



FIGURE 1: *The Soviet world was a land of striking contrasts, contradictions, and paradoxes, where citizens recognized that even though everything was forbidden, everything was possible. These paradoxes also characterize the post-Soviet era, such as this amusing scene in the center of Prague, where the Museum of Communism shares a courtyard with McDonald's.*

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO was a momentous time in many places around the world. While the catastrophe of World War I continued to grind on, adding to already unimaginable levels of casualties, it was not as though the rest of the world stopped and waited for the war to end. In 1917, the United States Supreme Court upheld an eight-hour working day for railroad employees, contributing to the idea that workers were people who were entitled to personal time and promoting the nascent concept of work-life balance. Suffragettes in Great Britain and the United States marched and protested for the right for (white, elite) women to vote. Puerto Rico was officially created as a U.S. territory and Puerto Ricans were granted American citizenship. Although in Africa there were only two independent countries—Liberia and what is now Ethiopia (then Abyssinia)—and it would be nearly another half century before independence movements swept the continent, a series of major revolutions elsewhere led to the formation of new nation-states. In China, Sun Yat Sen's efforts to lead a separatist regime eventually resulted in what has come to be described as the modern Chinese state, with Sen recognized as its de facto "father." Finland declared

its independence from Russia, setting it on the path to full autonomy. At the same time, ongoing political struggles in Russia culminated in the October Revolution, which paved the way for the formation of the Soviet Union. In short, the events of 1917 and their lasting effects proved upheaving for those who lived through them and continue to fascinate those who are drawn to studying them.

For me, the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution is especially meaningful, given that I have spent the past thirty-plus years as a student of all things Russian, Soviet, and now post-Soviet. In particular, I am excited to present this special issue of *Gastronomica*, which focuses on the legacies of the Russian Revolution across the formerly Soviet world. As the authors in this special issue show, food has been a crucial part of daily life in this region, before, during, and after the Soviet experiment. In fact, much of what is known about Soviet-style experiments with communism and state socialism has come through accounts of food and food practices.

In my own case, over the many years that I have studied Russia, I have frequently been asked by well-meaning people why I chose food as my topic of research. For most, the question has to do with cuisine: drawing on stereotypes of Russian peasant food or Soviet institutional cooking and food shortages, questioners have wondered how I could be interested in exploring what they were certain was a constant diet of potatoes, cabbage, and bread. Curiously, by contrast, among Russian acquaintances there has been a sense that by studying Russian food practices I could overcome what they assumed were quintessential American habits of not knowing how to cook “properly” from scratch but only from cans or take-away containers.

Yet the truth, as happens most commonly, lies somewhere else. In fact, what has captured my interest the most is not necessarily the food per se, but how food expresses many other things—including persistent stereotypes such as the ones I have encountered. Most notably, I have been intrigued by the ways in which political ideologies and practices might be discovered within something so seemingly ordinary as a bowl of *kasha* (hot cereal) or a jar of homemade raspberry jam.

My first experience with “communist” food occurred in 1985, when I was a high school student and spent a summer visiting my Girl Scout pen pal who lived in Karelia, Finland. My friend and her family were Karelians whose family had endured multiple experiences of territorial displacement as the Finland-Russia border moved back and forth over the years. Indisputably culturally Finnish and rooted in Finland, my host family and many of their neighbors and friends also had varied connections to a Russia that was then part of the Soviet Union. Russian language classes were taught in school in addition to mandatory classes in Finnish, Swedish, and English. Family friends who traveled across the border to visit relatives returned home with Russian sweets and other treasures. My pen pal’s father was a border guard who approached—and likely crossed—the border every day in his work while patrolling the official boundaries in the middle of the many lakes that separated Finland and Russia.

Knowing of my curiosity about the Soviet Union, a place that I, as an American, could not easily access during the height of the Cold War, my pen pal’s family tried to find ways to introduce me to Russia—albeit certainly from a Finnish perspective. One evening, my host mother prepared a special treat for us: a Russian fish soup. I have since enjoyed that same soup many times in Russia and in Finland. But on that particular occasion, it was presented as a Russian soup. What made the soup Russian? Apparently it was not the recipe itself. Instead, it was the fact that during his normal working day, my host father had pulled his guard boat alongside that of his Soviet counterparts, and one of his Russian colleagues had passed over a bucket of



FIGURE 2: Jars of raspberry preserves, black currant jam, and cabbage and pepper “caviar” are important items for long-term storage and treasured physical memories of the beloved family members and friends who made them.

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FIGURE 3: This Krasnaya Oktyabr’ (Red October) candy box was brought back from the Soviet Union in the early 1980s by a Finnish friend who had traveled to Russia to visit friends. Across the Soviet Bloc, decorative candy boxes were valuable gifts, first for the candy and later for the beauty of the boxes themselves.

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fish which he had caught that morning while on patrol. During that meal and the retelling of the day's catch, I learned that what makes "national" cuisines distinct and authentic has less to do with the origin of the recipe or the cook than the details that the narrator of the dish chooses to include. I also learned something about hospitality and commensality: sharing food was a deeply personal activity that transgressed geopolitical borders, such as when border guards from different countries passed freshly caught fish back and forth from their boats.

Five years later, I had another experience with "communist" and then "postcommunist food," when I arrived in East Berlin by train, just days after Checkpoint Charlie had been dismantled. I was working in West Germany that summer, and my coworkers and I had set off on a quick, weekend trip to Berlin to see the Wall before it disappeared. We had intended to get off the train at the last West Berlin station, but because the physical border had been dissolved and there were no longer any obvious indications that we had crossed from one country to another, we inadvertently missed our stop and exited in East Germany. The train station was drab and devoid of facilities. Because one of our group was violating the restrictions on her military dependent passport by being in East Germany, we had to swiftly reverse course. After returning to the previous station, and now back in West Germany, we exited and made our way to the PX that served American and allied troops, where we ate breakfast in the commissary, which was filled with American fast-food restaurants. For the rest of our weekend in Berlin, I moved back and forth between a still officially communist East Germany and capitalist West Germany, with periodic stops in a hyper-capitalist American military base. The differences were striking and intriguing to me as I attempted to make sense of the various styles in food marketing, restaurant cultures, and even available foods and foodscapes.

By the mid-1990s, I was deeply immersed in my own research on the post-Soviet world, and I remained fascinated by the changes that were occurring at all levels and in all corners of daily life—many of which were manifest in changing food cultures. Many of the larger political and economic transformations that took place as formerly Soviet countries adopted, rejected, and oftentimes reinvented "Western" capitalist models were evident in the types of foods that became available or disappeared altogether, the different forms of service economy that accompanied the arrival of foreign restaurant and grocery chains, and even the new cycles of bust-and-boom, or excess and shortage, that continued to shape food production and distribution across the formerly Soviet landscape. For instance, the arrival of Western-style supermarkets introduced new shopping routines and rituals for both customers and employees, beginning with multiple aisles stacked high with food items that could be touched by customers, placed in shopping carts and baskets, and then transferred to a moving belt where a cashier scanned their price tags and customers could present a credit card for payment. This was a significant change from past shopping experiences, when foods (and other goods) were kept behind glass counters and only available after a customer had paid at a central cashier and then returned to the counter to present a ticket in exchange for the purchase. New global trade partnerships brought in new, multinational products and brands, while "local" brands either found new markets through broader distribution or disappeared altogether. These changes were captured beautifully in movies like *Good Bye, Lenin!* when the main character searches East Berlin for jars of his mother's favorite East German pickles and coffee.

Most notably, global geopolitics were constantly on display as post-Soviet producers, consumers, and politicians alternately, and often paradoxically, imbued values



FIGURE 4: *The Museum of Communism in Prague includes an exhibit depicting a socialist-era food store. Aesthetics were an important part of consumption, and shopkeepers artfully displayed their items on store shelves. This practice was especially significant during shortages, when the aesthetics could potentially distract customers from the reality that there was very little to purchase.*

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in individual foods. Ideological differences played out both in embargoes against foods from “unfriendly” countries (at times the United States and later European Union countries) and increased imports from “friendly” countries (usually other postcommunist countries), as well as in the rehabilitation of particular foods as part of “nostalgia” cuisines that enabled consumers either to celebrate or criticize a communist past. Most notably, Russia’s ongoing political feuds with other countries have played out in the stigmatization of (and embargo against) Georgian foods, American brands, and European Union food products, whereas aspirational desires have become evident in the spread and normalization of sushi and French fries on otherwise “authentically” Russian menus. Food makes the political personal and the personal political in ways that are tangible and visceral.

This intertwining of political and personal, past and present, has been part of the daily experience across the formerly Soviet world, and across the communist world more generally. This is the focus of this special issue of *Gastronomica*. Guest editors Mary Neuberger and Keith Livers have curated a collection of articles that represent the breadth and depth of the impact of the Russian Revolution across the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and the larger world of Soviet Bloc allies.

Neuberger and Livers begin the conversation with an overview of the impact of the Russian Revolution through a series of “revolutions,” both political and economic, culminating in globalization in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As they document, food practices across the Soviet bloc and its post-Soviet successors have been significant, not simply as manifestations of Soviet ideologies and bureaucratic practices, but also as precursors to the series of revolutionary events that led to the 1917 October Revolution and later to the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.



FIGURE 5: During the Soviet period, Ronald McDonald was forbidden because he symbolized the capitalist enemy. Now in the post-Soviet period, he is ubiquitous across the postsocialist world, including at the American Chamber of Commerce Fourth of July celebrations held in Moscow at an eighteenth-century tsarist estate.

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FIGURE 6: Food was such an important part of the state socialist project that it was frequently incorporated into political iconography. This statue of socialist workers holding up sheaves of wheat is placed at the top of a monument devoted to Soviet progress and advancement at the All-Union Exhibition Center in Moscow.

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FIGURE 7: *Despite Soviet promises of plenty, food shortages were a persistent reality that revealed much about the state socialist political economy. In the most extreme cases, mass famines killed millions across the Soviet Bloc, including during the push for collectivization in Ukraine in which millions were dispossessed from their land and murdered by state authorities and during World War II, known within the USSR as the Great Patriotic War. This statue in Moscow's Victory Park commemorates the victims of the Siege of Leningrad, when the city of Leningrad was blockaded against the German army for almost 900 days and millions of people, both civilians and soldiers, perished from starvation.*

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Each of the contributors to this collection foregrounds this historical dimension—this (century-plus) *longue durée*—in articles that range from explorations of the symbolism of food in literary works past and present, the changing nature of public and private dining experiences under state socialism, the local and global relationships and tastes that were cultivated through communist trade networks, and the sentimentalized responses—both affectionate and critical—by today's post-Soviet consumers and producers to foods that are deeply associated with the Soviet period. In so doing, each contributor sheds light on critical issues in food studies more generally, showing again that even though there were unique particularities to Soviet-style state socialism, these cultural experiences also belong to larger, global phenomena.

Ronald LeBlanc starts this inquiry with an analysis of ethical eating in Russian literature, with particular attention to the ways in which Russian writers like Lev Tolstoy and Boris Pilnyak approached issues such as the consumption of meat, slaughterhouses, and animal welfare. As LeBlanc documents, Tolstoy's and Pilnyak's perspectives informed the views of both Soviet producers and consumers, who were at times opposed in their views on the quality, healthfulness, and morality of meat-eating in the context of Soviet industrial food production. Keith Livers continues this conversation on the ethical themes contained in food by moving to the present, post-Soviet period through an examination of Russian postmodernist author Vladimir Sorokin's use of food imagery to comment on post-Soviet utopian and nationalist-leaning movements. In attending to the processes by which food moves through the body politic, most notably in the physical bodies of the individual members of this society, Sorokin uses gastronomic metaphors to present a compelling critique of Russian traditions of collectivist utopianism.

These ideals of a collective national body and collective national experiences formed through food are at the center of François-Xavier Nérard's article on collective dining in the USSR. Focusing on the early years of the Soviet experiment, Nérard documents how the creation of canteens and factory kitchens as specific instantiations of a collectivist ethos were in fact complicated and even undermined by the realities of daily life under state socialism. At the same time that canteens offered reliable access to food for Soviet citizens, especially during times of food shortages, they also emerged as settings where ordinary people and authorities interacted, for better or for worse. As a result, ordinary meals were highly politicized events performed not in private but in public. This theme of the politicization of dining continues in Mary Neuburger's article on dining and tourism along Bulgaria's Black Sea coast in the latter decades of the state socialist experiment. Through an analysis of travelogues and cookbooks from late socialist Bulgaria, Neuburger critically examines how socialist authorities promoted a socialist "good life" and a modern socialist citizenry through more refined restaurant and culinary experiences. In line with Nérard's findings with respect to earlier in the twentieth century, Neuburger shows that late socialist utopian dining experiences similarly reveal a utopian vision that was internally fraught with contradictions and crises that were also characteristic of the Soviet project.

Embedded within each of these projects were competing socialist values of responsibility, restraint, and pleasure, on the one hand, and local priorities versus global reach, on the other. These competing ideals are at the forefront of the articles by Andrew Kloiber and Abigail Weil. In a fascinating account of East German coffee cultures, Kloiber shifts scale from the taste preferences of ordinary consumers to the larger socialist networks that enabled the circulation of coffee between state socialist trade partners. In this case, East German coffee cultures were made possible by coffee producers in Laos, a trade partnership that not only repositioned global coffee trade ventures but also revealed the extent to which state socialist countries had created a parallel set of development-oriented relationships with the so-called developing Third World. Abigail Weil, by contrast, focuses more directly on the microlocal processes by which Czech food practices were shaped by global media trends. In the early postsocialist period of the 1990s, the global phenomena of foodie cultures and restaurant reviews mediated by public media also appeared in Czech food culture. Weil presents a fascinating study of Petr Král, a Czech poet and essayist who, after many years of exile in Paris during the socialist era, returned to Prague and began writing restaurant reviews for a local newspaper. By comparing Král's reviews with his literary work more generally, Weil explores how Král reinvested both poetics and politics in Prague's emerging food scene as part of the postsocialist transformation.

This turn to the postsocialist moment offered new opportunities for post-Soviet consumers to make sense of their food cultures, both past and future. The utopian visions from the Soviet period were replaced by new utopian promises of the postsocialist capitalist future. At the same time, the problems of the past were replaced by new problems, prompting postsocialist citizens to struggle to reconcile competing political and economic realities. Which was better: the past or the present? These are questions that permeate each of the articles in this collection but find special resonance in the pieces by Laura Goering and Katrina Kollegaeva. In her article on the resurgence of a Soviet-era soft drink, Buratino, Goering considers the ways in which nostalgia has been central to how post-Soviet citizens have made sense of the past, at times valorizing people and experiences from the past and at other times distancing



FIGURE 8: A socialist-era advertising poster from a chain of stores named “Source” in Czechoslovakia greets customers with the promise “Joyfully and happily from our grocery stores ‘Source.’”

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themselves from them. In so doing, nostalgia for particular foods and food experiences relies on both reincarnation of the past and reinvention of what a desirable past should be in the present. Nostalgic consumption, then, provides a unique lens for understanding larger stories about industrial production and reproduction after the collapse of the Soviet empire. Meanwhile, Kollegaeva hones in on the anxieties that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet world, with special attention to how post-Soviet citizens struggled to draw on culinary traditions to create new identities of Self that were unique and distinct from their closest Others. *Salo*, or cured pork fat, is a dish that appears across central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet

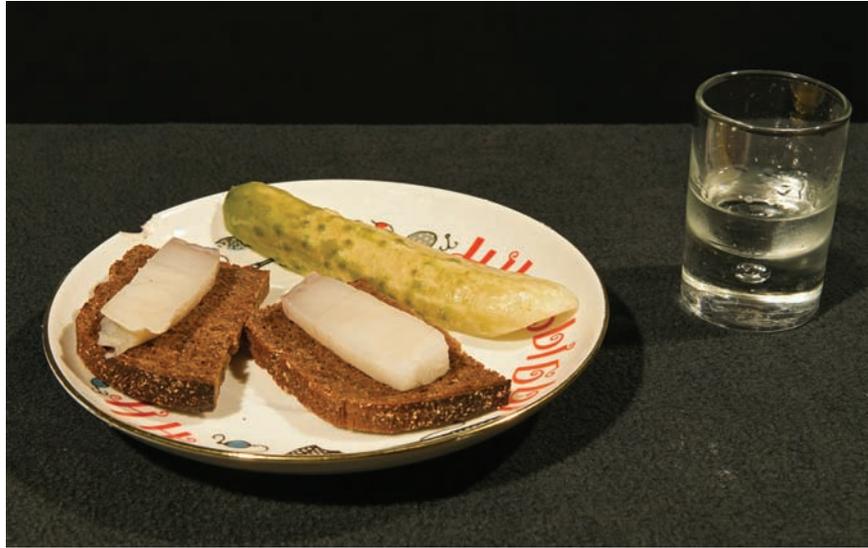


FIGURE 9: Salo with brown bread, fresh pickles, and vodka.

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Union. As such, consumption of cured pork fat is treasured as part of a shared insider-ness but also rendered an unflattering stereotype by outsiders. For the Ukrainians among whom Kollegaeva lived and studied, salo is such a quintessentially Ukrainian dish that it has inspired Russian jokes about Ukrainians as well as Ukrainian cultural experiences, including a museum devoted to salo. As Kollegaeva shows, salo articulates and mediates the ambiguity with which Ukrainians are navigating their new position as not-Russian and not-quite-European in the present world.

Navigations across borders, both geopolitical and cultural, characterize the final two articles. In her autoethnographic study of Soviet-era cookbooks from her own family, Anastasia Lakhtikova documents the ways in which manuscript cookbooks—that is, cookbooks created by individual women—reflect the intertwining of changing culinary preferences within historical and political events. By teasing out the family stories that exist beneath the recipes inscribed by three generations of women in her family, Lakhtikova narrates Soviet women's experiences with war, work, feminism, and, ultimately, migration from a Soviet to a post-Soviet time and place. Lastly, Daniel Monterescu extends the frame of reference for border navigation through an ethnographic study of wine production across border zones, such as those dividing Hungary and Slovakia, Bulgaria and Greece, and Israel and Palestine. As Monterescu's ethnographic materials suggest, tastes and taste preferences are embedded in a politics of edible authenticity, with the result that as communities compete to claim authority over particular forms, styles, and tastes, terroir turns into a terroir-ization of territory.

Collectively, these questions, approaches, and sites map out a broad perspective on the aftereffects of the Russian Revolution across time and space. Although the Russian Revolution happened a hundred years ago, many of the issues that were so important to that event continue to be significant today, even as they have necessarily changed over time to reflect new interests and needs. At the same time, this special issue represents both the importance of food studies as a lens through which to understand daily life at various scales as well as the potentialities for future research,

far beyond the immediate post-Soviet region. I invite you to delve deeply into these pieces and rethink what you know about the Russian Revolution, the Soviet experiment, and the particular moments that have shaped, and been shaped by, the last one hundred years in world history more generally.

*Melissa L. Caldwell*

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