzle of authenticity. ☉

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## NOTES

1. This article is based on research with bakers, rural restaurant owners, winemakers, and consumers in western Latvia in the summers of 2011 to 2013. All names are changed and all translations are my own.
2. See, for example, Grasseni 2011 for a detailed account of how food heritage is transformed over time.
3. See Dzenovska 2013 for an analysis of Latvians' complicated relationship to this historical period within the new Europe.

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