

THE MANY FLAVORS OF SOCIALISM: MODERNITY AND TRADITION IN LATE  
SOVIET FOOD CULTURE, 1965-1985

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## ABSTRACT

Adrienne Kathleen Jacobs: *The Many Flavors of Socialism: Modernity and Tradition in Late Soviet Food Culture, 1965-1985*

(Under the direction of Donald J. Raleigh)

The first to provide an extensive exploration of late Soviet food culture, this dissertation focuses on the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (“Soviet Russia”) during and immediately after General Secretary L. I. Brezhnev’s tenure (1964-82). Here, the food sphere served as an important site for state-society interaction, ideological contestation, and building national and gender identities. Utilizing cooking advice literature, periodicals, memoirs, films, and the archival records of state trade and research organizations, this project addresses three central questions: How was authority structured in the late Soviet kitchen? How did changes in the culinary sphere reflect or influence larger transformations in late Soviet society, culture, and politics? What did late Soviet food culture share with larger global developments?

Soviet culinary discourse typically followed a modernizing approach to food that emphasized scientific nutrition and mass production. In the 1960s and after, such efforts encountered competition from an alternative approach to cooking, which relied on history and “tradition.” Home cooks and experts used food to explore the national past and build identities that did not depend upon official ideology for their legitimacy. This trend permeated food writing and other forms of popular culture, which celebrated ethnic cookery and championed a “traditional” gendered division of kitchen labor. While officials encouraged such seemingly harmless expressions of national distinctiveness, discussions of food, history, and nation often implicitly critiqued the Soviet system.

This suggests that neither “stagnation”—a label often applied to the Brezhnev years—nor “dynamism” alone captures the essence of this period. Rather, these decades saw a turn toward *normalization*: the appearance in Soviet Russia of cultural patterns similar to those found in the Western societies against which Soviet leaders judged their country’s successes. Common concerns permeated food cultures on both sides of the “Iron Curtain,” and Soviet social and cultural life came to more closely mirror, for instance, the riotous heterogeneity found in late twentieth-century America. Tracking the emergence of new gastronomic viewpoints and attendant contests for authority in the food sphere, this dissertation uses culinary discourse to provide a critical reexamination of ideology, culture, and social life in late Soviet Russia.

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## INTRODUCTION

### FOOD, IDENTITY, AND IDEOLOGY IN LATE SOVIET RUSSIA

This project began with a deceptively simple question, “What did people living in Soviet Russia eat and what did they think about it?” Although aware of the shortages and famines that plagued the USSR, in my time as a student of Russian history, I had not found much indication of what people actually *did eat*, let alone what they thought of it. By contrast, the classical Russian literature I read overflowed with descriptions of pies sweet and savory, homemade jams, and feasts of all sizes. Whither these traditions in the land of the Soviets? I had my own suspicions, based on my experiences in Russia and in Russian homes in the US, and the glimpses of food I caught in Soviet films, fiction, and memoirs. Yet I wanted to know more. Would chronic food shortages not demand surprising flights of ingenuity? Which foods gave comfort and which conferred status in this society? Was there such a thing as Soviet cuisine and, if so, how did it differ from what we might call Russian cuisine?

Intending initially to write a history of Soviet food from 1917 to 1991, I found that the literature essentially stopped at the end of the N. S. Khrushchev era (1953-64).<sup>1</sup> The narrative thread found in this scholarship began again in the soup kitchens and bread lines of perestroika and early post-Soviet Russia.<sup>2</sup> The L. I. Brezhnev years (1964-82) represented a yawning void.

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<sup>1</sup> There are now a few works that touch on Brezhnev-era food culture in limited ways: Ol’ga Siutkina and Pavel Siutkin, *Nepridumannaia istoriia sovetskoi kukhni* (Moscow: AST, 2013); Ol’ga Nazarova with Kirill Kobrin, *Puteshestviia na krai tarelki* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2009), 49-78; Erik Scott, “Edible Ethnicity: How Georgian Cuisine Conquered the Soviet Table,” *Kritika* 13, 4 (Fall 2012): 831-58. These works mainly address the national cuisines paradigm and therefore receive more attention in chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Ries and Svetlana Boym pioneered the study of perestroika-era Russian kitchen culture in the 1990s. Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

But was this not a period of relative prosperity? Did I not spot intriguing-looking salads in late Soviet movies? Had many of the excellent home cooks I knew personally not come of age in the Soviet 1970s? Using the existing literature on Soviet food culture as a jumping off point, I reoriented on a topic that would help us understand what Brezhnev-era food culture looked like and what it could tell us about the apogee (or, perhaps from an orthodox communist perspective, nadir) of Soviet socialism. In essence, my dissertation uses food discourse and practice to take readers on a tour of Soviet Russian society and culture in the Brezhnev years.

This dissertation is the first scholarly work to focus exclusively on Soviet food culture from 1965 to 1985. It centers on Soviet Russia, that is, the RSFSR, and the place of “Russian” customs in a broader Soviet context. This scope not only rendered the project more manageable, but also allowed me to address the policies of the central government in Moscow, which shaped culinary developments unionwide, and to understand the impact of crosscultural connections on Soviet Russia. Broadly speaking, I understand this food sphere as an important site for state-society interaction, ideological contestation, and building national and gender identities. The following chapters therefore concentrate on food discourse—writings about and representations of food and dining—as this approach grants me access to the meanings that surrounded food and eating in late Soviet culture. Accordingly, my project triangulates among the state’s goals for public dining and home cooking, the diverse perspectives on cuisine propagated by Soviet food writers, representations of alimentary joys and displeasures in popular culture, and memories of

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Anthropologist Melissa L. Caldwell now dominates the study of post-Soviet Russian food culture. See Caldwell, “Domesticating the French Fry: McDonald’s and Consumerism in Moscow,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4, 1 (2004): 5-26; Caldwell, “Feeding the Body and Nourishing the Soul: Natural Foods in Postsocialist Russia,” *Food, Culture, and Society* 10, 1 (2007): 43-71; Caldwell, “The Taste of Nationalism: Food Politics in Postsocialist Moscow,” *Ethnos* 67, 3 (2002): 295-319; Caldwell, *Not by Bread Alone: Social Support in the New Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Caldwell, *Dacha Idylls: Living Organically in Russia’s Countryside* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

Soviet cuisine. It thereby reveals the complex nature of late Soviet Russian food culture, which appeared at once traditional and modern, stagnant and vibrant, delicious and unappetizing.

### **Research Questions and Central Arguments**

This dissertation addresses three central questions. First, how was authority structured in the late Soviet kitchen? More specifically, did culinary ideas set forth by doctors carry more weight than the folk wisdom of home cooks, or vice versa? Did men and women occupy positions of equal or unequal culinary authority? Which other authorities competed for the allegiance of late Soviet eaters? Second, how did changes in the culinary sphere reflect or influence larger transformations in Soviet society, culture, and politics in this period? For instance, how did improved living standards and a deepening popular investment in the private sphere influence what Soviet citizens thought about food and their relationship to it? How did new state policies and ideological innovations impact late Soviet gastronomy? Third, what did Soviet food culture during this period have in common with larger global developments? In other words, what parallels existed between the food cultures of the USSR and other industrialized nations in the late twentieth century? Also, how influential were late Soviet recipes and approaches to food outside the socialist bloc?

In answering these questions, I argue that the Brezhnev years saw, at least in the sphere of food culture, a turn toward normalization. Even if deficits of desirable goods continued, the Soviet diet now came closer to meeting state-established nutritional norms than ever before. Food discourse also became more diverse, in many ways hewing close to trends found elsewhere in the world. Multiple authorities, from nutritional scientists to grandmothers, vied for authority in the kitchen, while officially approved ideas about food collided with popular assumptions and

practices that did not necessarily align with officialdom's goals. More generally, normalization played out as a contest between "modernity" and "tradition." As both state and society sought stability and cultural rootedness, tradition grew in prominence as a source of culinary authority in the Soviet Union. Yet this interest in tradition and historical custom had to compete with ongoing efforts to make both dining and diet more "modern," that is, to ensure that Soviet foodways were rooted in "rational" nutritional principles, fueled by advanced forms of industry and agriculture, and guided by principles of sanitation and efficiency.

### **Sources, Method, and Food History**

Cooking advice literature constitutes the heart of my source base. This genre provides a wealth of information about Soviet culinary ideals and fantasies, as well as the shifting cultural meanings of food and its various uses. Soviet cookbooks range from short pamphlets and collections of postcards, to authoritative 500-page tomes with glossy illustrations and sleek volumes describing the "cuisines of the Soviet peoples." I have examined more than 150 cookbooks published between 1960 and 1985, focusing in particular on their introductions and supplementary passages—that is, the portions of the cookbook *other than* the recipes, which give us access to official nutritional standards, and to shifting understandings of nationality and authority. The recipes themselves provide valuable information about the ideal forms of Soviet meals and the Soviet diet. They reveal which ingredients the food establishment sought to promote—from the USSR's abundant potatoes to the novel creations of food factories, such as Okean (Ocean), a paste made from krill that could add a "shrimpy flavor" and "coral color" to dips, spreads, salads, and sandwiches. Products of state-run publishing houses that underwent editorial censorship, Soviet cookbooks speak mainly of the state's priorities. Yet, as later



chapters reveal, Brezhnev era cooking texts also became a venue for ideological and culinary contestation; food writers could use these spaces to subtly reject elements of official ideology.

Periodicals also offered the Soviet public advice on cooking. The women's journals *Krest'ianka* (Peasant Woman) and *Rabotnitsa* (Working Woman) had since the 1920s regularly included recipe columns, articles about home preserving, and tips for entertaining guests.<sup>3</sup> The parenting journal *Sem'ia i shkola* (Family and School) also occasionally gave parents advice on how to best feed children and adolescents. Examining cooking advice in these magazines for the years 1965-85, I have identified favored ingredients, techniques, and dishes. These sources also reveal much about Soviet women's impending but never fully realized "liberation" from housework. Further, periodicals offer an opportunity for assessing popular sentiments and charting change over time. These publications spoke to the reader in the moment of their publication, instead of aiming for enduring usefulness. They thus tended to offer cooking advice oriented on the season, while relying on a more limited range of ingredients and more consistently placing emphasis on economy of food and time than cookbooks. The differences and similarities between magazines and cookbooks reveal the divergence between ideals and realities in the Soviet culinary sphere.

Soviet periodicals and other published sources—including memoirs, interviews, and films—provide additional useful information about late Soviet food culture. Along with cooking advice, magazines and journals included articles about public dining and other aspects of the food system, which grant insights into the development of restaurants, cafes, canteens, factories, and agriculture countrywide. Even at their most triumphal, these journals aired complaints about ongoing problems (e.g., supply shortages) and proposed solutions (e.g., garden plots),

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<sup>3</sup> Halina Rothstein and Robert A. Rothstein, "The Beginnings of Soviet Culinary Arts," in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Glants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 179-80.

communicating not only official priorities and criticisms, but also the challenges faced by food workers and consumers across Soviet Russia. For such articles, I turn not only to women's and parenting magazines, but also to major newspapers, including *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*. Further, letters to the editor included in *Krest'ianka* and *Rabotnitsa* provide information about popular practices. Editors almost certainly selected letters that suited topics they wanted to address. Yet recipes provided in these missives still tell us which dishes readers liked to prepare, while notes of complaint shed light on which food behaviors they found acceptable. Speaking to individual experience and popular belief, memoirs and published interviews reveal the status of Soviet cuisine in the Russian memory today. On the whole, these sources cast the Brezhnev years as a time when many experienced hardship, but still managed to find a great deal of joy in their daily lives, often through food.

Archival sources are also critical to this dissertation. Unfortunately, the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) did not retain the editorial records of publishing houses responsible for the major Soviet cookbooks of the Brezhnev years, deeming them not to be of "scholarly interest." Reader letters similarly were destroyed. Mir Publishing, which specialized in translating Soviet works for foreign readerships, represents a partial exception to this sad rule. GARF retained a partial collection of reader letters, which include comments on *Russian Cooking* (1974), an English-language edition of the Soviet cookbook *Kulinarnye retsepty iz Knigi o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (Culinary Recipes from *The Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*), which appears in chapter 4. Other archives, however, proved more useful. At the Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE), I utilized the records of the Ministry of Trade of the USSR, which document central state efforts to expand and provision the public dining system, to improve the food supply, and to contend with problems including food shortages and

public drunkenness. The Central Archive of the City of Moscow (TsAGM) offered the files of the Main Administration of Public Dining of the Moscow City Executive Committee (Glavnoe upravlenie Obshchestvennogo pitaniia Mosgorispolkoma) and the Moscow Restaurant Trust (Moskovskii trest restoranov), which detail the operations of cafes and restaurants throughout the Soviet capital. Many of these eateries functioned as “model establishments,” which pioneered methods of service later introduced in other Soviet towns and cities. They therefore offer especially critical information about the state’s goals for public dining and its success or failure in attempting to reach those goals. The records of the Institute of Nutrition of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR (Institut pitaniia Akademiia meditsinskikh nauk SSSR) also provide invaluable insights into how nutritionists perceived the state of the Soviet diet and the measures that would need to be taken to ensure that all Soviet citizens ate properly.

This diverse source base reflects my contention that human interactions with food are “always conditioned by meaning” and that the culinary sphere should therefore be construed broadly to encompass the system of values and signification attached to food and eating.<sup>4</sup> I draw on the methodologies of historians of food culture and consumption, as well as on the work of literary scholars concerned with the presentation of eating and behavioral ideals in fiction and advice texts. First, following the lead of historian Alison K. Smith, I explore the question of authority as it relates to food. Examining public discourses about diet and dining in nineteenth-century Russia, Smith has demonstrated that debates about food practices and policy functioned more generally as contests over authority. As she argues, the Imperial state competed with agronomists, gastronomes, medical professionals, and others to influence the structures of everyday life. These debates therefore reveal that Russians began in this period to look to a

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<sup>4</sup> Sydney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into Eating, Culture, and the Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 8.

variety of sources, including “national” custom and Western expertise, for culinary wisdom.<sup>5</sup> I contend that the tug-of-war between “tradition and the West”—involving “Slavophiles,” “Westernizers,” and actors occupying a range of moderate positions—was reincarnated in the late Soviet period as a competition between tradition and modernity. In the Brezhnev years, ongoing state efforts at culinary modernization competed with a growing interest in the “traditional” cuisines of the Soviet peoples. As in the late Imperial era, the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s also saw a “shattering” or crisis of authority, as trust in the central state declined and both experts and home cooks cast about for new means of legitimizing various culinary practices.

My method also derives from the works of literary scholars Darra Goldstein, Ronald LeBlanc, and Catriona Kelly. Through their explorations of cuisine in fiction, Goldstein and LeBlanc prove the value of looking to cultural artifacts for insights into food culture and food’s place in identity formation and the moral imagination. Goldstein has used representations of dining and housework in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian literature to convincingly argue that food production granted prosperous Russian women considerable social power. Through their larders, Goldstein demonstrates, women became “both regulators and manipulators of the household, with actual as opposed to titular authority,” rather than playing the role of “victim and martyr.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly examining the imagery of food and eating in nineteenth-century novels, LeBlanc has shown that the era of the Great Reforms precipitated a significant change in the Russian intelligentsia’s consciousness. Whereas the prereform writings of N. V. Gogol’, I. A. Goncharov, and others treated “eating as an act of communion” and

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<sup>5</sup> Alison K. Smith, *Recipes for Russia: Food and Nationhood under the Tsars* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> Darra Goldstein, “Domestic Porkbarreling, or Who Holds the Keys to the Larder?” in *Russia\*Women\*Culture*, ed. Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 131, 137.

embedded it in nostalgic representations of the past, F. M. Dostoevskii and other postreform writers proved more concerned with a critique of the status quo, in which eating became “an act of cannibalism,” of “power, domination, and control over the other.”<sup>7</sup> Following Goldstein and LeBlanc’s lead, I examine food imagery in late Soviet film in order to access gender identity, changing moral standards, and subtle criticisms of the state.

Though not concerned solely with food-related texts, Catriona Kelly has demonstrated the value of advice literature as a historical source. While we might observe many divergences between the ideals embodied in advice texts and the realities of daily life, Kelly argues that these should not be taken as an argument for the irrelevance of these books. According to Kelly, discrepancies between prescriptions and behavior have long helped shape Russians’ experiences and worldviews. Observing these contrasts, individuals do not necessarily blame “the exacting demands set out in advice literature,” but instead feel that they themselves are responsible in some way for failing (or refusing) to meet the stated standards. In this way, ideals—even those people did not adhere to—“became part of lived reality for historical subjects.” Even a public’s seeming resistance to advice can be understood as evidence of the importance of such writings. After all, popular understandings of ideals were not always perfect. Admonitions to demonstrate refinement through consumption (of food, goods, entertainment, etc.) could be “interpreted as a message that refinement was *only* about consumption.” In Kelly’s view, this contributed to the creation in Russia of “venal and self-serving social elites,” such as the spoiled Communist Party aristocracy that became a defining feature of late Soviet life. We can also read advice texts against the grain to better understand popular mores and conduct. We might take, for example,

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald D. LeBlanc, “Food, Orality, and Nostalgia for Childhood: Gastronomic Slavophilism in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Russian Fiction,” *Russian Review* 58, 2 (April 1999): 266. Also see LeBlanc, *Slavic Sins of the Flesh: Food, Sex, and Carnal Appetite in Nineteenth-Century Russian Fiction* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2009).

“the desperate insistence with which [Russian] advice writers repeated their strictures about punctuality and reliability” as evidence of the ineffectiveness of these very admonitions.<sup>8</sup> Kelly’s research thus suggests an important and generally underexplored relationship among advice literature, individual behavior, and popular conceptions of propriety.

Literature on the history of food outside the USSR also informs this work. As a relatively young subdiscipline, food history does not hinge on a particular methodology. It encompasses histories of commodity and trade, studies of food and labor, research on cooking and daily life, analyses (*à la* Goldstein and LeBlanc) of food in *belles lettres*, and much more.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, food touches so many aspects of the human experience, including domestic life, industry, economics, agriculture, and war, that it would be both unrealistic and wrongheaded to push food history toward a unifying method or debate. Any historian concerned with food must therefore make choices about which bodies of food research to draw upon and which scholars to speak to.

This dissertation absorbs the most influence from studies exploring the intersection of political power, cultural change, and ideas about food. I borrow from Sydney Mintz, a pioneer in the food history field, who provides a definition of “food culture” that includes beliefs about food and the meanings ascribed to different foods and food practices in a given society.<sup>10</sup> This approach treats food as a key for decoding a people’s assumptions, anxieties, and hopes, as well

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<sup>8</sup> Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 394-97. Emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> Historians have been studying food since ancient times, but food history did not gain legitimacy as a scholarly pursuit in its own right until the 1960s and 1970s, when social history drew attention to daily life and feminism in the academy rendered the domestic sphere a topic of greater interest. On the development and current state of the field, see Jeffrey M. Pilcher, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Food History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Kyri F. Claflin and Peter Scholliers, eds., *Writing Food History: A Global Perspective* (London: Berg, 2012); Ken Albala, “History on the Plate: The Current State of Food History,” *Historically Speaking* 10, 5 (November 2009): 6-8; Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, “Why Food? Why Culture? Why Now?” in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Counihan and Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1-18.

<sup>10</sup> Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*, 8. Pilcher has recently dubbed works of this type “cultural histories of food.” See Pilcher, “Cultural Histories of Food,” in *Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Pilcher, 42-56.

as the structures of their identity. Cookbooks and other cultural ephemera represent a tool for exploring connections between shifting culinary standards and changes in politics, identity, and culture. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's study of post-partition India offers one such model, as he uses cookbooks to analyze changing conceptions of Indianness. In his reading, these texts act as a tool for creating national identity in an ethnically and religiously diverse state.<sup>11</sup> Historian Amy Bentley's work on American culture during the Second World War has also been instructive, as she highlights the importance of food to state political goals during times of economic and social upheaval. In wartime, the US government fostered unity by propagating the "icon of the ordered meal": a peaceful family dinner, presided over by loving, white, middle-class parents.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, historian Mark Swislocki's research on urban food culture in Shanghai, China, reveals the role that food can play in a community's efforts to craft an identity by using food to both understand its past and also shape its present and future.<sup>13</sup> Taking my cues from these and other scholars, I explore connections between state priorities, social conditions, and food culture. I also use cookbooks and other popular texts to access Soviet identities and to understand how people living in late Soviet Russia used food to make sense of their world.

In sum, rather than focusing, like much previous scholarship on food in the USSR, on rationing, deficits and famine, or industry, I take a more comprehensive approach, which focuses on culture and ideas.<sup>14</sup> By bringing together published cooking advice literature, artifacts of

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<sup>11</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, 1 (January 1988): 3-24.

<sup>12</sup> Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Mark Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Urban Experience in Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example: Lars T. Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914-1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Mauricio Borrero, *Hungry Moscow: Scarcity and Urban Society in the Russian Civil War* (New York:

popular culture, and materials held in Russian state archives, my work considers the myriad forces driving the evolution of Soviet cuisine. It also illuminates connections among state ideology, entertainment, scholarship, and advice literature. I trace the development in Soviet Russian society of new approaches to cooking and eating, as well as the numerous ways in which representations of food reflected elements of Soviet identities and worldviews. I simultaneously investigate interactions among standards of living and understandings of nutrition, national identity, and the good life in late Soviet Russia. Moreover, interpreting cookbooks and other artifacts of popular culture as sites of cultural critique, I shed light on heretofore-unseen tensions within late Soviet society.

### **Stagnation, Dynamism, or Something Else?**

While building on existing literature on food culture and consumption, this dissertation engages most enthusiastically with the growing historiography on Soviet society and culture in the Brezhnev era. Beginning in the late 1980s, it became popular among scholars and other observers of Russia and the Soviet Union to refer to the Brezhnev years as a time of “stagnation.” This followed Mikhail Gorbachev’s pronouncements, which used stagnation as a foil for Gorbachev’s own (perhaps *too* dynamic) reforms. The stagnation label stuck most tenaciously to the latter portion of Brezhnev’s tenure, specifically the period stretching from the

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Peter Lang, 2003); Nicholas Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946-47 in Global and Historical Perspective* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Anna Kushkova, “Surviving in the Time of Deficit,” in *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, ed. Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 278-95; Nikolai M. Dronin and Edward G. Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia, 1900-1990: The Interaction of Climate and Agricultural Policy and Their Effect on Food Problems* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005). Sociologist Jukka Gronow pays more attention to culture and ideas, but his narrative still centers on various food industries, such as confectionary. Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 2003). My approach most closely mirrors that of Natalia B. Lebina, who brings together the methods of cultural history and semiotics. See, for example, Natalia Lebina, “‘Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy...’ (Vkusovye priorityety epokhi khrushchevskikh reform: Opyt istoriko-antropologicheskogo analiza),” *Teoriia mody* 21 (Fall 2011): 213-42.



mid-1970s to Brezhnev's death in 1982, during which the General Secretary's health went into serious decline, superpower relations grew chillier, the Soviet economy appeared sluggish, and the Red Army became embroiled in a deadly war in Afghanistan. Yet observers have sometimes tarred the entire Brezhnev period with this brush, pointing (however unfairly) to the entrenchment of an aging political elite, expanding corruption, unwise economic and military planning, and widespread cynicism.<sup>15</sup> There is no need to recapitulate the whole of the stagnation paradigm here, as several excellent overviews of this historiographical trend already exist.<sup>16</sup> It suffices to say that, for many scholars, "stagnation" helped describe gerontocracy, economic decline, agricultural woes, and even the eclipse of auteur filmmakers by their more commercial colleagues.<sup>17</sup> One might be forgiven for taking this body of literature to mean that the Soviet 1970s had been suffused with state-mandated conformity and dreary social ossification.

Yet the stagnation paradigm neither represented the only means of interpreting the Brezhnev era, nor did it remain in ascendance for terribly long. As political scientist Philip

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<sup>15</sup> On "stagnation" and attempts to divide the Brezhnev years into distinct periods, see Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, "Brezhnev Reconsidered," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, ed. Bacon and Mark Sandle (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 208-11. Over the years, many scholars have questioned, eschewed, or otherwise complicated the idea of "stagnation," often by asserting that the label applied only to a portion of the Brezhnev period. Regardless, "stagnation" has remained a convenient byword for the whole of the Brezhnev era, particularly in survey texts. See, for example, Abraham Ascher, *Russia: A Short History*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 213-19; Gregory L. Freeze, "From Stalinism to Stagnation, 1953-1985," in *Russia: A History*, ed. Freeze, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford, 2009), 438-40; Richard Sakwa, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Union, 1917-1991* (London: Routledge, 1999), 351.

<sup>16</sup> Each of these surveys of the stagnation paradigm also includes a critique of this school of thought: Edwin Bacon, "Reconsidering Brezhnev," in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, ed. Bacon and Sandle, 1-21; Stephen E. Hanson, "The Brezhnev Era," in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 3, *The Twentieth Century*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 292-96; Marc Elie and Isabelle Ohayon, Foreword in "L'expérience soviétique à son apogée: Culture et société des années Brežnev," vol. 1, "Le socialisme réel en trois dimensions: Passé, futur, ailleurs," special issue, *Cahiers du monde Russe* 54, 1-2 (January-June 2013): 27-45; Neringa Klumbytė and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, Introduction to *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964-1985* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield, 2013), 1-14.

<sup>17</sup> Iu. V. Aksiutin, ed., *L. I. Brezhnev: Materialy k biografii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1991); Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy: An Economic History of the USSR from 1945* (New York: Longman, 2003); Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia*, 267-330; Birgit Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema* (New York: Berg, 2009).

Hanson rightly points out, pre-Gorbachev assessments of the Brezhnev years tended to characterize this period as one marking “the triumph of rationality and development over the ‘Utopian’ impulses of Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev.”<sup>18</sup> Favorable views of the Brezhnev era also emerged among Russians in the late 1990s. Many saw these decades as a “golden age” when people enjoyed relative comfort, warm sociality, and something approaching true equality.<sup>19</sup> Even scholars who used the stagnation label sometimes pointed to change bubbling just under the surface, in the social and cultural spheres.<sup>20</sup> More recently, some historians have begun to identify elements of change and dynamism that, they suggest, fatally undermine the stagnation thesis. For example, Christine Evans, in her article on *Song of the Year* television specials, argues that “the state-controlled mass media could become a site of crucial cultural innovation and experimentation aimed at finding new ways of engaging and unifying the Soviet populace during the Cold War.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Natalya Chernyshova holds that the years between 1965 and 1985 saw a true “consumer revolution,” led by the state, which transformed popular expectations and daily life.<sup>22</sup> Such works suggest that the stagnation school grew overly trusting of the Gorbachevian view and yearned too much to locate the roots of systemic failure in the 1970s.

My dissertation aligns with a new perspective on the Brezhnev years, just now emerging in the scholarship, which considers it as a time of stabilization, predictability, and maturity for the Soviet system. Scholars have articulated this in different terms. Historians Marc Elie and

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<sup>18</sup> Hanson, “Brezhnev Era,” 293.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 294; Bacon, “Reconsidering Brezhnev,” 4-6.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, John Bushnell, *Moscow Graffiti: Language and Subculture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Josephine Woll, “The Politics of Culture, 1945-2000,” in *Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 3, ed. Suny, 617-29.

<sup>21</sup> Christine Evans, “Song of the Year and Soviet Mass Culture in the 1970s,” *Kritika* 12, 3 (Summer 2011): 619.

<sup>22</sup> Natalya Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (London: Routledge, 2013).

Isabelle Ohayon describe the Brezhnev years as the USSR's "heyday" or "apogee," while scholar Vladimir Kusin offers the more tepid assessment, "bearable socialism."<sup>23</sup> Although it builds on the work of those who emphasize dynamism, enjoyment, and the blossoming of social diversity, this approach also takes seriously the very real economic and political problems that first inspired the stagnation thesis. I maintain that neither "stagnation" nor "dynamism" provides a satisfactory interpretation of late Soviet society and culture. As my work suggests, some of the most notable "dynamic" elements of Soviet food culture existed as both *reactions against* and *manifestations of* stagnation. For instance, cookbooks and restaurants that embraced a growing passion for ethnic cuisine and the emergence of a historical perspective on cooking (discussed in chapters 2 and 5) betrayed widespread dissatisfaction with the standardized Soviet diet, while also representing a yearning for stability and cultural roots—a kind of embrace of "stagnation." Similarly, the era's increased promotion and consumption of ocean fish (treated in chapter 1) points to innovation in the Soviet diet, yet it also reminds us that the state never managed to produce and distribute sufficient quantities of meat, a classic symptom of the USSR's alleged economic and agricultural stasis.

How shall we, then, characterize the Brezhnev years? I submit that we might best describe this as a period of normalization.<sup>24</sup> Here, "normalization" means Soviet Russia's near-convergence with other industrialized societies, particularly those Western states against which the Soviet leadership judged their country's successes. True, the USSR and, for instance, the United States never looked exactly alike. Yet common concerns permeated the food cultures of

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<sup>23</sup> Elie and Ohayon, Foreword, 44; Kusin as quoted in Ibid., 34.

<sup>24</sup> The writings of Juliane Fürst and Paulina Bren helped inspire this idea and emboldened me to articulate it here. Fürst, "Where Did All the Normal People Go?: Another Look at the Soviet 1970s," *Kritika* 14, 3 (Summer 2013): 621-40; Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010). Also see Klumbyte and Sharafutdinova, Introduction.

both nations, and the diversification of social and cultural life came to more closely mirror the riotous heterogeneity we find in late twentieth-century America than ever before. This is not a comparative study, but it does tell a story of the multiplication of acceptable culinary viewpoints and the manifestation of familiar anxieties about modern life. It sits comfortably alongside the work of scholars including Alexei Yurchak, Sergei Zhuk, Donald J. Raleigh, and Juliane Fürst, who have revealed the extraordinary ordinariness of the late Soviet years.<sup>25</sup> Even in focusing on sellers of illicit goods, hippies, and the residents of closed cities, these works reveal the “normality” of the age; a normality, as Fürst points out, composed of countless different “normalities,” some of which engaged with officialdom and some of which did not.<sup>26</sup>

During the Brezhnev years, people lived, dreamed, held varying perspectives on the world, and often favored personal priorities over any so-called “Soviet project.” The state tried, though it sometimes failed, to create the conditions for “normal” modern life. In the food sphere, this meant providing a wide array of cooking advice literature, diversifying and democratizing public dining, and seeking to satisfy the population’s diverse tastes. This also sometimes meant allowing partial departures from official ideology. So, rather than viewing Brezhnev’s USSR as a revolutionary project in decline, we might see it as a polity moving beyond its status as a “project.” Ultimately, I suggest that the Soviet Union in its Brezhnev-era guise represented just one of several versions of modernity that coexisted in the late twentieth century.

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<sup>25</sup> Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever Until It was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010); Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers: An Oral History of Russia’s Cold War Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Fürst, “Where Did All the Normal People Go?”

<sup>26</sup> Fürst, “Where Did All the Normal People Go?,” 639.

## Tradition and Modernity

“Tradition” and “modernity” are two key themes that dominate this work and that also demand some critical reflection. I treat tradition as something “invented” and constantly in a state of “reinvention.” This idea first appeared in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s volume, *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), comprising essays that focus on the years between 1840 and 1914, a time when colonialism, capitalism, and romantic nationalism created a dramatic upsurge in the “invention” of tradition, as opposed to the “evolution” of customs.<sup>27</sup> Hobsbawm’s formulation identified “traditions” as symbolic practices aiming “to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” Imperial rulers often imposed these upon non-European subjects in order to project power, establish legitimacy, and differentiate between the “civilized” and the “uncivilized.” By contrast, “customs” include the practices and behaviors that constitute daily life and give “any desired change (or resistance to innovation) the sanction of precedent, social continuity, and natural law as expressed in history.”<sup>28</sup> Since the original publication of *The Invention of Tradition*, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists have generated important correctives to this framework.<sup>29</sup> They have demonstrated, for instance, that the invention of traditions involved not only those in power, but also the masses of people on whom these traditions were meant to have an effect. More importantly for the present work, scholars have highlighted the ongoing processes of reinvention that follow any initial invention. Finally, the invention of tradition has

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<sup>27</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>28</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> Terence Ranger himself provided a roundup of these critiques of and additions to the “invention of tradition” in Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa,” in *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A. H. M. Kirk-Greene*, ed. Ranger and Olufemi Vaughn, (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1993), 62-111.

also been demonstrated to be an integral part of late twentieth-century societies—including those one might dub “postnational”—which have their own needs with regard to identity construction and legitimation.<sup>30</sup>

I maintain that the rituals of the state—Hobsbawm’s primary concern—are not the only “traditions” that carry ideological meaning and that the rituals of daily life also represent “traditions” in that they similarly embody rules, values, and meanings. Moreover, “traditional” activities and ideas remain constantly in flux, even if they pretend at “invariance.” Defining or “inventing” tradition means constructing the past and connecting it to present-day practices. Tradition functions as a “resource” for fashioning legitimacy, identity, accepted forms of sociality, and so forth.<sup>31</sup> In the context of Soviet food discourse, such simple acts as making soup or hosting a holiday party could serve as markers of political allegiance, social distinction, ethnic identity, and gender identity. Daily life in the Soviet Union was heavily politicized, the personal inseparable in many ways from the ideological. It thus proves impossible to make any meaningful distinction between “tradition” and “custom” along Hobsbawm’s lines. In this work, then, the concept of invented tradition serves as a reminder that all “traditions” have a starting point, that they change over time, and that they are not necessarily as old as members of a given society believe them to be. For these reasons, I often refer to traditions or customs as “so-called” or “perceived” traditions. This reflects my understanding that their histories may be shorter and more complex than we might at first be led to think.

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, a special edition of *History and Anthropology* featured several articles examining processes of invention and reinvention in twentieth century societies, including Sri Lanka, China, Peru, and England. See articles in *History and Anthropology* 15, 3 (September 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Robert Tonkinson, “Tradition,” in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), online.

This approach extends also to the concept of “authenticity.” Some scholars and food writers concern themselves with whether a particular dish, vessel, or method of preparation “truly” belongs to a given people. Is *borshch* “really” Russian?<sup>32</sup> Is a particular meat-and-potato casserole “really” Ukrainian?<sup>33</sup> Such questions, in my view, overlook the fluid nature of food customs and their relationship to national identity. In the case of *borshch*, for instance, we have a dish that, as far as scholars can tell, first came into existence and took on its familiar name sometime before the tenth century among the peoples living in the region now occupied by Poland, Ukraine, and western Russia.<sup>34</sup> Today, *borshch* can now mean a hearty stew boasting several kinds of meat and countless vegetables, a thin, lurid-looking brew made mainly of beets, or just about anything in between. Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, American Jews, and likely other groups as well now consider *borshch* (*borsch*, *borsht*, etc.) their own. It would be not only wrong-headed, but also impossible to seek to determine whose *borshch* is truly “authentic.” A dish’s perceived authenticity thus hinges not on its point of origin or ingredients, but on the belief in ownership, the imagined connection between a given dish and a national identity. Much like tradition or the nation, authenticity is “invented” or “imagined.” It serves to define the boundaries of national culture and to differentiate between those foods and behaviors that belong to the nation and those that remain alien.

Moreover, both “tradition” and “authenticity” often signify value judgments. Speaking of American food culture, folklorist Lin T. Humphrey writes, “where we find traditional recipes and

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<sup>32</sup> Julia Ioffe, “The Borscht Belt,” *The New Yorker*, 16 April 2012, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/04/16/120416fa\\_fact\\_ioffe](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/04/16/120416fa_fact_ioffe).

<sup>33</sup> Edward Geist, “From Kulesh to Chicken Kiev: How Soviet Power Redefined Ukrainian Cuisine,” in *Table Matters: Cuisine and Culture in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mary Neuburger, Keith Livers, and Ana Tominc (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> Nikolai Burlakoff, *The World of Russian Borshch: Explorations of Memory, People, History, Cookbooks, and Recipes* (Ossining, NY: Aelita Press, 2013).

food stories, ‘traditional foods’ may refer to either the kind of heritage or history that we actually had or the one we wish we had. When we label food traditional it is usually a mark of approval.”<sup>35</sup> More generally, as folklorist Burt Feintuch argues, identifying a tradition might imbue a given act or item with “meaning and historicity,” but it does not demand the “continuity of old practices.” Rather, “to call something traditional is to institutionalize it by setting it off from less authentic practices, to reduce it to a pared-down essence, to encourage its social performance, and to imply the need for stewardship into the future.”<sup>36</sup> This held true in late Soviet society, where dishes could earn praise for their authentic nature and their ability to represent the “traditional” cultures of the Soviet peoples.

Such valuations do not tell us anything concrete about the dish’s nature or history. Instead, they disclose a great deal about how the speaker in question relates to the contemporary world, imagines the past, and perceives the proper boundaries of his or her society’s culture. So, rather than seeking to determine which foods or food-related activities represent something “traditional,” in the sense of a meaningful and historically-rooted pattern of behavior or belief, I interrogate the assumptions about and representations of so-called “tradition” found in late Soviet food discourse. While avoiding deeming foods or food behaviors “traditions,” I use “custom” as a more neutral term, simply meaning practices recognized as common within a given society. These may adhere to certain unwritten rules, but they do not necessarily possess the historical roots that the word “tradition” often implies.

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<sup>35</sup> Lin T. Humphrey, “Traditional Foods? Traditional Values?” *Western Folklore* 48, 2 (April 1989): 162-69.

<sup>36</sup> Burt Feintuch, “Tradition,” in *The Dictionary of Anthropology*, ed. Thomas Barfield (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 470-71. Here we might also note that “authenticity” can also generate social censure when a diner or cook behaves in a way that others deem “inauthentic.” One such example can be seen in Masha Gessen’s recent criticism of her fellow Russians for adding mayonnaise to sushi, a symptom, in her view, of cultural dislocation and poor taste. Masha Gessen, “Russia: You Are What You Eat,” *New York Review of Books*, 21 November 2013, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/nov/21/russia-you-are-what-you-eat/>.



While it may be the case that in many cultural contexts to call something “traditional” is to make it seem more meaningful, to assess its value positively, this does not hold true universally. In the Soviet Union, tradition often represented something to be overcome, outgrown, or left behind. In the 1920s and 1930s, ideologists dubbed many common ideas and practices *perezhitki proshlogo* (relics of the past), which held back social and cultural progress. *Perezhitki* included everything from church weddings to drunkenness, that is, anything that officialdom saw as antithetical to or incompatible with the construction of a communist future.<sup>37</sup> Concerns about tradition-as-backwardness came to the fore especially at times when the party-state enthusiastically sought to remake daily life, or *byt*, as during the NEP period (1921-28), the First Five-Year Plan (1928-32), and the Khrushchev years.<sup>38</sup> Anything could potentially be a target for eradication, and foodways proved no exception. The Soviet way of eating would be modernized, along with all other aspects of life. In the 1920s, some food officials struck out explicitly against “traditional” modes of eating, regarding them as inefficient and decadent, holdovers from a way of life marked by inequality and suffering.<sup>39</sup> Even as the Stalin regime

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<sup>37</sup> Ilya Zemtsov offers a compact and useful discussion of *perezhitki proshlogo* in his *Encyclopedia of Soviet Life* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1991), 272-73. Also see, N. B. Leбина and A. N. Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy: Kartiny povsednevnoi zhizni gorozhan v gody nepa i khrushchevskogo desiatiletiia* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003), 252-60; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 190; Irina Glushchenko, “Rol' gosudarstvennoi vlasti v formirovanii kul'tury pitaniia v SSSR 1920-1930-x gg.” (Candidate's diss., Russian State University for the Humanities, 2014), 29-36.

<sup>38</sup> On the transformation of daily life during NEP and under Khrushchev, see Leбина and Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy*. Stephen Kotkin has famously argued that the Stalin-era drive to transform the country amounted to the creation of a new “civilization.” Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). On daily life in the Stalin years, also see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). On efforts to remake daily life in the Khrushchev era, also see Polly Jones, “Introduction: The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1-18; Susan E. Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (Summer 2002): 211-52; Miriam Dobson, “The Post-Stalin Era: De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent,” *Kritika* 12, 4 (Fall 2011): 905-24.

<sup>39</sup> Rothstein and Rothstein, “Beginnings of Soviet Culinary Arts,” 186.

shifted toward a more opulent culinary aesthetic in its efforts to convince the public that a bright future was on the horizon, Soviet cuisine remained very much under the sway of modernization.<sup>40</sup> It was not to look like any older, so-called “traditional” cuisine. Rather, it was a new way of eating for a new kind of person. Reflecting—at least in theory—the needs and capabilities of Soviet society, Soviet culinary modernity demanded mechanization, industrialization, mass production, centralized planning, and scientific nutrition.

In this and many other ways, the Soviet Union functioned as a “modernizing project.” But what exactly does this mean? It certainly should not suggest that the USSR pursued a process of Westernizing modernity that would result in liberal democracy, genuine mass politics, and a robust civil society. Yet even if Soviet modernization did not signify “progress” in a liberal understanding, it did entail urbanization, industrialization, the spread of literacy and the media, and the quintessentially modern “rebellion against tradition.”<sup>41</sup> Seen from this angle, Soviet modernity hinged on the actions and priorities of the Communist Party, which sought to revolutionize everything from high politics to daily life, and also reached (in part through the mechanisms of the state) into the realm of lived experience. Some features of Soviet politics, culture, and society—state paternalism, for example—might rightly be dubbed “neotraditional.”<sup>42</sup> Yet the *drive for modernization*, embodied in a striving for efficiency, mechanization, refinement, novelty, and innovation, remained palpable in both policy and

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<sup>40</sup> On the “bourgeois” aspect of Stalinist cuisine, see Edward Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik: Anastas Mikoian and the Making of the *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*,” *Russian Review* 71, 2 (April 2012): 295-313.

<sup>41</sup> Michael David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54, 4 (2006): 537.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 544-49. For major works in the “neotraditionalist” vein, see Matthew E. Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

discourse; it never ceased to shape the daily lives of Soviet citizens, even if the outcomes of the Soviet modernizing impulse did not always look the way the regime intended. As I demonstrate, this extended into the realm of food, where new products, processing techniques, nutritional advice, and kitchen appliances gave Soviet citizens a taste of socialist modernity.

## History and Nostalgia

“Tradition” held especial appeal in the late Soviet period in part because this concept fit neatly with a larger fascination with the past that swept this society in the decades after Stalin’s death. During the late Soviet period, groups throughout the Soviet Russian sociopolitical hierarchy engaged in a collective search for meaning, bowing—or at least paying lip service—to the authority of history and national “traditions,” as they sought better means of approaching the present and the future. This “historical turn,” as historian Denis Kozlov has dubbed it, encompassed such diverse activities as private efforts to amass antiques, critical literary forays into the Stalin era, poetic reminiscences about an idealized prerevolutionary past, and grassroots activism for the preservation of architectural monuments.<sup>43</sup> Driven largely by the intelligentsia, the historical turn grew from the work of individuals with diverse ideological commitments, including liberal reformers, Stalinists, and conservative nationalists, many of whom had initially been spurred to creative and social action during the Khrushchev-era Thaw.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kozlov provides a wide-ranging overview of such activities in “The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture: Retrospectivism, Factography, Doubt, 1953-91,” *Kritika* 2, 3 (Summer 2001): 577-600.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Also, Kozlov’s recent work on the influential thick-journal *Novyi mir* and its readers makes clear the importance of the Thaw—and the critical retrospection it permitted—to the development of the historical turn. Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013). The Russian nationalist movement came into being at roughly the same time that the historical turn took place. Both Yitzhak Brudny and Nikolai Mitrokhin demonstrate the diversity of nationalist thinkers involved in Soviet public life during these years. Yitzhak Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: Dvizhenie russkikh natsional’istov v SSSR: 1953-1985* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003). Finally, literary scholar

In the Thaw years, the “official reassessment of Stalin’s legacy”—embodied most famously in Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s “cult of personality” and “excesses” of violence and repression—sparked “a broader, widespread reevaluation of the country’s recent past.”<sup>45</sup> This uprooting of official historical narratives and a more general sense of cultural loss sent many Soviet citizens looking for truth and meaning, for material from which to build historically-based, stable identities. By the 1970s, the historical turn had saturated public culture, even though opportunities to put forth critiques of Soviet history (and historically-based critiques of the present) had become far more circumscribed. In the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, Soviet citizens took in countless literary and filmic representations of the past, participated in historical preservation efforts, patronized a growing number of historical museums, and purchased consumer goods that bore folkloric and other “traditional” motifs.<sup>46</sup> During the Brezhnev years, as historian Andrew Jenks puts it, “continuity with the past, rather than a radical break, became a central theme of cultural construction.”<sup>47</sup>

As part of this “search for origins,” primordial understandings of ethnicity grew more prevalent in Soviet intellectual and cultural life. Long part of Soviet nationalities discourse, such conceptions of identity hold that “group ties based on blood, race, language, residence, religion, and custom are stronger than other ties—including those based on ideology, class, or

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Catriona Kelly has specifically identified a desire among politically disaffected segments of the late Soviet intelligentsia to create continuity between their own ideas, experiences, and lifestyles, and those of their prerevolutionary intellectual and cultural predecessors. Kelly, *Refining Russia*, 337-45.

<sup>45</sup> Kozlov, *Readers of Novyi Mir*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Kozlov, “Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture”; Andrew Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation in the Brezhnev Era,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 44, 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2003): 629-55; Virginia Olmsted, “Nationalizing Fashion: Soviet Women’s Fashion and the West, 1959-1967” (MA thesis, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2015), 32-37.

<sup>47</sup> Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation,” 642.

professional affiliation.”<sup>48</sup> As political scientist Yitzhak Brudny and historians Alexander Yanov and Nikolai Mitrokhin have demonstrated, the popularity of and tacit official approval for this understanding of national identity helped fuel the development of a Russian nationalist movement in the years between 1953 and 1991.<sup>49</sup> Nationalists interested in renewing the nation by resurrecting its past could be found in artistic and intellectual circles, most notably in the village prose movement, among political dissidents, and in the highest levels of the government.

Indeed, the post-Stalin leadership allowed the Russian nationalist movement to grow and flourish. According to Brudny, Brezhnev in particular believed that nationalist sentiment could provide a tool for mobilizing a populace that no longer responded with enthusiasm to Marxism-Leninism. Russian nationalism also offered an anti-Western alternative to the ideology of the liberal reformers who challenged the Soviet political system in this period. With its yearning for stability and its celebration of patriotism, nationalism aligned with the Brezhnev leadership’s desire to find alternatives to radical reform. Yet tensions still arose between the leadership and nationalists. For instance, as Mitrokhin discusses, members of the Russian nationalist movement found allies among the Stalinist faction in the government. More publicly, village prose writers continued to criticize the Soviet status quo by launching critiques of urbanization, industrialization, and environmental degradation, looking for truth and regeneration in national tradition and rurality.<sup>50</sup> This attitude appealed to many urbanites—and not nationalists alone—

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<sup>48</sup> Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.; Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*; Alexander Yanov, *The Russian New Right: Right-Wing Ideologies in the Contemporary USSR*, trans. Stephen P. Dunn (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1978).

<sup>50</sup> Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 150-91; Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 395-404. On village prose, also see Kathleen F. Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Marina Balina, “Prose After Stalin,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-century Russian Literature*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 161-66. Musya Glants argues that representations of food in late Soviet visual art speak to a desire for a return to national traditions, such as that

who felt alienated from the mainstream of Soviet life and sought a connection to the values of their “little motherland,” the Russian village.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, faced with waning enthusiasm for official ideology and an onslaught of Western cultural influences, nationalism, especially if it could be harnessed at least in part for the purposes of the government, appeared as a useful tool for identity-building and popular mobilization.

Nationalism suited the moment of the late Soviet “historical turn,” as it embraced and encouraged popular nostalgia. First, late Soviet Russian nationalism embodied what literary scholar Svetlana Boym calls “restorative nostalgia,” that is, a form of nostalgia that “evokes national past and future” and attempts to recreate a longed-for, imaginary historical-national home. Second, the prominence of nationalist sentiment in public discourse in this period also legitimized “reflective nostalgia.” Unlike restorative nostalgia, reflective nostalgia is concerned with “individual and cultural memory” and fosters constructive introspection and creativity.<sup>52</sup> Late Soviet food culture contained expressions of both forms of nostalgia. Here we find projects aiming to resurrect and purify (i.e., restore) historical culinary custom. We also find creative (i.e., reflective) attempts to take apart and reassemble various cultural patrimonies in order to invent something of use to the present, or to understand contemporary foodways in terms of continuity and discontinuity, growth and decay. More generally, in the culinary sphere, this embrace of primordial ethnicity and national nostalgia drove dining officials, food writers, and

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expressed in the village prose movement. Musya Glants, “Food as Art: Painting in Late Soviet Russia,” in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Glants and Toomre, 215-37.

<sup>51</sup> Mitrokhin suggests that the popularity of village prose had roots in such feelings of disconnection, though he is careful to specify that not all writers attached to this trend were part of the Russian nationalist movement (contra Brudny’s interpretation). Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 403.

<sup>52</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41-55.

home cooks to consider what they could gain—materially and emotionally, individually and collectively—by seeking sustenance in national cultural “tradition.”

### **Soviet Food Experts**

Throughout this work, I refer to “Soviet food experts,” yet few of these individuals appear as central characters in my narrative. This group included nutritionists, doctors, and other scientists, officials in the USSR’s various food industries, trade and public dining bureaucrats, professional cooks, and food writers. Many of these experts trained at professional and technical schools, such as the Plekhanov Institute of the Economy in Moscow, which offered education for future trade workers and administrators, or the Institute of Nutrition of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR, which taught and employed nutritional science researchers. The term “food expert” also encompasses home cooks and even historians who brought their experience and perspective to bear in offering cooking advice. Although not “experts” in terms of their training, their participation in the creation and dissemination of cooking advice literature via official channels (state-sponsored publications) positioned them as experts in Soviet society. In short, this was a diverse population, including men and women, Russians and non-Russians, professionals of various stripes, and amateurs-cum-experts. All of these actors became “food experts” in the process of articulating ideas about food, not by virtue of belonging to a clearly defined or necessarily interconnected community of credentialed professionals.

My sources provided only scant information about the experts who I encountered in the course of my research via their food-related writings. Typically, Soviet cookbooks list only the author’s initials and surname, and perhaps a professional title. Unlike their American and post-Soviet Russian counterparts, Soviet cookbooks did not represent an autobiographical enterprise

or seek to offer a glimpse of a certain individual's desirable lifestyle. Rather, they served mainly as guides to good taste, good nutrition, and wholesome sociality, standards that would ideally apply to all Soviet citizens. The author's preferences and social distinction had no place in these manuals of (allegedly) practical advice.

This is not to say that we know nothing of these authors. In a few cases, I identified individual authors thanks to their post-Soviet publications. For instance, in the 1990s, A. S. Piruzian, lead editor of the 1960 cookbook *Armenian Cuisine* (*Armianskaia kulinariia*), penned two works that combined autobiographical reminiscences with an insider's history of the Soviet food industry.<sup>53</sup> I became acquainted with Anna Glauberman-Izarova, a Soviet food columnist, because I unwittingly contacted her—she now goes by Anne Volokh—regarding a 1983 American publication, *The Art of Russian Cuisine*. In other cases, I found tidbits of information by tracking down authors on the internet or by cross-referencing articles in the press (which sometimes provided information about authors in their bylines) with publications credited to the same names. In this, I intended primarily to determine whether a given text had been written by an amateur or a trained expert and, if the latter, the nature of the author's profession.

The general dearth of information about the experts whose ideas shaped Soviet food culture does not represent a major problem for my study, because I explore food primarily through public discourse, which demands an analysis of these individuals' pronouncements, not their personalities or lives. Rather than hunting down obscure physiologists and occasional contributors to women's magazines, I devoted my energies toward understanding the ideas conveyed in these works, how they related to one another, and how they connected (or failed to connect) with the ideas about food presented in popular culture, public dining enterprises, and

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<sup>53</sup> A. S. Piruzian, *O khlebe nasushchnom: Istoriko-ekonomicheskie ocherki, vospominaniia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994); Piruzian, *Pishchevaia industriia: Gody, liudi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1999).



memories of late Soviet life. In the Russian field, scholars including Catriona Kelly and Alexei Yurchak have demonstrated the power of using public discourse to understand Soviet society and culture, including popular expectations and state-society relations. As discussed above, Kelly has mined Russian advice literature to reveal that *texts themselves* have much to tell us about the culture of a given moment. Similarly, in his pioneering work, *Everything was Forever Until It was No More*, Yurchak illustrates that such sources as press articles, memoirs, jokes, cinema, and music all provide clues to how individuals interacted with the “authoritative discourse” produced by the state, reproducing and also manipulating it. In his view, these processes made the Soviet system seem “immutable,” while also allowing for the creation of “unpredictable styles of living to spring up everywhere within it.”<sup>54</sup> We can see similar processes at work in public food discourse. Cookbooks, memoirs, movies, films, and other sources echo, criticize, and offer alternatives to official priorities.

There is one major exception to this: the food expert V. V. Pokhlebkin (1923-2000), whose life and works represent the focal point of my final two chapters. As I demonstrate, his popularity and influence outstripped that of all other individual Soviet food writers. In his long career as a historian, journalist, and cookbook author, Pokhlebkin created well over 100 works on cooking and dining. His major publications remain in print today—unlike nearly all other Soviet cookbooks—and his name continues to appear in discussions of Russian cuisine and the other cuisines of the Soviet Union. A prolific writer and a prominent presence in late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian culture, Pokhlebkin left behind a wealth of materials through which we can understand his life and the beliefs that informed his writings on cuisine. His shocking murder—addressed in chapter 6—also occasioned intense media attention, which in turn brought to light

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<sup>54</sup> Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 29.

reminiscences by Pokhlebkin's former colleagues and reflections of intellectuals and artists who admired or were influenced by his thought. Further, I was able to make the acquaintance of his son, Avgust Pokhlebkin, who not only granted me an interview, but also permitted me to visit his father's former home in Podol'sk, Russia. Considering his incredible impact on late Soviet food discourse and the ample available information about his biography, it would have been a serious oversight to not delve into Pokhlebkin's life and ideas.

## **Organization**

This dissertation is organized into six thematic chapters. The first examines the status of the Soviet state's modernizing mission during the Brezhnev period by bringing together three seemingly disparate food discourses: on seasonality, ocean fish, and cultured dining. During these years, industry and experts followed a long-established pattern by wielding food policy as a tool for transforming the collective. Expanded consumption of fruits, vegetables, and ocean fish would render the population happier and healthier, while also demonstrating the system's ability to overcome economic and agricultural obstacles. Meanwhile, eating out would not only contribute to health and happiness, but also modernize individuals by teaching them the tenets of "cultured leisure." Institutional failings and uncooperative individuals often prevented these initiatives from meeting their stated or implied goals. Yet culinary modernization did impact Soviet life, facilitating some interesting and unexpected changes, including a deepening commitment to at-home food production and the intensification of a rebellious urban dining culture.

The next chapter provides a counterpoint to modernization, by looking at another dominant late Soviet food discourse, that of "national" cuisines. Though the popular obsession

with ethnic cooking (or “national cuisine”) began prior to the 1960s, the Brezhnev years saw this trend reach its height. An increasing variety of texts promoting national cuisines hit bookstore shelves and an ever greater number of restaurants and cafes serving the cuisines of both Soviet and foreign peoples opened in towns and cities across the RSFSR. Here, we see a tension developing between culinary modernization and a desire among the public and within the food establishment for a more “traditional,” historical cuisine. Cooking texts expressed the “modern” ideal of a Soviet “friendship of peoples,” while national eateries in Moscow allowed the Soviet capital to masquerade as the gastronomic center of the socialist world. Yet, at the same time, they increasingly embraced a backward-looking traditionalist approach to cooking that in some important ways stood at odds with the more fundamental culinary modernizing project discussed in chapter one.

This growing interest in a return to “tradition” naturally had implications for the relationship between food, gender identities, and domestic roles in the Soviet mind. Chapter three thus addresses the gendered aspects of late Soviet food discourse, paying particular attention to women’s place in the Soviet Russian food sphere. As in earlier periods, women bore primary responsibility for domestic food procurement and preparation. Women also held the majority of positions in public dining and trade, making them culinary overseers in both the professional and private realms. Cookbooks, periodicals, and films all reinforced the characterization of cooking as “women’s work” throughout the Brezhnev era, yet these sources simultaneously granted men a disproportionate amount of culinary authority by casting the archetypal food expert as male. In the home, meanwhile, men’s participation in housework remained a special event, something unusual and for which society allotted them praise. Although their real authority in the kitchen sometimes went unrecognized or underappreciated,

women's control of food within Soviet homes and public dining establishments afforded them important kinds of social power. Soviet food discourse held that women could use food and cooking to shape their familial and romantic relationships, appear more desirable, and transform their children into proper Soviet citizens.

Chapter four steps outside the USSR's borders to gain a more complete understanding of food culture in late Soviet Russia. Specifically, it considers books on Russian cuisine published in the United States during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Much like Soviet texts, these American-made volumes frequently called on the authority of "tradition," as the authors positioned themselves as arbiters of what was truly "Russian." Both Soviet and American books on Russian cuisine not only celebrated historical cooking, they even sometimes presented the same recipes, as several US-based food writers drew on Soviet cooking texts. Over time, as relations between the two superpowers thawed, the presentations of Russia and the Soviet Union in these volumes grew more nuanced and paid increasing attention to not only the hardships, but also the joys of life behind the "Iron Curtain." However, even at their friendliest, these cookbooks remained resolutely political. Writing Russian cuisine in America could mean leveling criticisms at the Soviet government, casting oneself as a quasi-dissident, or even promoting a vision of multiethnic cuisine that aligned neatly with the Soviet state's culinary priorities.

Chapters five and six both focus on the ideas of V. V. Pokhlebkin, a historian turned food expert who became the most widely known and culturally potent cookbook author of the late Soviet period. Best known for his writings on tea and on Soviet national cuisines, Pokhlebkin emerged as an outspoken proponent of a viewpoint that I describe as "gastronomic historicism." He held fast to the idea that one must rely on the accumulated wisdom of past generations to know how to cook and eat well, rather than listening to the ever-changing advice of doctors and

nutritionists. After 1991, Pokhlebkin grew increasingly candid about the Russian nationalism that came to underpin his gastronomic historicism. He thus parlayed his veiled criticisms of the Soviet system neatly into a condemnation of developments in post-Soviet Russia. Whereas he previously cast suspicion on state-sponsored modernization, Pokhlebkin now attacked fast food, “culinary stupidity,” and rootless “cosmopolitan” gastronomy. Importantly, his admonitions to prepare traditional recipes from whole ingredients and to trust grandmothers over doctors aligned with developments in food writing elsewhere in the industrialized world. Pokhlebkin’s work thus reflects both cultural anxieties present in late Soviet society and also continuities across the divide of 1991. It further suggests that Soviet food writing tapped into a late modern malaise that took hold in Russia, as well as Europe and the US in the late twentieth century, as people around the world grew distrustful of the modern diet.

## CHAPTER 1

### HEALTHY, HAPPY, AND MODERN: DISCOURSES ON SEASONALITY, SEAFOOD, AND PUBLIC DINING IN BREZHNEV'S RUSSIA

In 1971, the women's magazine *Krest'ianka* printed a comic poking fun at recent attempts to introduce newer, more modern forms of trade into the Soviet state-run public dining system. The image depicts a “milk” café—a common kind of eatery, specializing in dairy products—that claims to offer “self-service” (figure 1). Yet instead of the glass-fronted refrigerator cases, streamlined decor, and tidily dressed cashiers that one ought to have found in a proper self-service café, this one requires patrons to milk their own cows. We see one unlucky customer hunched over a stool, apparently trying to extract coffee cream from his bemused-looking bovine companion. A man in a uniform and cap stands by the entrance, pointing towards the customer. Another man in a hat and coat stands outside, holding a box. The sign above the entrance reads “МОЛОЧНОЕ КАФЕ” (Milk Café). Below the illustration, the text reads: “— У нас самообслуживание.” (— Self-service here.)



**Figure 1** I. Sychev, “It’s self-service here,” *Krest'ianka*, September 1971.

This image offers an ironic commentary on the divergence between what the Soviet state advertised and what the public experienced. While dining officials promised a sleek, clean, speedy dining trade, many individuals instead encountered poor sanitation, slim menu selections, and bad service. Not all efforts to improve Soviet diet and dining came to naught, but Soviet citizens were aware of both these initiatives and also their tendency to flounder.

The Soviet state struggled for decades to create a modern diet. These efforts shifted form and focus over time, depending on the leadership's broader priorities, though they always addressed questions of "rationality" and individual or group wellbeing. For instance, in the 1920s and again in the late 1950s and early 1960s, modernizing the food sphere meant socializing kitchen labor in order to "liberate" women from domestic "drudgery" and eliminating the "negative" customs of the bourgeoisie and the peasantry. Feeding the public in centralized eateries would also permit experts to monitor nutrition, ensuring that the people consumed prescribed quantities of calories and nutrients.<sup>55</sup> Beginning with the industrialization drives of Stalin's First and Second Five-Year Plans (1928-37), factories and trade outlets emerged as the focus for culinary modernization. The Soviet diet was now meant to boast numerous industrially produced foods, sold in glittering new stores. Ideally, participating in Soviet-style consumer culture would create a more modern, sophisticated public, who had good taste and appreciated the USSR's alleged triumph over backwardness.<sup>56</sup> Under Khrushchev, technological advances—

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<sup>55</sup> On dining and nutrition in the 1920s, see Rothstein and Rothstein, "Beginnings of Soviet Culinary Arts"; Tamara Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit: O vlasti v Rossii, XVI-XX vv.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006). On both the 1920s and the Khrushchev era, see Lebina and Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy*. On the 1950s and early 1960s, also see Lebina, "Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy."

<sup>56</sup> On Stalin-era dining and consumer culture, see Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik"; Irina Glushchenko, *Obshchepit: Mikoian i sovetskaia kukhnia* (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 2010); Glushchenko, "Rol' gosudarstvennoi vlasti v formirovanii kul'tury pitaniia"; Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*; Julie Hessler, *A Social History of Soviet Trade: Trade Policy, Retail Practices, and Consumption, 1917-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Amy Randall, *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

particularly in the form of kitchen appliances and other consumer goods—came to represent a key feature of domestic modernity. Refrigerators, hand mixers, juicers, and other tools made cooking more efficient, while reminding the home cook of the USSR’s industrial prowess.<sup>57</sup> Together, these projects envisioned Soviet culinary modernity as defined by scientific know-how, up-to-date nutritional standards, and public engagement with the trade system.

In the Brezhnev years, the Soviet state persisted in its attempts to modernize Soviet cuisine and dining customs. Seeking to better understand how this core facet of Soviet food culture functioned between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, this chapter targets three seemingly disparate food discourses—about seasonality, ocean fish, and cultured leisure—all of which were entangled with concerns about Soviet modernity.<sup>58</sup> The first two sections, on seasonality and ocean fish, combine analysis of cooking advice literature with statistical data and information about dietary changes drawn from Soviet state-published handbooks, US government publications, and secondary literature. The third section, on culturedness in Moscow cafés and restaurants, derives primarily from the archival records of the Moscow Restaurant Trust (hereafter MRT) and the Main Administration of Public Dining of the Moscow City Executive Committee. While these sources do not cover every aspect of Brezhnev-era food culture, in part because they favor Moscow and the RSFSR, they do shed light on some of the most important ways in which the Soviet diet changed *and* remained the same during this period. They also

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<sup>57</sup> Lebina and Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy*; Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy”; Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen.”

<sup>58</sup> Here, “ocean fish” refers to oceanodromous species, which spawn, live, and die in saltwater. These are the fish Soviet food writers promoted in the texts discussed below. By contrast, the term “saltwater fish” includes oceanodromous and diadromous fish. The latter spend part of their lifecycle in fresh water and part in salt water. Sturgeon and salmon are examples of diadromous fish.



reveal the ways in which discourses on such diverse topics as preserving fruit, selecting cod fillets, and visiting a café could all speak to ongoing efforts to establish Soviet-style modernity.

First, the seasonal availability of produce represented one of the most persistent “traditional” features of the Soviet Russian food system. Russians had been dependent on fresh seasonal goods and their ability to preserve these products for year-round use for countless generations. With the expansion of refrigeration and storage facilities, advances in transportation, and growing global contacts, the Soviet Union, experts hoped, would be able to overcome the limitations of seasonal consumption. Seasonality represented for nutritional scientists a flaw in the food system that needed to be addressed immediately, as they believed that it limited the quantities of fruits and vegetables the public ate. Yet fluctuations in availability (e.g., no tomatoes in winter) persisted throughout the Soviet period, leaving food writers the task of helping home cooks make the most of a given season’s offerings, whether meager or bountiful. Seasonal shifts in the availability of produce also reinforced and perpetuated traditions of gardening, canning, and other forms of domestic food production popular across the USSR.

Second, this chapter addresses an area in which the Soviet food establishment enjoyed a bit more success: the introduction of new varieties of ocean fish into the Soviet diet. In this case, nutritionists, food industry officials, and food writers sought to inculcate in the population new ways of eating that did not necessarily align with older Russian food customs, while also making up for persistent shortfalls in meat production. This became a moment of intense culinary “modernization,” as putting fish harvested in the open ocean on the Soviet table required a massive and dynamic fishing fleet, as well as advanced transportation and refrigeration systems. Ideally, increasing the quantity of fish in the Soviet diet would improve the population’s health by providing an additional source of animal protein, but it also required the introduction of

unfamiliar raw foodstuffs and novel modes of preparation. While some food writers promoted fish for its health benefits, others sought to convince home cooks to eat ocean fish as a means of connecting with their national culture or becoming more sophisticated.

Third, I discuss the state's efforts to make public dining more "cultured," focusing on Moscow-based youth cafés—establishments meant for people in their teens and early twenties—as well as cafés and restaurants catering to an older crowd. The push for cultured dining represented part of an ongoing modernization campaign started in the Stalin era, which aimed to bring Soviet trade standards in line with foreign norms and to alter the way Soviet citizens thought about their society. In the post-Stalin era, the state extended this long-term civilizing project by trying to draw an increasing number of individuals into public dining establishments that would teach them the rules of Soviet-style propriety. Good Soviet citizens would be able to dine politely, enjoy the restaurant's musical or other entertainments, and appreciate good food. Under Brezhnev, efforts to create the conditions for "cultured leisure" stumbled for a variety of reasons, mostly related to the ineffectiveness of dining officials, restaurant employees, and the food supply network. The dining culture that emerged from this appeared rather less "cultured" than officials hoped, yet it became a feature of late Soviet life for which many people had great affection. As in the case of seasonality, even when officials did not meet their goals, their attempts to change the popular diet offered new opportunities for Soviet Russians to engage in activities that reflected their own—rather than the government's—priorities.

By examining these discourses we can better understand some of the concerns that animated food culture in the Brezhnev years. When writing on seasonal produce or unfamiliar species of fish, food experts promised good health, novel gastronomic experiences, and even happiness. The state used these innovations to express its drive to modernize the diet, but also

ran into the limits of its power to remake daily life. Ideally, older modes of eating—e.g., consuming mainly seasonal produce and freshwater fish—would be replaced by new foodways, which allowed for berries in winter and encouraged an appreciation of sea cucumber. Officials similarly promised opportunities for distinguishing oneself as “cultured” through participation in public dining. Yet attempts to promote culturedness had some unexpected outcomes, as Soviet citizens took it upon themselves to shape a raucous restaurant and café culture suited to their own desires. While this did not conform to projected visions of Soviet civilization, it did bring Soviet public culture more in line with that of other modern states, which boasted their own rich nightlife. All of this speaks to the continued importance of the ideal of modernization in the late Soviet culinary sphere, the practical considerations that drove these policies, and the paradoxes inherent in attempting to modernize something as complex and elemental as food culture.

### **Health, Satisfaction, and Seasonality**

When compared to other moments in Soviet history, the Brezhnev period represents a time of relative wellbeing. Though levels of food production and consumption never matched official goals, the assortment and amounts of available foodstuffs improved between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s. The Soviet public became less dependent on grains and potatoes, Russia’s historic poverty fare, though these foods remained vital components of the Soviet diet. Grain appeared most often as bread, or as a pilaf or porridge, while Russia’s “second bread,” the potato, could be prepared in countless different ways: boiled, fried, mashed, simmered in milk, baked with cheese and onions, smothered with mushroom sauce, used to fill pies, and so forth.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> On the vast array of potato recipes available to Soviet home cooks, see, for example, I. Ryzhanova, *250 bliud iz kartofelia* (Perm’: Permskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1963); I. M. Vol’per, Ia. I. Magidov, *Kartofel’: Istoriia, primeneniie, upotreblenie* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1978).

Versatile and well-loved, bread and potatoes by no means always represented want. In this period, Soviet citizens also consumed growing quantities of dairy, though the government's large figures for milk consumption are a bit misleading. They represent quantities of raw milk, which would have yielded smaller amounts of foods such as cheese, yogurt, butter, and sour cream, commonly consumed across the USSR.<sup>60</sup> Levels of meat, fish, vegetable, and fruit consumption climbed throughout these decades—initially as a tribute to improvements in agriculture, and later thanks to the state's grudging willingness to import foodstuffs from the West (see tables 1-3).<sup>61</sup> These gains represented a partial realization of the promises Khrushchev made—and failed to keep—regarding improvements to the food supply and the popular standard of living. Settling for “developed socialism” rather than pushing for communism, the Brezhnev regime managed to put food on Soviet tables in greater quantities and varieties than ever before.

**Table 1** Per Capita Consumption of Primary Foods in the Soviet Union, 1960-85 (kg)

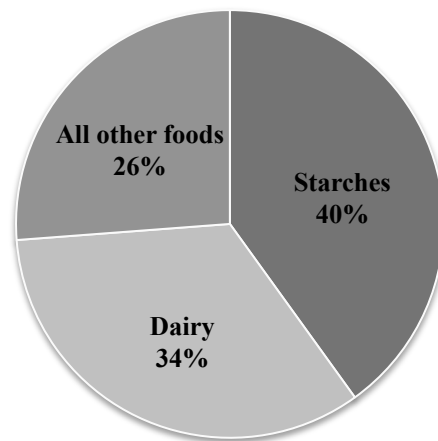
	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985
Bread	164	156	149	141	138	133
Potatoes	143	142	130	120	109	104
Vegetables	70	72	82	89	97	102
Meat	39.5	41	47.5	57	57.6	61.7
Milk	240	251	307	316	314	325
Eggs (units)	118	124	159	216	239	260
Sugar	28	34.2	38.8	40.9	44.4	42.2
Fish	9.9	12.6	15.4	16.7	17.6	18
Fruit	22	28	35	39	38	48
Vegetable Oil	5.3	7.1	6.8	7.6	8.8	9.8

Sources: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 60 let* (Moscow: Statistika, 1977), 511; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 70 let* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1987), 470.

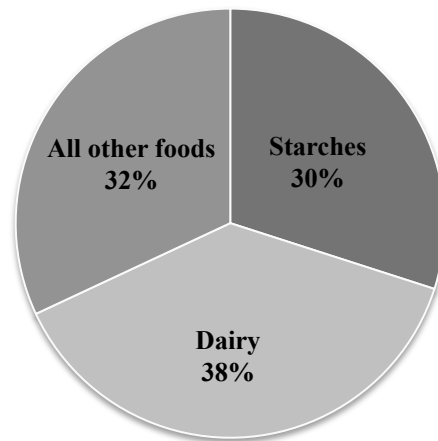
<sup>60</sup> For instance, thirty-two ounces of milk produces only sixteen ounces of butter.

<sup>61</sup> On Soviet food imports in the Brezhnev years, see Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems*, chap. 8-9.

**Table 2** Average Soviet Diet, c. 1965



**Table 3** Average Soviet Diet, c. 1980



Sources: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 60 let: Iubileinyi statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Statistika, 1977); *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 70 let: Iubileinyi statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1987). Eggs are not included in these tables. Instead of calculating kilograms of eggs consumed, these statistical manuals list quantities by unit. This means that, without data on the average weight of a Brezhnev-era Soviet chicken egg, it is not possible to include egg consumption figures in a chart that reflects quantities of staple foods by weight.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, seasonality represented a significant force shaping the Soviet diet. The emphasis that food writers and nutritionists placed on the realities

and perceived problems of seasonality attests to the fact that fruits and vegetables tended to appear for sale primarily during their proper growing seasons. The wild foods that residents of many Soviet regions enjoyed—including mushrooms, berries, and nettles—could also generally be had fresh only in season, though in preserved forms they provided nourishment in the winter. This represented a feature of Russian food culture that reached far into the past, when growing, preserving, and storing produce for the winter remained a central concern of peasants and nobility alike.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, not only in Russia, but worldwide, the availability of out-of-season produce remained a luxury of the wealthy until well into the twentieth century, when refrigeration, high-speed transport, and other innovations revolutionized the way that food was stored, shipped, grown, and consumed in industrial societies.

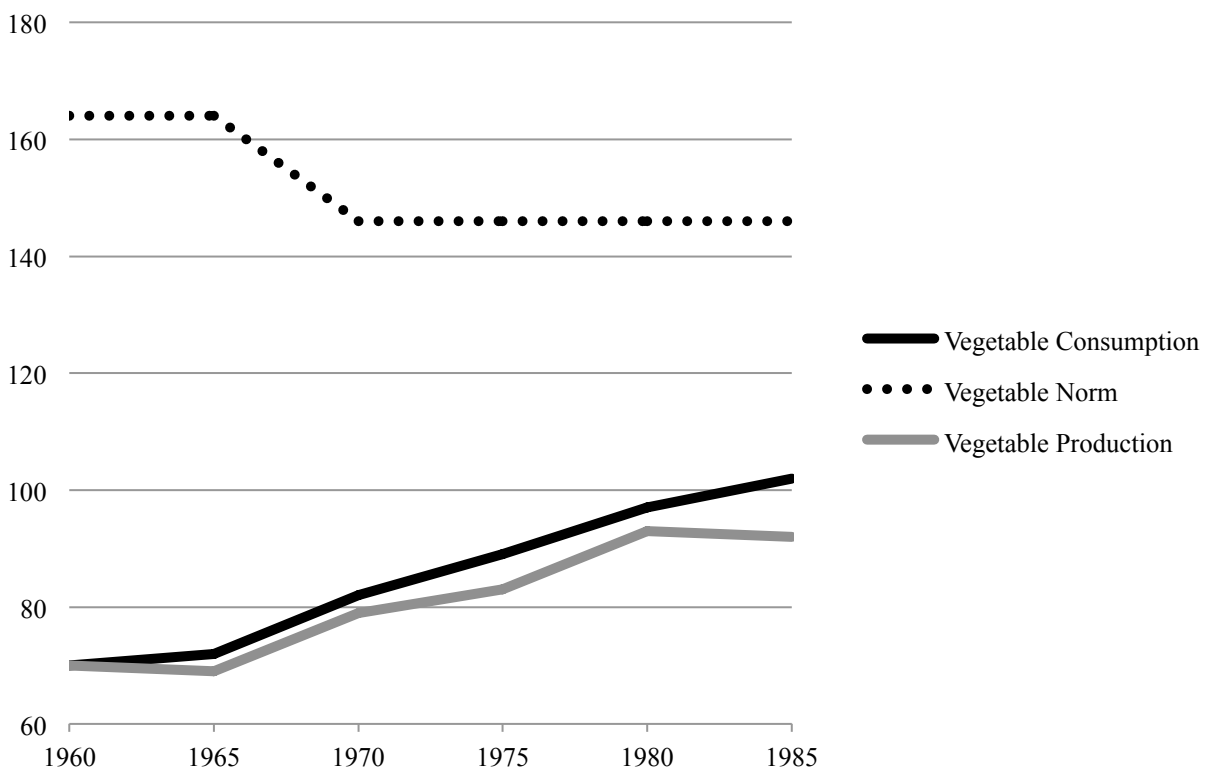
Seasonality appeared to Soviet nutritionists as a negative side effect of problems with the food supply and a holdover from a past the state had intended to eliminate. This issue came into focus when experts looked to the composition of the Soviet diet. As tables 4 and 5 show, fruit and vegetable production and consumption both grew in the Brezhnev years, spurred on by increased production. The average Soviet citizen consumed only seventy kilograms of vegetables and twenty-two kilograms of fruit in 1960, compared to ninety-seven kilos of vegetables and thirty-eight kilos of fruit in 1980. In other words, vegetable consumption rose by more than 38 percent between 1960 and 1980, while fruit consumption climbed approximately 73 percent. Not

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<sup>62</sup> Smith and Christian note that salt extraction was key industry in prerevolutionary Russia largely because of salt's role in preserving food. They also demonstrate that the peasant diet varied cyclically throughout the year and that this aspect of the diet changed little from ancient times through the early twentieth century. R. E. F. Smith and David Christian, *Bread and Salt: A Social and Economic History of Food and Drink in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 27-28, 331. Preserving and storing food also appear as major concerns in both the sixteenth-century household manual known as the *Domostroi* and in Elena Molokhovets's famous nineteenth-century cookbook, *A Gift to Young Housewives*. Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, ed. and trans., *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the Time of Ivan the Terrible* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 151-55; Joyce Toomre, Introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking: Elena Molokhovets' A Gift to Young Housewives*, ed. and trans. Toomre (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 40-44.

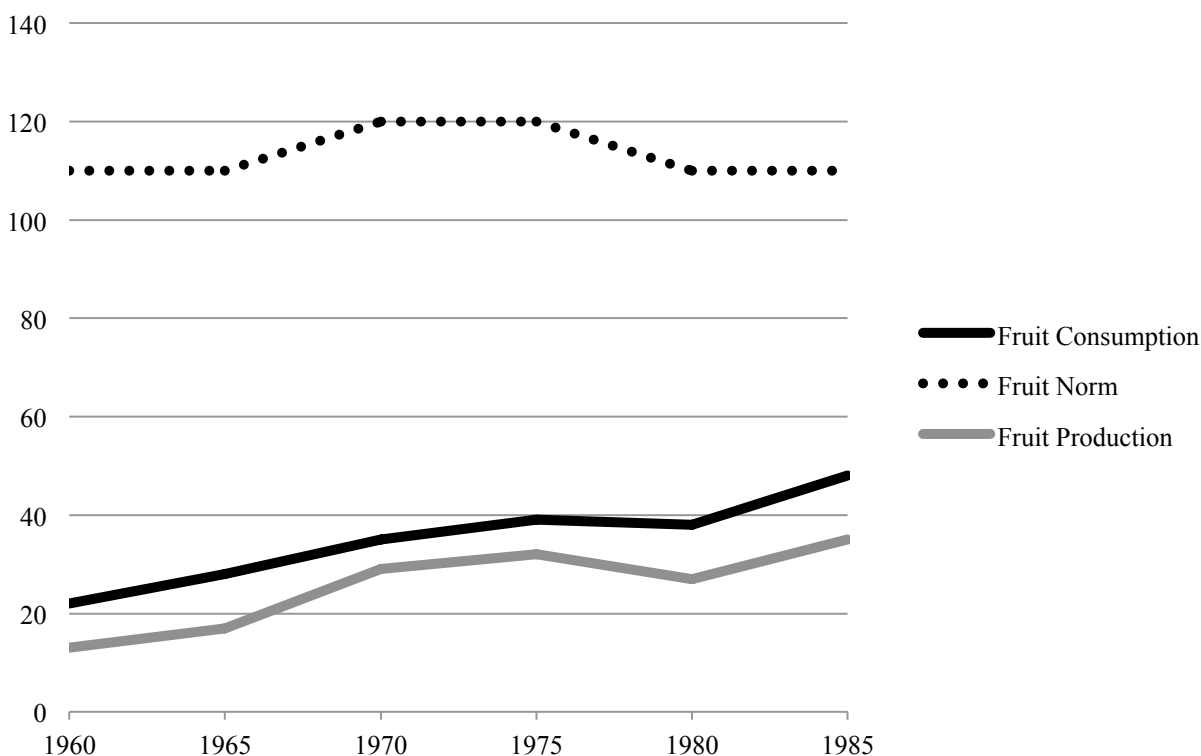
only had agricultural production expanded, but also additional produce entered the food system thanks to imports and personal garden plots, which provided crops that could be consumed privately or sold at farmers' markets. Yet neither output nor consumption met levels necessary to satisfy the state's recognized "physiological norms" for amounts of these foods in the diet. In spite of real improvements in the diet, a yawning gap still existed between the amounts that the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR set for a healthy diet and the quantities of produce the Soviet people actually consumed.<sup>63</sup>

**Table 4** Vegetable Consumption, Production, and Dietary Norm in USSR, 1960-85 (kgs)



<sup>63</sup> As Dronin and Bellinger note, between 1965 and 1975, "the Soviet Union became one of the largest food importers in the world." Sugar, meat, and grain accounted for most of these imports, though some quantities of fruits, vegetables, fish, and other foods were also imported. Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia*, 229. On physiological norms, see Phillip Weitzman, "Soviet Long-Term Consumption Planning: Distribution According to Rational Need," *Soviet Studies* 26, 3 (July 1974): 305-21.

**Table 5** Fruit Consumption, Production, and Dietary Norm, 1960-85 (kgs)



Sources: Weitzman, "Soviet Long-Term Consumption Planning: Distribution According to Rational Need"; V. F. Maier, *Uroven' zhizni naseleniia SSSR* (Moscow: Mysl', 1977); *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 60 let* (Moscow: Statistika, 1977); *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 70 Let* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1987); "Agricultural Statistics of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, 1960-80," International Economics Division, Economic Research Service, US Department of Agriculture, *Statistical Bulletin* No. 700 (November 1983); Nancy J. Cochrane, "Agricultural Statistics of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, 1960-85," Agriculture and Trade Analysis Division, Economic Research Service, US Department of Agriculture, *Statistical Bulletin* No. 778 (July 1989).

Nutritionists often blamed seasonal variations in the availability of fruits and vegetables for insufficient per capita consumption of these foods. In 1965, researchers at the Institute of Nutrition of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR noted optimistically that seasonal oscillations had become less dramatic since 1950, enabling rising use of fruits and vegetables union-wide.<sup>64</sup> Over the next fifteen years, however, seasonal shifts persisted—berries were primarily available in summer, squash could only be had in the fall, and so forth—and this

<sup>64</sup> Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv nauchno-tekhnicheskoi dokumentatsii (RGANTD), f. 44, op. 4-1, d. 83, l. 11.



frustrated nutritionists who urged the Soviet public to ingest more of these “valuable nutritional products.” In 1980, Institute of Nutrition researchers warned once more of the negative effects of seasonality. In their view changes in availability contributed to the low quality and monotonous assortment of produce available, factors that in turn deterred Soviet citizens from eating necessary quantities of these foods.<sup>65</sup>

Problems with transportation, storage, and misconduct in the trade sector made it difficult to ensure that these and other perishable goods would be available to the public. A shortage of refrigerated trucks and train cars, transport bottlenecks, and insufficient storage space led to spoilage and waste.<sup>66</sup> Even in well-supplied areas, such as Moscow, often only lower quality produce made it to market. The Brezhnev years saw the highwater mark for trade-related corruption and criminality. This included illegal price hikes on desirable items, as well as officials and their cronies skimming off the best of the crop for their own consumption.<sup>67</sup> Common store clerks treated their jobs as a kind of “feeding trough” (*kormushka*), which gave them privileged access to goods that they could use themselves, save to sell to friends, or exchange in an informal barter system.<sup>68</sup> From this perspective, seasonal fluctuations in the

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<sup>65</sup> RGANTD, f. 44, op. 4-1, d. 388, l. 42.

<sup>66</sup> Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems*, 310. Problems with transport and storage were frequent topics of conversation in the Soviet trade apparatus in the Brezhnev years. See, for example, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 465, op. 1, d. 663, ll. 74-75, 81-82, 100; f. 465, op. 1, d. 1410, ll. 52-56; f. 465, op. 1, d. 3082, l. 71; f. 465, op. 1, d. 3300, ll. 97-100.

<sup>67</sup> Luc Duhamel, *The KGB Campaign against Corruption in Moscow, 1982-1987* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2010), 8-14. Rhiannon Dowling, PhD Candidate in History at the University of California, Berkeley, is currently working on a dissertation addressing criminal activities, including trade corruption, during the Brezhnev years. Her research will shed light on this important and heretofore-understudied topic.

<sup>68</sup> The importance of connections, or *blat*, for obtaining necessary foodstuffs and consumer goods has been addressed in a number of historical works and memoirs. These practices are recognized as an established feature of Soviet life. See, for example, Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 3, 62-65; Elena Osokina, *Za fasadom “stalinskogo izobil’iia”: Raspredelenie i rynek v snabzhenii naseleniia v gody industrializatsii, 1927-1941* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998); Osokina, *Ierarkhiia potrebleniia: O zhizni liudei v usloviakh stalinskogo snabzheniia, 1928-1935 gg.* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo MGOU, 1993); Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 170, 228-36; Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia’s*

supply of certain goods appear as one of several factors that reduced consumption of fruits and vegetables. Regardless of the causes of these problems, by focusing on the question of seasonality, experts implicitly pushed for the modernization of the Soviet diet, as the uniformity of supply they sought stood in stark contrast not only to lived realities, but also the way that Russians had eaten for centuries.

Food writers, whose task it was to teach the public to eat right, could do little about shoddy storage facilities and corrupt trade officials, but they *could* offer advice on working with seasonal produce. Authors of cookbooks and advice columns compiled seasonal menus and recipes that would help the reader make the most of the season's offerings. *The Book about Delicious and Healthy Food* (Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche), the USSR's most heavily-published cooking text, had long endorsed seasonal menus, emphasizing "the need for variation in one's daily eating and [encouraging] the use of seasonal specialties."<sup>69</sup> In this text, spring brings fresh fish, dairy products, and young vegetables, including sorrel, rhubarb, radishes, cabbage sprouts, and green onions. In summer, delicate produce gives way to eggplants, cucumbers, spinach, cauliflower, and cherries, as well as wild foods, including berries, nettles, and game birds. Fresh fruit appears in salads and desserts, and virtually every meal boasts tomatoes. Autumn dishes exploit late summer produce—eggplants, melons, and grapes—as well

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*Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking, and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Discussions of blat also appear in memoirs and cookbooks dealing with the Soviet experience. For example, see Anya von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking: A Memoir of Love and Longing* (New York: Crown, 2013), chap. 7; Darra Goldstein, *À la Russe: A Cookbook of Russian Hospitality* (New York: Random House, 1983), viii-ix. For an extended discussion of the importance of the idea of a state-run *kormushka* in Russia, see Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit*.

<sup>69</sup> Jukka Gronow and Sergey Zhuravlev, "The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food: The Establishment of Soviet *Haute Cuisine*," in *Educated Tastes: Food, Drink, and Connoisseur Culture*, ed. Jeremy Strong (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 48. *The Book about Tasty and Healthy Food* first appeared in 1939 and later enjoyed numerous reprints and updated editions. See Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik"; Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 137-79; Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit*, 131-34; Gian Piero Piretto, "Tasty and Healthy: Soviet Happiness in One Book," in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*, eds. Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (New York: Anthem, 2009), 79-96.

as apples, pears, pumpkin, and mushrooms. The winter menu relies on preserved foods, such as sauerkraut, salted mushrooms, and dried fruit, as well as citrus fruits and a great deal more meat than in other seasons.<sup>70</sup> Ironically, these cyclical dietary changes, which sometimes frustrated the efforts of Soviet citizens to eat healthful quantities of produce, would appeal to many of the twenty-first century's so-called "foodies," who tout the benefits seasonal eating allegedly provides to mind and body.

Throughout the Brezhnev years, periodicals including *Krest'ianka* and *Rabotnitsa*, as well as *Sem'ia i shkola* and *Nauka i zhizn'* (Science and Life) offered a plethora of articles following roughly the same pattern of in-season ingredients. Spring brought greens—nettles, sorrel, dandelion—and new potatoes, as well as other early produce, such as rhubarb.<sup>71</sup> Recipes for refreshing salads and cooling drinks came in the summer, shaping a table on which fresh fruits and vegetables reigned supreme.<sup>72</sup> Late summer and early fall meant preserving produce for the winter, and gathering newly matured wild mushrooms, berries, and rosehips.<sup>73</sup> Apples

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<sup>70</sup> *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (Moscow: Pishchepromizdat, 1952), 43-52.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, "Sovetuiut chitateli," *Krest'ianka*, May 1965, 32; "Iz pervoi zeleni," *Krest'ianka* supplement, May 1980, 6; P. Leviant, "Kogda prikhodit vesna..." *Rabotnitsa*, April 1965, 30; P. Ovchinnikov, "Reven'—pervenets leta," *Rabotnitsa*, May 1970, 29; I. Grushevskii, "Pervaia zelen'," *Rabotnitsa*, May 1979, 30; "Iz revenia," *Rabotnitsa*, May 1980, 29; "Khochu posovetovat'," *Rabotnitsa*, May 1976, 29; G. Sushko, "Chudodeistvennaia krapiva," *Rabotnitsa* supplement, May 1983, 1-2; T. Zakharova, "Vitaminy na stole," *Sem'ia i shkola*, May 1978, 61.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, "Sovetuiut chitateli," *Krest'ianka*, June 1965, 32; "Doma, v stolovoi, na polevom stane v zharkii den'," *Krest'ianka*, July 1965, 32; P. Lebedev, "Leto na stole," *Krest'ianka*, May 1973, 32; "Iz ovoshchei i s ovoshchami," *Krest'ianka*, July 1979, 32; "Peite na zdorov'e," *Rabotnitsa*, June 1965, 29; V. Kovchenkov, "Osvezhaiushchie napitki," *Rabotnitsa*, June 1967, 32; "Kogda zharko," *Rabotnitsa*, June 1970, 30-31; T. Virkunen, "Vitaminy pro zapas," *Rabotnitsa*, June 1982, 30; L. Vital'eva, "Vprok, pro zapas," *Rabotnitsa*, July 1980, 30; V. Tkachenko, "Ovoshchi i frukty: Polezno, neobkhodimo," *Sem'ia i shkola*, July 1975, 53-54; "Retsepty na leto," *Nauka i zhizn'*, June 1968, 151.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, "Gribnaia pora" and "Bliuda iz gribov," *Krest'ianka*, September 1974, 30-32; "Opiat' pora gribnaia," *Krest'ianka* supplement, August 1980, 3, 6, back cover; A. Namestnikov, "Sushka ovoshchei i plodov v domashnikh usloviakh," *Krest'ianka* supplement, September 1981, 6-7; A. Glauberman-Izarova, "Griby po retseptam so vsego sveta," *Rabotnitsa*, August 1970, 30-31; Z. V. Kochetkova, "Skoraia pomoshch' domashnim zagotovkam," *Rabotnitsa*, February 1969, 31; "Iz svezhikh gribov," *Rabotnitsa*, June 1971, 32; "Gribnaia mozaika," *Rabotnitsa*, July 1972, 30-31; T. Zakharova, "Osennie dary 'sputnika lesa,'" *Sem'ia i shkola*, August 1979, 58;

also appeared in the late fall, and represented the fruit of choice throughout the winter months.<sup>74</sup>

In the winter, columnists alternated between giving suggestions for holiday meals and providing advice on consuming vitamin-rich foods. Sauerkraut and fruit preserves featured heavily, as well as those fruits and vegetables that could be readily wintered-over: beans, root vegetables, and apples.<sup>75</sup> Meat, fish, and dairy appeared throughout the year. November and December, however, brought the most extravagant meat, poultry, and seafood dishes, such as roast goose with apples, stuffed pork loin, and whole fish in aspic. These, along with fussy canapés, wine cocktails, and luxurious cakes, were meant to grace Soviet tables on New Year's Eve.<sup>76</sup>

These seasonal patterns provide a sense of what the yearly cycle meant for many Soviet home cooks, who continued to rely on foods that they gathered, grew, and preserved at home or at their *dacha* (exurban summer home). This cycle also suggests a strong degree of continuity between the Brezhnev era and earlier periods, when Russians and their close neighbors had

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"Osen', zima: Pitanie shkolnika," *Sem'ia i shkola*, November 1977, 62-63; L. Shchepin, "Dary prirody," *Krest'ianka*, August 1970, 32; "Iagodnaia pora," *Krest'ianka*, July 1973, 32; Z. Kochetkova, "Vkusnaia riabina," *Rabotnitsa*, September 1969, 30; L. Stishkovskaia, "Lesnaia krasavitsa," *Rabotnitsa*, September 1976, 30; I. Grushevskii, "Iz oblepikhi," *Rabotnitsa*, October 1979, 30.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, D. Belousov, "Fruktovye i ovoshchnye domashnie konservy," *Krest'ianka*, July 1970, 32-33; "Bliuda iz fruktov," *Krest'ianka*, July 1974, 32; "Poprobuete--vkusno!" *Krest'ianka*, February 1979, 31; "Ovoshchi na stole," *Krest'ianka*, October 1979, 32; "Ispekite pirogi!" *Krest'ianka*, December 1979, 31; V. Askabovich, "Iabloki po-belorusski," *Rabotnitsa*, October 1967, 31; A. Glauberman-Izarova, "Iabloki na tret'e," *Rabotnitsa*, October 1970, 30; "Pora osenniaia," *Rabotnitsa*, September 1972, 30-31; S. Krasnokutskaiia, "Vsiakoe iablochko—v delo," *Rabotnitsa*, August 1976, 30.

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, I. Grushevskii, "Priglasiaem k stolu," *Rabotnitsa*, February 1980, 28-29; Grushevskii, "Pel'meni na liuboi vkus," *Rabotnitsa*, November 1980, 30; K. Petrovskii, "Vitaminy zimoi," *Nauka i zhizn'*, February 1965, 46-48; "Kapusta vprok," *Sem'ia i shkola*, October 1979, 63; Galina Vailevskaia, "Doma na ferme," trans. T. Kvitko, *Krest'ianka*, January 1965, 25-27; V. Kovchenkov, "Belorusskaia kuchnia," *Krest'ianka*, February 1969, 31-32; B. Aleksandrov, "Vtoroe miaso," *Krest'ianka*, February 1969, 32; "Iz kartoshki, s kartoshkoi," *Krest'ianka* supplement, October 1980, 5-6; Kochetkova, "Skoraia pomoshch' domashnim zagotovkam"; "Sovetuiut kubanskiie povarikhi," *Krest'ianka* supplement, January 1981, 4; Svetlana Katurina, "Prostye retsepty," *Krest'ianka* supplement, February 1981, 4; V. Nikol'skaia, "Na poroge prazdnika," *Krest'ianka* supplement, December 1981, 1; "Chitateli predlagaiut, sovetaiut..." *Rabotnitsa*, November 1965, 30.

<sup>76</sup> P. G. Kuznetsov, "Na prazdnichnyi stol," *Krest'ianka*, October 1967, 30-31; "Gotovimsia k prazdniku!" *Krest'ianka*, November 1968, 30-31; V. Kovchenkov, "K novogodnemu stolu," *Rabotnitsa*, December 1969, 30; I. Grushevskii, "Prazdnichnyi uzhin," *Rabotnitsa*, November 1979, 31-32; E. Demakova, "K novogodnemu stolu," *Rabotnitsa*, December 1979, 30-31; "Novogodniaia uzhin," *Krest'ianka*, December 1970, 32.

depended upon seasonally available foods. At the same time, the specific produce, most notably wild foods, represented as seasonal staples reflect the fact that major cookbooks and periodicals primarily targeted readers located in the European portions of the USSR and in western and central Siberia. That is, the composition of foods presumed that the reader lived in a region boasting hot summers, and cool springs and autumns. While many of these crops grew throughout much of the Soviet Union, the particular seasonal variations reflected in cooking advice literature would not have held true in all regions of the country. The Far East would rarely experience the intense heat necessary to grow good tomatoes and eggplant, while hardy rhubarb and sorrel flourish in regions with springtimes chillier than those found, say, near Sochi. In many ways, then, the seasonal mode of dining promoted in late Soviet cooking advice literature appears quite “traditional” for the population of the RSFSR. That is, it conforms in its broadest contours to longstanding patterns of consumption, even if it suggests a greater array of fruits and vegetables than would have been available to the average prerevolutionary peasant.

In practice, seasonality did not look quite as grim as some nutritionists might have thought. Indeed, seasonal shifts in consumption both relied upon and perpetuated certain beloved food traditions, including berry picking, mushroom hunting, and home preserving. The state heartily endorsed these endeavors, in part by offering ample advice in the form of books dedicated to canning and jarring produce. Soviet publishing houses produced dozens of volumes on home preserving between 1965 and 1985, with many titles appearing in multiple editions. All told, more than twelve million individual copies of various books on drying, canning, and jarring produce entered circulation during these years, adding to more than three million such volumes produced between 1959 and 1964. Since a household likely only required one such manual, this represents a notable per capita increase in the number of books on preserving found across the

USSR. General knowledge cookbooks also frequently included recipes for fruit preserves, vegetable pickles, and other foods that could be stored throughout the winter.<sup>77</sup>

Newspapers and magazines had a special advantage in meting out advice on seasonal cooking, as cooking columns could be tailored to the reader's needs during the given week or month. Periodicals encouraged readers to gather wild foods and preserve homegrown produce throughout the summer and fall months. These articles might emphasize the health potential of wild and homegrown fruits and vegetables. For instance, in 1982, *Rabotnitsa* published an interview with E. N. Stepanova, head of the chemical analysis laboratory at the Institute for Nutrition in which she touted fruit and berry preserves as a good source of much-needed vitamins during the long winter months.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, *Sem'ia i shkola* reminded readers that rosehips not only abounded in the autumn, but also offered more vitamin C than lemons and could be dried in the oven for year-round use in fruit puddings or tea.<sup>79</sup> Other authors focused more on the pleasure that these foods would bring. Collecting and drying wild herbs and spices in the summer could give winter dishes the unique scent of juniper berries or the warm nuttiness of caraway seed.<sup>80</sup> Preserves made from raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries, rowanberries, and other forest fruits provided important vitamins and also had a "pleasant flavor and aroma."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> All publication information presented here is based on the data available in the annual catalog of books published in the Soviet Union, *Ezhegodnik knigi SSSR* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia knizhnaia palata), for the years 1948-1986. For examples of general knowledge cookbooks that provide information on home canning and preserving, see, *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1971), 387-94; N. T. Mitsova and M. L. Rozentsvaig, *Dary leta: Fruktovo-ovoshchnoi stol* (Khar'kov: Prapor, 1972), 134-37; N. G. Astravlianchik, *Ovoshchi i frukty na vsei vkusy* (Minsk: Polymia, 1981); E. P. Demakova, *Dlia vashego stola* (Novosibirsk: Zapadno-sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1983), 262-82; I. A. Fel'dman, *Sovety kulinara* (Kiev: Reklama, 1983), 93-97.

<sup>78</sup> Virkunen, "Vitaminy pro zapas."

<sup>79</sup> Zakharova, "Osennie dary 'sputnik lesa.'"

<sup>80</sup> "Zagotovim prianosti," *Rabotnitsa*, June 1982, 30.

<sup>81</sup> Shchepin, "Dary prirody."

Of course, these publications provided not only encouragement, but also practical advice, admonishing those engaged with home preserving to properly sanitize their jars and utensils, and to use sufficient acid to inhibit the growth of dangerous bacteria. In this way, the authors made foodways that we might describe as “traditional” also appear modern, as they told the reader that these patterns of consumption conformed in many ways to contemporary nutritional ideals.

Sometimes seasonality stubbornly refused to look modern at all. Mushroom-hunting in particular appears as an activity that merges seasonality, gastronomic desire, and perceived tradition. Mushrooms could only be had fresh at certain times of year in the USSR. Lumped in with all other “vegetables” in statistical reports, they likely accounted for a negligible portion of agricultural output, since they do not represent nutritional staples and, as highly perishable produce, demand either processing or hasty sale. Moreover, the varieties of mushrooms—including ceps (also known as *porcini*), chanterelles, and saffron milk caps—most prized in Russian cookery only grow in the wild. Unlike button mushrooms and other common cultivated fungi, these species exist in symbiosis with the roots of certain trees and therefore thrive only in forests.<sup>82</sup> August and September thus remain *gribnaia pora*, or mushroom season, a time when millions of people took to the forests in search of these edible delicacies, engaging in the so-called “Russian national sport.”<sup>83</sup> To complement these activities, Soviet periodicals would hail the mushrooms’ appearance with recipes for stewed mushrooms, mushroom sauces, mushroom

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<sup>82</sup> Chanterelles, ceps, and milk caps are all examples of edible ectomycorrhizal mushrooms (EEMMs). As agricultural scientists Alessandra Zambonelli and Gregory M. Bonito explain, “EEMMs live in the soil as mutualistic symbionts, nourished by roots of trees and shrubs, and . . . play important roles in maintaining forest ecosystem health and diversity.” Such fungi “interact in the soil with other biota and microbes contributing to soil formation and nitrogen fixation,” as well as “bioprotection and soil detoxification.” Zambonelli and Bonito, “Preface,” in *Edible Ectomycorrhizal Mushrooms: Current Knowledge and Future Prospects*, ed. Zambonelli and Bonito (Berlin: Springer, 2012), v.

<sup>83</sup> Lynn Visson, *The Complete Russian Cookbook* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), 227; Andrei Lebedev, ed. *Vita Sovietica: Neakademicheskii slovar'-inventar' sovetskoi tsivilizatsii* (Moscow: Avgust, 2012), 62.

spreads, mushrooms baked in sour cream, and even mushroom “meatballs.” *Krest’ianka* and *Rabotnitsa* alike provided detailed instructions for drying, salting, or pickling mushrooms, suggesting that women in both the country and the city would be interested in acquiring additional knowledge on this topic.<sup>84</sup> *Nauka i zhizn’* and *Sem’ia i shkola* also touched on mushrooms, warning fungus-loving readers of poisonous varieties.<sup>85</sup> These treats would serve a family well throughout the winter, enriching an appetizer spread, flavoring soups, or appearing atop mounds of steaming buckwheat kasha.

Displaced Russians’ yearnings for their homeland’s mushrooms speak to the cultural importance of mushroom hunting for one-time residents of the USSR. In Western Europe or the US, finding the right mushrooms to prepare Russian dishes could prove a challenge. In 1964, Princess Alexandra Kropotkin thus complained that the “one flaw” in the American food supply is that there are “NOT ENOUGH DIFFERENT KINDS OF MUSHROOMS.” Mushrooms grow in the United States, “but where are our native American *cepes* and delightful orange-colored *chanterelles*? . . . Those magnificent species of mushroom are available only when flown in from France, for affluent gourmets to eat. . . . Silly!”<sup>86</sup> Later writers suggested using dried Italian or Polish mushrooms, but this would not replace the act of mushroom hunting itself.<sup>87</sup> Soviet émigré and food writer Anya von Bremzen thus advised her readers to pick and dry their own. In this way, they could enjoy “an essential Slavic ingredient” and understand why, in the USSR,

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<sup>84</sup> For articles on preserving mushrooms, see note 73 above.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, K. Petrovskii, “Griby,” *Nauka i zhizn’*, July 1965, 31-32; B. Aleksandrov, “Lesnye ovoshchi,” *Sem’ia i shkola*, August 1968, 59.

<sup>86</sup> Alexandra Kropotkin, *The Best of Russian Cooking* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), x. Emphasis in original. First published as *How to Cook and Eat in Russian* in 1947.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Petr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, *Russkaia kukhnia v izgnanii* (Los Angeles: Almanakh, 1987), 71; Jane Blanksteen, *Nothing Beats Borscht: Jane’s Russian Cookbook* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 80.



“everyone looks forward” to mushroom season.<sup>88</sup> For some, mushrooming could take on an almost spiritual quality. Discussing summers spent foraging in the forests near Leningrad in the 1970s, memoirist Elena Gorokhova asserted that the mushroom hunt “must start early, when tentative brightness bleeds from under the horizon, setting alight the stubble of forest across the field. . . . To find mushrooms, especially noble ones, you must know the spots . . . *intuitively*.”<sup>89</sup> Literary critics Aleksandr Genis and Petr’ Vail’ put it more succinctly, insisting that, “in this activity, as in no other, the Russian’s gentle soul is made manifest.”<sup>90</sup>

The dacha provided an important venue for harvesting, producing, and processing wild and homegrown fruits and vegetables. In this way, dachas became the key site where seasonality gave rise to ingenuity and resourcefulness, perpetuating and reinforcing traditional modes of food production. As historian Stephen Lovell has demonstrated, the postwar decades saw the dacha move from being a relatively exclusive privilege to a common feature of Russian life. In the Brezhnev years, dachas emerged as a “crucial part of the routine for millions of urban families.” As Lovell writes, “the dacha was a way of combating shortages—of guaranteeing a supply of fruits and vegetables that were not always to be seen on open sale.” Further, “the vegetables that could be bought [in stores] were in general so unappetizing as to give the concept of ‘homegrown’ produce a positive resonance that could never be matched in the West.”<sup>91</sup> The allure of homegrown foods proved so great for some Soviet urbanites that they might take to

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<sup>88</sup> Anya Von Bremzen and John Welchman, *Please to the Table: The Russian Cookbook* (New York: Workman, 1990), 495.

<sup>89</sup> Elena Gorokhova, *A Mountain of Crumbs: A Memoir* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 96. Emphasis added.

<sup>90</sup> Vail’ and Genis, *Russkaia kukhnia v izgnanii*, 73.

<sup>91</sup> Stephen Lovell, *Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 197, 206.

growing crops in plots of land intended for other purposes. As *Rabotnitsa* reported in 1976, on one block in Volgograd, local gardening enthusiasts provoked the anger of their neighbors by filling the courtyard with garden plots, leaving children without a place to play.<sup>92</sup> Even some public dining outlets took to raising apples and beans for school lunches, serving up pies with home-grown sorrel to collective farm workers, or fattening pigs—future menu items themselves—on kitchen scraps.<sup>93</sup>

Such gardening enterprises not only provided supplements to the diet, but also offered important social and cultural rewards. Lovell points out that acquiring a plot of land, building a dwelling, and tending a garden provided a sense of ownership, accomplishment, and satisfaction that might otherwise be hard won in a country where access to material comforts remained relatively restricted.<sup>94</sup> As anthropologist Nancy Ries argues, raising crops at the dacha also allowed Russians to perform “the ideals of resourcefulness, skill, discipline, and patience,” while revering a “connection (partly fantasized) with a simpler, more integral, and more independent peasant past.”<sup>95</sup> Further, according to anthropologist Melissa Caldwell, the dacha helped forge a uniquely Russian “ecological nationalism” that persists today. Rooted in the belief that Russians experience a unique connection to the soil and to Russian nature more generally, this “protectionist ethos” holds that nature will care for the people, rather than insisting—as per

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<sup>92</sup> “Dvor—ne ogorod!” *Rabotnitsa*, September 1976, 29.

<sup>93</sup> E. Sadovskii, “Menui samoe raznoobraznoe,” *Sem'ia i shkola*, June 1968, 34; “Obshchestvennoe pitanie na sele,” *Krest'ianka*, June 1968, 24; V. Kuz'minov, “Kafe v Novootaiskom,” *Krest'ianka*, November 1971, 29; Ia. Gol'tsman, “‘Slivka’ i ee khoziaiki,” *Krest'ianka*, February 1972, 32; T. Andreeva, “Obed v dvukh izmereniiakh,” *Rabotnitsa*, July 1982, 26-27.

<sup>94</sup> Lovell, *Summerfolk*, 207.

<sup>95</sup> Ries, *Russian Talk*, 133.

Western environmentalism—that the people must care for nature.<sup>96</sup> “Dacha season” thus allowed the doctor, the schoolteacher, and the factory worker a chance to feel connected to the earth and their own national past, while also circumventing the dysfunctional state-run food system.

Frustrating as the fluctuating availability of produce would often have been, it might, at least in some limited ways, actually have contributed to the quality of life of many people in Soviet Russia. These apparent shortcomings in the food supply system pushed many individuals and families to engage deeply with private food production, a process that could prove not only gastronomically, but likewise emotionally fulfilling. Yet dacha gardening and home canning by no means represented the core of the ideal diet that Soviet nutritionists envisioned. From this angle, the modernization of the Soviet diet appears to have remained largely rhetorical.

### **A Fishy Answer**

While attempting to put more fruits and vegetables on the table, Soviet nutritionists, dining officials, and other food experts also sought to provide the population with sufficient quantities of animal protein. Although the Soviet diet improved on the whole during the early Brezhnev years, supplies of basic foodstuffs—especially meat and dairy—remained unstable as a result of low productivity, periodic droughts, and the mishandling of raw goods. For instance, in 1969 and 1970, meat and eggs vanished from many stores, even in well-stocked Moscow, as a result of falling livestock and poultry inventories, the consequence of a harsh winter in 1968-69.<sup>97</sup> When these products did appear, their quality often left much to be desired. One furious resident of Novokuznetsk complained to *Izvestiia* in 1970 of the “poor quality dairy products,”

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<sup>96</sup> Caldwell, *Dacha Idylls*, 78-81.

<sup>97</sup> Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems*, 258-59.

including “sour milk and bad cottage cheese,” that often appeared in local stores. Even in the face of obvious defects, “the trade management and the state inspectors act as if they don’t notice.” Interestingly, *Izvestiia* treated this letter not as an indication of problems with the supply of meat and dairy products in the country, but as a matter of negligence on the part of trade workers. They should have returned the spoiled products to the factory, instead of “shamefully” describing the milk as “fresh.”<sup>98</sup> The store clerks and managers, however, would have known all too well that replacements were unlikely to be available. To remedy such problems, the USSR began importing large quantities of animal products from the West in 1970, adding to already critical imports from the Warsaw Pact states. In 1977, the state not only continued to bring in foodstuffs from abroad, but also turned to private production to replenish dwindling reserves. Rural dwellers could sell their produce to official trade organs or in urban farmers’ markets. The situation only worsened in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as agricultural output stagnated.<sup>99</sup> It now became common to stand in line to buy any sort of animal-based food product. The government even initiated rationing in some areas in 1980 and 1981.<sup>100</sup> With imports and private production failing to make up the difference between output and demand, officials turned to the ocean for answers.

Historically, fish represented a staple food for many pre-Christian Eastern Slavs and, after the adoption of Christianity, fish became even more important, providing the sole source of animal protein for the approximately 200 fast days the Orthodox Church decreed each year. Russians ate their fish fresh, dried, salted, smoked, or brined. Commoners living near lakes and

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<sup>98</sup> “Po obe storony prilavka,” *Izvestiia*, 9 March 1970.

<sup>99</sup> Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems*, 258-63, 307-30. For a comparison of investment in agriculture and agricultural output, see *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 313-14, 320-23.

rivers enjoyed a vast diversity of species, including pike, bream, whitefish, smelts, trout, and lamprey eels. Elites and merchants with the means to purchase pricy foods at the market also enjoyed “noble fish” (*krasnaia ryba*), including salmon, sturgeon, and sterlet. As the empire expanded, so did the range of fish in the Russian market. In particular, some saltwater species now also found their way into the diet, including dried Caspian roach and perch from the Black, Azov, and Caspian seas, and various kinds of brined fish (such as pickled herring) from the North Sea. Throughout the centuries, fish remained a familiar and important part of the Russian diet, even if patterns of fish consumption varied over time and from region to region. As historians R. E. F. Smith and David Christian assert, “the rule is that those near well-stocked rivers generally had access to plenty of fresh fish, though they might sell rather than consume it; those in or near towns could generally get salt or pickled fish; while those in rural areas far from good fishing ate hardly any fish at all, and what they did eat was mainly salted or dried.”<sup>101</sup>

Fish consumption declined over the first decades of Soviet rule and remained low into the early postwar period. Residents of rural and semiurban areas in Russia consumed between eight and ten kilograms of fish per year between 1896 and 1915, compared to only four kilograms per year in 1940.<sup>102</sup> This figure rose for all segments of the population to seven kilograms per year by 1950, but had still not attained prerevolutionary levels.<sup>103</sup> As fisheries analysts point out, prior to the Second World War, the Soviet fleet simply did not produce enough fish to put it on all Soviet tables. In 1938, the combined Soviet ocean, shore, and inland catches amounted to 1.55

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<sup>101</sup> Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 10, 272-74.

<sup>102</sup> See table 2.1, “Per Capita Consumption of Different Foodstuffs in Rural Russia, 1880-1960,” in Robert Deutsch, *The Food Revolution in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>103</sup> Iain M. MacSween, “Markets for Fish and Fishery Products in Eastern Europe,” FAO Fisheries Technical Paper 241, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (1983), 12.

million metric tons, only a portion of which would provide food for humans—the rest became industrial products, such as fishmeal and fish oil. In the early postwar years, this number declined, with 1948's total catch coming to just 1.49 million metric tons.<sup>104</sup> Research still remains to be done on additional causes of this decline, though urbanization, the disruption of former fishing and trade patterns, and ongoing attempts to restructure economy and agriculture surely played key roles.

Only in the post-Stalin era, did the Soviet fishing industry expand sufficiently for fish to once more become a true staple food. The (then relatively small) Soviet fishing fleet had been decimated in the Second World War, necessitating massive reconstruction and expansion after 1946. This project proved quite successful: By 1967, the USSR had achieved third place in terms of its total fish catch worldwide, behind only Peru and Japan, and it also possessed the world's largest fishing fleet.<sup>105</sup> Between 1950 and the mid-1970s, the total Soviet catch from all fishing zones increased significantly, from about 1.75 million metric tons in 1950 to almost ten million metric tons in 1975.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, fish consumption more than doubled during these years, soaring from seven kilograms per person in 1950 to more than eighteen kilograms in 1982.<sup>107</sup>

These numbers rose not only thanks to growing fish harvests, but also on account of ongoing efforts on the part of the Soviet trade system to put more fish on Soviet plates. Even as problems with transport and storage persisted, as they did throughout the food system, consumption grew. The Ministries of Trade and the Fish Industry worked together to push for the

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<sup>104</sup> See table 1 in Terence Armstrong, "Soviet Sea Fisheries Since the Second World War," *The Polar Record* 13, 83 (May 1966): 156; T. S. Sealy, "Soviet Fisheries: A Review," *Marine Fisheries Review* 36, 8 (August 1974): 9-10.

<sup>105</sup> Sealy, "Soviet Fisheries," 5.

<sup>106</sup> MacSween, "Markets for Fish and Fishery Products in Eastern Europe," 1.

<sup>107</sup> See table 10 in *Ibid.*, 12.

expansion of fish restaurants and seafood shops that would make fish more accessible to the average consumer. Trained nutritional and cooking experts traveled throughout the country to aid trade and public dining workers in preparing and promoting fish.<sup>108</sup> Beginning in the late 1960s, a growing number of restaurants and cafés took up aquatic themes, while ever more stores selling exclusively fish and seafood began appearing in Soviet cities.<sup>109</sup> In 1976, cafés, canteens, and restaurants from Kiev to Alma-Ata began featuring “Fish Day” once or twice even per week.<sup>110</sup> On Fish Day no meat would be served, only fish, grain, dairy and vegetable dishes. Ideally, this would introduce hesitant diners to a new lean protein source, while also filling in gaps created by shortfalls of meat.<sup>111</sup>

During the Brezhnev years, Soviet citizens encountered a vastly wider variety of fish, fish products, and seafood. The freshwater fish, salmon, and sturgeon that many Russians and residents of other European parts of the Soviet Union had long been familiar with faded somewhat, as industrialization and the intensification of agriculture precipitated a serious decline in freshwater fisheries. Between the 1930s and the early 1980s, the Volga River fish harvest, once rich in sturgeon, declined by approximately 90 percent, from more than 600,000 tons per year to about 60,000 tons per year. The annual catch in the Volga-Caspian watershed similarly

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<sup>108</sup> RGAE, f. 465, op. 1., d. 2376, ll. 14-15; f. 465, op. 1, d. 1972, ll. 37-40.

<sup>109</sup> In Moscow, the Chaika (Seagull) Restaurant (located on a boat in the Moscow River) moved to an all-fish menu in 1967. The Iakor’ (Anchor) Restaurant also switched to a fish format in the mid-1960s. The Ermitazh (Hermitage), specializing in fish and seafood, opened in 1972, while Moscow Restaurant Trust plans for that year proposed the creation of five additional bars and cafés with aquatic themes: Izba rybaka (Fisherman’s Hut), Rusalka (Mermaid), Rakushka (Seashell), Botik Petra (Peter’s Little Boat), and Del’fin (Dolphin). Tsentral’nyi arkhiv goroda Moskvyy (TsAGM), f. 224, op. 1, d. 277, l. 29; f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, ll. 54-55a; f. 224, op. 1, d. 344, l. 1; f. 224, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 57-58. By the late 1960s, Moscow had more fish stores than liquor stores. As of 1967, Moscow boasted 38 of the former and 30 of the latter. *Moskva v tsifrah za gody sovetskoi vlasti, 1917-67 gg.: Kratkii statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Statistika, 1967), 100.

<sup>110</sup> RGAE, f. 465, op. 1, d. 1972, l. 37.

<sup>111</sup> This idea was originally floated by Anastas Mikoyan in 1932, but was not implemented on a large scale until 1976. Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 186-87.

dropped by more than 40,000 tons.<sup>112</sup> In many cases, fish died because hydroelectric dams did not have effective fish ladders to allow their passage for migration.<sup>113</sup> Elsewhere, dams dried out areas that had once been spawning grounds for sturgeon and other valuable fish. For example, by one estimate, “the construction and operation of the Tsimlyansk and Nevinnomyssk dams on the rivers Don and Kuban . . . completely destroyed the spawning grounds of beluga and 80 percent of spawning grounds for other species of sturgeon.” In areas where fish continued to migrate and spawn, they often suffered as a result of pollution. Many proved unfit for consumption on account of disease or high concentrations in their flesh of pesticides and heavy metals. All told, on account of this disregard for ecology, the USSR’s “annual fish catch from inland lakes and rivers decreased from one million tons to just 200,000 tons” between 1948 and 1983.<sup>114</sup>

Historians have observed some of the consequences of the decline of Soviet freshwater fisheries in the postwar decades. Historians N. B. Lebina and A. N. Chistikov note that Soviet consumers felt the effects of diminishing fish stocks already in the mid-1950s, when supplies of river and lake fish in stores decreased and trade organs first began advertising frozen ocean fish. Some fish shops in major cities had featured aquariums of live fish, which all but emptied by the late 1950s. In Leningrad, consumers began to complain to local officials about the lack of fresh fish by 1960. Also in the early 1960s, the once-numerous advertisements for canned and dried fish products vanished from newspapers, at about the same time whale sausage, a legendarily

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<sup>112</sup> D. J. Peterson, *Troubled Lands: The Legacy of Soviet Environmental Destruction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 78.

<sup>113</sup> A fish ladder is a construction that allows fish to pass unharmed over a dam or other structure located in a spawning stream. If improperly constructed, they can kill fish or prevent spawning and migration. A typical fish ladder resembles a flight of stairs submerged in running water.

<sup>114</sup> Peterson, *Troubled Lands*, 61, 78.



unpopular product, appeared in stores.<sup>115</sup> Historian and food writer V. V. Pokhlebkin, meanwhile, remarked in his *Cuisine of the Century* (*Kukhnia veka*, 2000) on the slow dying-out of “traditional” modes of fishing and fish cookery in Russia and across the USSR’s northwestern region. Fewer small freshwater fish were harvested, while such dishes as fresh *ukha* (clear fish soup) and fish cooked in egg and milk began to fade from memory (though the countless recipes for *ukha* found in late Soviet cookbooks suggest that this estimation may be overblown). According to Pokhlebkin, only in the Baltic region—an area that did not undergo the intense and environmentally destructive waves of Stalin-era industrialization—did traditional freshwater fish dishes continue to hold a prominent place in the menu.<sup>116</sup>

As freshwater fish slowly vanished from view, ocean fish and seafood took an ever more prominent place on the Soviet table—or at least tried to. The Soviet fishing industry expanded considerably after the Second World War and emphasis shifted from collective fishing farms (focused on inland catches) and fleets fishing coastal waters (harvesting mainly herring and salmon) to massive trawlers and processing boats taking in fish on the high seas. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet ships moved into new areas including the Bering Sea, the Gulf of Alaska, and the Indian Ocean. With these changes came increased quantities of plaice, coalfish, redfish, halibut, Pacific cod, king crab, and Alaska pollock, among other species.<sup>117</sup> Other seafoods also grew in importance with, for instance, Soviet boats making their first commercial catches of octopus in 1965.<sup>118</sup> By the mid-1960s, optimism about the potential of seafood to

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<sup>115</sup> Lebina and Chistikov, *Obyvatel’ i reformy*, 233.

<sup>116</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka* (Moscow: Polifakt, 2000), 315-16.

<sup>117</sup> Armstrong, “Soviet Sea Fisheries,” 158, 160-61, 164-66.

<sup>118</sup> Lev Zenkevich, Galina Korobkina, Stefan Mikhailov, and Rita Shteiman, *Dary moria* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1968), 87.

supplement or even replace other common foods was running high, as exemplified in a 1965 article published in the trade journal *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* (Public Dining). Entitled “Neptune’s Riches,” the piece outlined the vast array of edibles that could be found in the sea, declaring them all highly nutritious. Crabs, mollusks, sea cucumbers, seaweed, and plankton offered new culinary possibilities. Mammals such as seals could provide “sea beef,” perhaps someday being herded by trained dolphin-shepherds.<sup>119</sup> From this perspective, the future of the Soviet diet looked bright and quite fishy.

Fantasies of undersea livestock herding aside, the trend toward an open-sea harvest continued and, by 1976, more than 88 percent of the total Soviet catch came from the high seas, as opposed to 57 percent in 1950. After 1976, the diversity of fish and seafood entering the Soviet food system expanded even more, as new international regulations pushed Soviet fleets further from coastal regions and into new fishing zones. With the UN’s blessing, numerous countries moved in the mid-1970s to extend their zones of exclusive fishing rights to as much as 200 miles from the shore. As Iain M. MacSween of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization wrote in 1983, this change to a “system of national fisheries jurisdictions” largely replaced “unrestricted international access to the world’s marine fish resources.” In response, the USSR extended its own protected zone in the winter and spring of 1976-77. But the fishing industry still had to make adjustments. Soviet fleets now moved from the northwest, west, and west-central zones of the Atlantic to the Atlantic’s southwest, southeast, and Antarctic zones, while gaining near-exclusive rights to much of the northwest Pacific Ocean. As a result, catches of such fish as herring (Atlantic and Pacific), Atlantic cod, and some species of mackerel declined between 1976 and 1981. These declines included some high-demand fish (e.g., redfishes and

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<sup>119</sup> I. Vol’per, “Bogatstva Neptuna,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, March 1965, 45-46.

hake), catches of which were mainly made up through increased fishing of Alaska pollock. At the same time, quantities of some previously unfamiliar fish and other sea creatures rose, including Gunther's notothenia, blue whiting (*putassu*), squid, and Antarctic krill (see tables 6 and 7).<sup>120</sup> Changes in international law altered the composition of the Soviet catch, tipping the balance toward animals previously unknown to Soviet diners and fishing professionals alike.

**Table 6** Decreases in Species Catch by Soviet Vessels (in Tons), 1976-81

Species	1976	1981
Atlantic mackerel	370,303	3,874
Jack and horse mackerel	381,141	185,271
Atlantic herring	155,693	111,538
Pacific herring	208,975	85,552
European sardines	517,380	185,850
Sprats	166,620	99,002
European anchovy	274,694	197,560
Atlantic redfishes	419,203	118,347
Atka mackerel	88,749	3,676
Capelin	895,153	727,886
Atlantic horse mackerel	188,803	183
Cape horse mackerel	410,261	362,393
Blue grenadier	41,735	3,235
Atlantic cod	467,534	176,752
Silver hake	134,988	40,336
North Pacific hake	158,047	311
Capes hake	296,645	33,943
Senagalese hake	59,542	2,830

Source: MacSween, "Markets for Fish and Fishery Products in Eastern Europe," 9-10.

<sup>120</sup> Macsween, "Markets for Fish and Fishery Products in Eastern Europe," 1, 5, 7, 9-11.

**Table 7** Increases in Species Catch by Soviet Vessels (in Tons), 1976-81

	1976	1981
Japanese John Dory	1,571	25,167
Gunther's notothenia	0	36,758
Blue whiting	26,730	522,951
Alaska pollock	2,090,869	2,137,875
Pacific cod	22,420	40,997
Chilean horse mackerel	0	554,646
Cunene horse mackerel	0	92,439
Trigger fishes	0	96,285
Chub mackerel	375,507	415,290
Japanese pilchard	0	461,000
Sardinellas	215	111,204
Squids	17,300	39,565
Antarctic krill	500	420,434

Source: MacSween, "Markets for Fish and Fisheries Products in Eastern Europe," 10.

Much of this produce underwent processing at sea, aboard ships outfitted for cleaning, salting, smoking, freezing, and canning everything from herring to squid to seaweed.

Approximately 80 percent of the Soviet catch was processed at sea as of 1983.<sup>121</sup> In sum, then, not only did the portion of the Soviet diet coming from the ocean increase during the Brezhnev years, but oceanic foods also largely arrived in customers' hands in various semi-processed forms. Clearly, the home cook would require some direction in making use of this new bounty.

Nutritionists and cooking experts stepped in to help Soviet consumers figure out how to move these foods from market to table. Books dedicated to preparing fish and/or seafood began

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 9.

appearing in the 1960s, just as the rejuvenated Soviet fleet hit its stride.<sup>122</sup> Several of the earliest such volumes focused on herrings, sardines, and other small fish widely available in various forms, including salted and canned.<sup>123</sup> These works typically provided instructions for turning these humble fish into diverse and tasty dishes. Ia. I. Magidov's 1967 *Dishes and Ready-to-Serve Foods from Herring-type Fishes* (Bliuda i kulinarnye izdeliia iz sel'devykh ryb) thus offered 200 recipes ranging from simple herring sandwiches to sprats baked in puff pastry.<sup>124</sup> Yet now authors came to dwell ever more on the rich variety of unfamiliar fishes that Soviet shoppers would now find in stores. Texts published in the 1970s and early 1980s still provided plenty of recipes for well-known fish such as herring and cod, but tended to devote most of their pages to novel ocean fish, including blue whiting, eelpouts (*bel'diuga*), wolfish (*zubatka*), and Alaska pollock (*mintai*).<sup>125</sup> Other volumes gave home cooks guidance in working with seafoods other than fish. The 1968 text *Gifts of the Sea* (Dary moria) concentrated on recipes for sea kale (*morskaia kapusta*), scallops, mussels, sea cucumber, squid, shrimp, oysters, octopus, sea urchins, sea stars, lampreys, clams, jellyfish, whelks, and various canned seafood products.<sup>126</sup>

Even as they engaged in a modernizing effort by aiding the introduction of new foods into the Soviet diet, these authors explicitly aimed to make such products feel more familiar and less intimidating or mysterious. Their texts addressed head-on the skepticism with which many

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<sup>122</sup> On publication data, see note 77 above.

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, *Zakuski iz sel'di* (Tallinn: Sovnarkhoz Estonskoi SSR, Upravlenie rybnoi promyshlennosti BII, 1961); V. I. Trofimova and R. A. Shteinman, *150 bliud iz salaki, kil'ki, khamisy, i tiul'ki* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1965); Ia. I. Magidov, *Bliuda i kulinarnye izdeliia iz sel'devykh ryb* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1967).

<sup>124</sup> Magidov, *Bliuda i kulinarnye izdeliia iz sel'devykh ryb*.

<sup>125</sup> See for example: B. P. Nikitin, *Morskaia ryba*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1974); V. I. Trofimova, *Sovetuem prigotovit': Rybnye bliuda* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1978); L. A. Starostina and R. V. Dobrosovestnaia, *Rybnye bliuda*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1983).

<sup>126</sup> Zenkevich, et al., *Dary moria*.

consumers met novel ingredients. As *Gifts of the Sea* recognized, the appearance of strange comestibles often caused “bewilderment,” rather than the feeling of “pleasant surprise” with which shoppers would greet new shoes or fabrics. Experts could help assuage feelings of trepidation and confusion by offering information about the properties of the foods in question. The authors of *Gifts of the Sea*—with three academics among them—thus sought to warm the reader up to scallops, mussels, and other sea creatures by highlighting their nutritive potential (rich in protein, vitamins, and micronutrients), as well as their tastiness, evidence of which came from the presence of these foods in the diets of peoples around the world.<sup>127</sup> Food experts continued singing this tune well into the 1980s. The authors of *Fish Cookery* (*Rybnaia kukhnia*), published in 1984, similarly observed that new varieties of fish still arouse “feelings of suspicion and distrust.”<sup>128</sup> They, like their colleagues writing earlier, concluded that this unease about new foods derived from a simple lack of information.

Fish-focused cookbooks thus attempted, first and foremost, to convince the Soviet public to consume ocean fish and seafood for their health, implicitly arguing that these comestibles suited modern standards of nutrition. The Soviet home cook could now have at her fingertips data detailing the quantity of vitamin A in sea kale or the amount of protein provided by one serving of pikeperch poached in milk.<sup>129</sup> Concerned that readers might not give up their meaty ways, authors insisted time and again that fish was just as good as, or perhaps better than, beef, lamb, or pork. In *Ocean Fish* (*Morskaia ryba*, 1970 and 1974), Boris Nikitin took on the popular belief that fish offers less nutrition than meat. Meat makes one feel fuller, but this results,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 9-11.

<sup>128</sup> N. I. Brunnek and I. N. Morozova, *Rybnaia kukhnia* (Moscow: Legkaia i pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1984), 3-4.

<sup>129</sup> Zenkevich, et al., *Dary moria*, 17; Starostina and Dobrosovetsnaia, *Rybnye bliuda*, 136.

according to Nikitin, from the fact that it takes longer for the body to process. In order to feel satisfied, one should eat fish along with “bountiful vegetable side dishes and sufficient, but not excessive” amounts of fat. Indeed, “it has been proven that fish meals are healthier and more hygienic than meat [meals].”<sup>130</sup> By the mid-1980s, experts had settled firmly on the notion that the nutritional value of ocean fish exceeded that of warm-blooded animals. The authors of *Fish Cookery* contended that fish contained more minerals, more digestible proteins, a higher proportion of healthy unsaturated fats, and micronutrients (e.g., creatine and lactic acid).<sup>131</sup> A proper diet appeared to be one that included a variety of ocean fish and seafood, even if many of these creatures had never before been available for consumption in Russia.

As part of a balanced diet, fish could also offer greater variety than consumers would get from the usual rotation of vegetables, dairy, meat, and grains. As the authors of *Fish Cookery* note, as of the early 1980s, Soviet fisheries were catching at least 400 different species of ocean fish intended for human consumption, including 300 that had not been eaten in Russia before the Second World War.<sup>132</sup> Some of these went directly into industrial processing, though many entered the trade system whole or filleted, awaiting transformation in the home or professional kitchen. To this list, we can add squid, octopus, lobster and langoustines, crab, mussels, oysters, scallops, whelks, several species of sea cucumbers, and sea kale, as well as shark and whale.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Nikitin, *Morskaia ryba*, 5. Also see Trofimova, *Sovetuem prigotovit'*, 2.

<sup>131</sup> Brunnek and Morozova, *Rybnaia kukhnia*, 5.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 13. Lebina and Pokhlebkin have both complained that the move to ocean fish created greater culinary homogeneity unionwide, as people consumed fewer local freshwater fish and more mass-produced saltwater fish products. This does not mean, however, that *individual* diets grew more homogenous. Rather, it means that everyone was eating a wider variety of foods, but that this array became increasingly uniform across the USSR, especially in the RSFSR. Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy,” 229; Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 314-15.

<sup>133</sup> Recipes for all of these foods are listed in Brunnek and Morozova, *Rybnaia kukhnia*. The majority of these also appear in Zenkevich, et al., *Dary moria*.

Books on fish cookery generally offered recipes calling for between twenty and eighty different kinds of fish, sometimes in addition to crustaceans, mollusks, and other sea creatures. Recipes proved equally diverse. They ranged from “traditional” dishes, such as fish-stuffed *kulebiaka* and fish in lemon-butter sauce, to novel culinary adventures, including fish doughnuts and rice salad with krill paste.<sup>134</sup> Further, sampling a diverse array of foods—including different ocean fish—not only made dinner more interesting, but also conformed to the standards of modern “rational dining,” which held that better nutrition came from a varied diet.<sup>135</sup>

There was a vast variety of ocean fish being eaten in Brezhnev’s Soviet Union, though not all of these fish would have been available at the same time. As the language used in these texts and in press articles on fish cooking hint, kitchen professionals and home cooks had simply to work with what was available on any given day.<sup>136</sup> Many recipes provided some flexibility. Stuffed fish, for example, could be made with macrurous, grouper, hake, or “other” fish.<sup>137</sup> Soviet trade also treated certain kinds of fish as essentially interchangeable, selling numerous different species and subspecies under a single “trade name.” For instance, more than thirty different fishes appeared in stores under the name “Far Eastern flounder,” while “cod” (*treska*) could mean cod, haddock, pollock, Arctic cod, saffron cod, hake, European hake, or rockling.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> One example of fish *kulebiaka* can be found in Starostina and Dobrosovestnaia, *Rybnye bliuda*, 134. Nikitin offers a recipe for fish in “Polish” (lemon-butter) sauce, similar to that found in virtually any standard Soviet cookbook. Nikitin, *Morskaia ryba*, 100-101. *Ponchiki iz rybnogo testa* (fish doughnuts) appeared in “Dary moria,” *Rabotnitsa*, November 1969, 31. *Salat risovyi s pastoi “Okean”* (rice salad with “Ocean” krill paste) appeared in Usov, *Ryba na vashem stole*, 197.

<sup>135</sup> Nikitin, *Morskaia ryba*, 4; Brunnek and Morozova, *Rybnaia kukhnia*, 10; Usov, *Ryba na vashem stole*, 144.

<sup>136</sup> Lebina notes that “good fish” could be hard to find. This does not mean that fish was unavailable, but that preferred varieties, such as sturgeon and pikeperch were often difficult to obtain. Natalia B. Lebina, *Entsiklopediia banal’nostei: Sovetskaia povsednevnost’: Kontury, simvol’y, znaki* (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2008), 312.

<sup>137</sup> Trofimova, *Sovetuem prigotovit’*, 5-6.

<sup>138</sup> Nikitin, *Morskaia ryba*, 19; Brunnek and Morozova, *Rybnaia kukhnia*, 14.



This may have caused some consternation among customers, some of whom would have noticed differences in appearance, taste, and texture from one piece of “cod” to the next. Cookbooks sought to help readers overcome such feelings by giving them clues to understanding which fish was which. As Nikitin wrote, “the most experienced housewives” could tell haddock from cod by identifying the distinctive black stripe that runs along a haddock’s back, an important piece of wisdom, as haddock tastes better.<sup>139</sup> Knowledge—whether gained through “experience” or reading cookbooks—appears in this view as the key to properly understanding and enjoying the USSR’s oceanic riches.

Tradition offered another lure for consumers who remained unconvinced by appeals based on health-consciousness and promises of variety. Operating with this vision in mind, V. V. Usov, an economist, advertising expert, and prolific writer on culinary matters, thus submitted a unique entry into the canon of Soviet fish cookbooks in 1979 with *Fish on Your Table* (*Ryba na vashem stole*). Usov made the usual statements about the healthfulness of eating fish in his discussion of “modern fish cookery,” which he defined largely in terms of wholesomeness, convenience, and novelty. Yet a reverence for centuries-old Russian and foreign traditions also informed this work. Russia would prove an especially fruitful place for expanding fish consumption, as Russia’s “distinctive and deeply national” cuisine had long involved quantities of fish, and Russia’s chefs played a crucial role in the development of modern fish cuisine. This shaped Russians’ “dining culture,” giving them a taste for fish and countless means to prepare it. Some of the most worthy dishes of this tradition, however, had been lost. Usov set out to “resurrect” them, while setting aside those he deemed “low-calorie and crude-tasting.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Nikitin, *Morskaia ryba*, 50.

<sup>140</sup> Usov, *Ryba na vashem stole*, 3-5, 76, 139-55.

But what of the fact that ocean fish, now the dominant fishes in the Soviet trade system, rarely appeared on prerevolutionary Russian tables?<sup>141</sup> Usov first attempts to make these products seem less suspicious by discussing their use in the ancient world. Focusing on Greece, Usov points to the habits there of salting and marinating scomber, anchovies, tuna, and sturgeon, and of harvesting oysters, mussels, crab, and sturgeon caviar. “Contemporary housewives,” when confronted with odd-looking specimens at the fish counter, could take comfort in the fact that the ancients prized these creatures.<sup>142</sup> Further, Usov’s discussion of Greek custom not only establishes a precedent for eating the fish now appearing in Soviet markets, but also draws a connection between the ancient world and the Soviet Union, by focusing on the ancient Greek fishing and trade regions that were now part of the USSR: Chersonesus, once located on the site of modern Sevastopol, and Pontic Olbia, near the Southern Bug estuary in Ukraine. Usov also highlights Russia’s native uses of fish that live in saltwater and spawn in freshwater, such as salmon and sturgeon, as well as true ocean fishes, including cod, mackerel, capelin, silver hake, whiting, and saffron cod, which first appeared in cities in the early eighteenth century. While these fishes, which remained expensive and in limited availability, did not become common fare until the twentieth century, their use in prerevolutionary Russia meant that these fish were not all that “new” and could therefore be trusted. Moreover, a range of fish and seafoods could be used to make such staples as fish aspic, ukha, solianka (a sour and zesty soup), kulebiaka, pel’meni

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<sup>141</sup> Usov raises this question. *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 18.

(stuffed, boiled dumplings), and borshch.<sup>143</sup> Even unfamiliar fish, then, could appear comfortable and traditional, rather than intimidating and novel.

For some, ocean foods represented part of a venerable native tradition, but for others the allure of fish and seafood came from their newness. Nikitin thus introduced his *Ocean Fish* with a brief discourse on taste, highlighting the persistent difficulties that face anyone who attempts to introduce a new food. “In nothing else does a person evince such conservatism, such strong devotion to the familiar . . . as in relation to food.” The Soviet public’s aversion to unfamiliar ocean fish, in his view, mirrors the Muslim “antipathy” to pork, which Nikitin describes as “instinctive.” Assuming that such aversions ought to be overcome, Nikitin suggests that only education and experience can change entrenched tastes. One has to get to know a new product, to come to understand its properties, how it tastes, and what it can be used for. This proves easier for more “cultured” people. As Nikitin asserts, “the higher [a person’s] level of culture . . . the more he has traveled and conferred closely with people of different traditions, tastes, and customs, the more quickly and easily he will overcome the psychological barriers of ‘food conservatism.’”<sup>144</sup> This distinction between culturedness and conservatism echoed contrasts made in Stalin-era Soviet food rhetoric, between the choice to either adhere to “familiar tastes and habits” or take the “revolutionary” path, embracing new foods and learning “new tastes.” The latter option was the correct one, as it aligned with the stunning development of the Soviet food industry, and took advantage of the healthful and convenient foods it offered.<sup>145</sup> “Food

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 10-11, 24-26, 33-74. Other authors similarly offer familiar dishes featuring unfamiliar products. See, for example, the versions of borshch with scallops, mussels, squid, sea cucumber, or sea kale offered in Zenkevich, et al., *Dary moria*, 138, 168, 181, 196, 210.

<sup>144</sup> Nikitin, *Morskaia ryba*, 3-4.

<sup>145</sup> *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (1952), 14-16.

conservatism” reflected ignorance and backwardness, while a willingness to try new foods signaled sophistication and modernity. The cultured individual would boldly try new foods, even those from mysterious briny deep.

As the wealth of fish and seafood products available to Soviet consumers grew, publishing houses poured ever more energy and ink into providing an onslaught of information that would hopefully convince the public to embrace these comestibles. Each cookbook reader would ideally become an authority on the matter of fish, taking in nutritional data, lengthy descriptions of various kinds of fish and seafood, disquisitions on the wonders of canned seafood products, and careful instructions for preparing everything from herring to whale. Much as the Soviet food establishment sought to remake the popular diet, cookbooks offered to reshape the individual diner. Their first aim was, simply, to make the reader more informed. This would allow home cooks and shoppers to feel differently, and therefore interact differently, with the foods available to them. Ideally, upon reading these texts, sunfish, John Dory, and canned seaweed would no longer evoke “bewilderment,” “suspicion,” or “hesitation.” Shoppers instead would be able to identify these items and regard them as wholesome. Moreover, these texts promised other transformations. By learning about and preparing fish, one could—so the story went—become more sophisticated, tap into historical cultural roots or take part in a culinary performance of modernity. Ultimately, this project aimed to make the public healthier and, if not happier, then at least more comfortable with the current food supply.

Yet many people proved reluctant to get on board, in spite of Soviet food experts’ extensive appeals. In the public dining system, Fish Days failed to gain popularity, though they continued in some establishments so long as fish was available.<sup>146</sup> Pokhlebkina contends that

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<sup>146</sup> Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 186-87.

these events may have damaged fish's status in the Soviet mind, as cooks in most cafeterias prepared the fish poorly, making the public dread seeing it on the menu.<sup>147</sup> Also, the sheer fact that publishing houses kept churning out books about cooking fish suggests that the state continued to feel it necessary to push these products and to convince people that they were “no worse than meat.” While plenty of Soviet citizens enjoyed fish—it remains a popular item today—meat abided as the object of popular desire, an elusive marker of good living. As one Soviet joke (*anekdot*) holds, “A man can forgive his wife for unfaithfulness, but not for secretly eating meat without him.”<sup>148</sup> Fish, no matter its nutritive value, would have been less likely to pique his jealousy.

### **Learning Culturedness Through Dining**

The changes the state attempted to make to food culture in the Brezhnev years dealt not only with questions of health, but also with concerns about the public's level of culture. While discussions of culturedness (*kul'turnost'*) remained scarce in cooking advice literature, they appeared prominently in discourses on public dining, especially those treating restaurants and cafés, rather than canteens. Considering how dining officials addressed culturedness can thus offer some important insights into the place of “culture” in the late Soviet food sphere. Public dining establishments were to act as venues for cultured leisure. Indeed, since the Stalin years, restaurants and cafés intended to serve this very function, serving as sites where Soviet citizens,

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<sup>147</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 312-13.

<sup>148</sup> Anecdote no. 2718 in M. Mel'nichenko, *Sovetskii anekdot: Ukazatel' siuzhetov* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014), 555.

most often elites, could perform their sophistication.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, the idea of culturedness itself had been in the water, so to speak, since the Soviet Union's earliest days, although its forms had shifted somewhat over the years, moving from a concern for tooth-brushing and basic literacy to a "culture of propriety" more akin to prerevolutionary ideals of refinement.<sup>150</sup>

Taking a closer look at youth cafés, as well as regular cafés and restaurants, in the 1960s and 1970s reveals that not only distinctive methods of conveying and embodying culturedness, but also distinctive failures in efforts to promote culturedness emerged in the post-Stalin era and crystallized in the Brezhnev years. Moscow provides an ideal illustration of these trends. The capital served as a testing ground for new methods of service, while also boasting a dynamic dining scene. Between 1960 and 1980, Moscow's dining system grew by 2,210 establishments, initially exceeding and then keeping pace with population growth (see table 8). During the 1970s, this number included more than 300 restaurants and approximately 2,500 cafés and snack bars—the kinds of venues in which one would theoretically practice cultured leisure. While many of the capital's eateries were quite plain, a good number paid careful attention to the ambience they offered diners.<sup>151</sup> One could enjoy snacks accompanied by American pop music, a four-course meal and a floorshow, a Russian-style tea service, or just about anything in between.<sup>152</sup> Neither the food nor the entertainments on offer always lived up to expectations, and it often proved nearly impossible to gain access to the hottest cafés and restaurants. But with

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<sup>149</sup> Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*, 113-15.

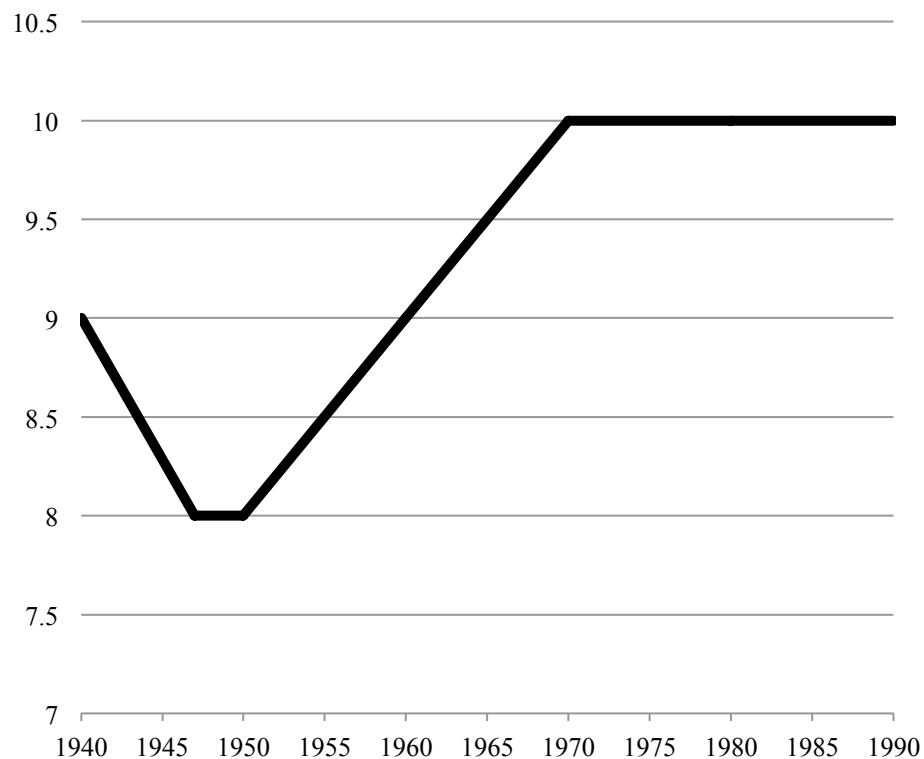
<sup>150</sup> Michael David-Fox, "What is Cultural Revolution?" *Russian Review* 58, 2 (April 1999): 192; Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 80-83.

<sup>151</sup> Statisticheskoe upravlenie goroda Moskvy, *Moskva v tsifrakh, 1971-1975 gg.: Kratkii statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Statistika, 1976), 122.

<sup>152</sup> *The Moscow Gourmet*, a unique dining guide published in 1974, provides probably the best sense of the surprising diversity of Moscow's late Soviet restaurant scene. Lynn Fisher and Wesley Fisher, *The Moscow Gourmet: Dining Out in the Capital of the USSR* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1974).

enough money and patience—and a willingness to sometimes pay bribes—a Muscovite or a visitor to the city could choose from a diverse variety of dining establishments and experiences.

**Table 8** Dining Establishments per 10,000 People in Moscow, 1940-90



Source: G. S. Barabanshchikov and E. I. Kuznetsova, eds., *Mosvka v tsifrakh: S nachala veka do nashikh dnei* (Moscow: Moskovskii gorodskoi komitet gosudarstvennoi statistiki, 1997).

In the 1960s and 1970s, dining administrators approached cultured leisure largely as a matter of organization and instruction. Moscow’s youth cafés provide one of the most vivid examples of this phenomenon. First appearing in the early 1960s on the initiative of Komsomol (Communist Youth League) members and local dining officials, youth cafés aimed in particular at cultivating Soviet youth. As historian Gleb Tsipursky has pointed out, youth cafés removed teens and twenty-somethings from private apartments to “spaces of collective influence and state monitoring.” The young activists who organized leisure activities within each youth café received instruction on discouraging “inappropriate” forms of dress and behavior, as well as

direction in which activities constituted “cultured leisure.”<sup>153</sup> The interiors needed to conform to “modern” aesthetic standards: clean, streamlined design, rather than the fussy, opulent, and potentially “bourgeois” trappings typical of Stalin-era cafés and restaurants.<sup>154</sup> Drapes, oil paintings, and potted ferns were out; glass, open spaces, and minimalist décor were in. The fictional Café Oduvanchik (Dandelion) underwent such a transformation in the popular 1965 film *Give Me the Complaints Book* (*Daite zhalobnuiu knigu*, dir. E. Riazanov), thanks to a spunky young administrator who whipped the café’s look, staff, and entertainments into shape, making them appropriate for a dynamic, postwar youth (see figures 2 and 3).



**Figure 2** Oduvanchik’s old aesthetic featured drapes, wall sconces, and dusty oil paintings. The impudent server and piles of dirty dishes also fail to conform to standards of culturedness. Source: *Daite zhalobnuiu knigu* (1965).

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<sup>153</sup> Gleb Tsipursky, “Pleasure, Power, and the Pursuit of Communism: Soviet Youth and State-Sponsored Popular Culture During the Early Cold War, 1945-1968” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2011), 382-83.

<sup>154</sup> Susan E. Reid discusses the turn to modern design aesthetics in “Destalinization and Taste, 1953-1963,” *Journal of Design History* 10, 2 (1997): 177-201.





**Figure 3** Oduvanchik in its new guise as a youth café is less cramped and features clean, almost minimalist design, including modern lighting fixtures and large windows, as well as good service and contemporary music. Source: *Daite zhalobnuiu knigu* (1965).

At Oduvanchik’s real-life counterparts, appropriate activities included poetry readings, discussions with writers, actors, and other creative intellectuals, and, during the Brezhnev years, meetings with veterans, who would help youngsters appreciate their elders’ heroism and sacrifice.<sup>155</sup> Music and dancing also potentially represented “cultured leisure,” although this depended upon its form. Jazz remained controversial—some cafés allowed jazz performances, but officials often frowned upon this—and dancing could prove acceptable so long as it did not hew too closely to Western trends.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Tsipursky, “Pleasure, Power, and the Pursuit of Communism,” 377; Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy,” 227; TsAGM, f. 453, op. 1, d. 2019, l. 11. The introduction of meetings with veterans likely grew out of the enthusiastic veneration of the memory of Great Patriotic War evident in the Brezhnev era. See Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>156</sup> On Komsomol activists’ and state officials’ views on Western-style dances during the early 1960s, see Tsipursky, “Pleasure, Power, and the Pursuit of Communism,” 371-76. As Tsipursky also notes, the acceptability of jazz waxed and waned in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years. While the Brezhnev regime was mainly tolerant of jazz, much of Soviet society still regarded it as dangerously Western and un-Soviet. Ibid., 402-6, 416-18. In 1966, the MRT considered turning one of the city’s most popular youth cafés, Café Molodezhnoe (Youth), into an ice cream parlor because its evenings of jazz and dancing had become a wild spectacle. Molodezhnoe, however, continued to function as a youth café after this spasm of anti-jazz sentiment. TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 280, l. 12.

The Moscow Restaurant Trust also set out in the mid-1960s to create an organized, didactic atmosphere in regular cafés and full-service restaurants. In 1966, the Moscow Restaurant Trust thus introduced the “Leisure Day” (*Den’ otdykha*), an afternoon event that invited workers to enjoy a special program of food and entertainment at an MRT establishment. As many workers moved to a five-day (from a six-day) work week, the Leisure Day would serve the “thousands upon thousands of people” who could now spend more time “raising their knowledge and culture [and] better organizing their leisure.” Like the events held at youth cafés, the Leisure Day served at once to cultivate Soviet individuals and serve the interests of society as a whole. Each day off spent in a “happy and cultured” manner gave the individual a “charge of vivacity,” which in turn benefitted the collective by improving not only the worker’s mood, but also his or her “labor and creative activity” for the rest of the week. Restaurants benefitted financially from these events, which brought in new customers and filled the dining room on weekend afternoons, when trade tended to be slow.<sup>157</sup>

Leisure Days aimed to broaden restaurants’ customer base, while also educating Soviet consumers in cultured recreation. Leisure Days featured dining, dancing, and games, rather than the restaurant’s usual menu and service.<sup>158</sup> The first such event, hosted at the Ukraine Restaurant in October 1966, brought together factory laborers, medical workers, and middle-school teachers for an afternoon of revelry. Visitors participated in “mass” dances and group sing-alongs, while enjoying a *prix fixe* menu of Ukrainian specialties.<sup>159</sup> Later Leisure Days followed a similar pattern, with visitors choosing neither their meal nor how they would spend their time before and

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<sup>157</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, l. 108-9.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 108-23; TSAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 283, l. 27-29; f. 224, op. 1, d. 391, l. 5; f. 224, op. 1, d. 321, ll. 2-3.

<sup>159</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, ll. 111-14.

between courses. Typically, entertainments were scripted, menus were fixed, and attendance was by invitation only.<sup>160</sup> These events aimed to open “the restaurant’s doors to the broad mass of workers” and, most importantly, transformed the restaurant into “a place of cultured leisure for people from the lathe, the driver’s seat, the workbench, the teacher’s desk, [and] the drawing board.”<sup>161</sup> Yet the tightly controlled nature of the Leisure Day suggests that the restaurant intended not simply to create opportunities for “cultured leisure,” but to *teach* customers how to pursue leisure in a cultured way. Lathe-operators and bus drivers would presumably not have known how to behave in a restaurant otherwise. They needed to be civilized; they had to be instructed how to behave as part of a modern, socialist public.

Restaurants and cafés theoretically would provide an education in cultured behavior during regular service, as well. Speaking on the theme of “cultured service” to a group of Moscow dining workers in 1968, one Tarasov, a server at the Volga Restaurant, reflected on the importance of his pedagogical role. Thanks to improvements in laborers’ standards of living, he asserted, many could now “go to restaurants where they have never been, where some once considered it disgraceful to go.” Encountering this new environment, workers would need guidance to “understand the restaurant’s culture.” Tarasov thus insisted that “it is not embarrassing to tell them how to use the utensils, what the fish fork is for, what each glass is for, but it is necessary to do this tactfully, softly, cautiously.” Each server needed to understand not only how to set the table, describe dishes, and fold napkins. He or she must also study “the

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<sup>160</sup> For instance, a 1971 Fisherman’s Day at the Volga Restaurant was presided over by a master of ceremonies, who cajoled diners into participating in singing, cooking, and fishing competitions whenever they were not eating. TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 325, l. 10.

<sup>161</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, l. 117.

human character, human psychology, and national peculiarities.”<sup>162</sup> In this view, dining room staff facilitated a specific kind of interaction with the restaurant, teaching diners to act the part of the modern, cultured consumer.

Cultured leisure would ideally be fun and a bit frivolous, while remaining reserved, polite, and relatively sober. One who dined in a cultured manner knew the purpose of each utensil and glass on the table, could appreciate good music, and cheerfully interacted with tablemates and neighbors. A cultured diner also avoided obvious intoxication. For this reason, the dining apparatus encouraged youth cafés to serve only “light” beverages and insisted that restaurants permit hard liquor only in limited quantities.<sup>163</sup> Yet, interestingly, food occupied an ambiguous place in this scheme. In restaurants, the dishes appeared relatively unimportant. In his speech admonishing his fellow restaurant workers to uphold an atmosphere of culturedness, Tarasov condemned the actions of one waiter, who sneered at a young couple for ordering chopped steak and sprats with onions—the cheapest items on the menu. Evidently, the server did not notice that these were students who came to the restaurant to “listen to music, chat, maybe to solve philosophical problems.”<sup>164</sup> While condescending to the customers on account of their lack of means or poor taste, the waiter revealed himself to be the uncultured one. He played the snob,

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<sup>162</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 287, l. 30, 27.

<sup>163</sup> Waitstaff periodically got in trouble for flouting these regulations and serving liquor in “without limit.” See, for example, TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1., d. 285, l. 53; f. 224, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 4-5. Restrictions on alcohol sales were tightened after 1970. Only restaurants would now be allowed to serve hard alcohol without special permission, and even these establishments were told to further curtail alcohol consumption by raising prices. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. R-5446, op. 104, d. 1069, ll. 28-35, 49-50. In a Moscow restaurant circa 1971, it was appropriate to serve a single guest 200 grams of champagne or wine (a little over seven ounces), in addition to 125 grams (about 4.5 ounces) of vodka or cognac. This is the equivalent of approximately a glass and a half of wine, plus three standard “shots” of hard liquor. These quantities are reflected on a menu designed by the MRT for New Year’s Eve service at high-end restaurants. TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 300, ll. 146-49.

<sup>164</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 287, l. 27.

while the students understood that the restaurant was an important venue for social interaction, intellectual engagement, and the enjoyment of culture.

In youth cafés, by contrast, the menu would ideally serve to reinforce a particular social mission. Youth cafés were not to serve the soups, stews, and meat-based entrees that filled out menus at common Soviet eateries. Instead, they would offer ice cream, non-alcoholic punches and cocktails, tea and coffee, juice, fruit, wine, and champagne, as well as an assortment of cold snacks and pastries.<sup>165</sup> Filling up on solid fare or drinking to the point of intoxication could inhibit “intellectual recreation.”<sup>166</sup> Instead, a glass of chilled champagne or an ice cream parfait would provide refreshment and invigoration. Promoting cultured leisure in part through a light, sweet menu of nonessential treats, these cafés suggested to their young patrons that they lived in a world of such abundance that eating simply could be fun.<sup>167</sup> Further, the combination of menu and programming suggested that becoming “cultured” meant knowing which foods and drinks to consume when. The youth café menu was far from heavy and ribsticking. Its wines, desserts, and fruit drinks represented the antithesis of the boiled potatoes, slabs of black bread, and glasses of vodka that had long graced the tables of Russian peasants and workers, and now figured centrally in the Soviet diet. A young person needed to understand that distinction in order to reveal him- or herself as a properly cultured member of Soviet society.

To return to Tarasov’s comments, this incident also points to another essential feature of cultured leisure: its connection to the emotions of both dining workers and clientele. Here, the customers’ potentially negative emotional response to the server’s behavior marked his failure,

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<sup>165</sup> TsAGM, f. 453, op. 1, d. 2019, ll. 1-2.

<sup>166</sup> Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy,” 227.

<sup>167</sup> To an extent, this represents a continuation of Stalin-era ideals of abundance and luxury, in which such items as champagne, chocolates, and perfume would be available to all. See Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*.

while the latter's inability to recognize the former's culturedness implied a lack of sophistication. Officials' comments about problems in restaurants often touched on questions of feeling. A. N. Ershov, head of the Administration of Public Dining of the Soviet Ministry of Trade, complained that slow, inattentive restaurant service "ruins people's moods." Restaurant staff should behave in a cultured manner, building the restaurant's work on "a maximum of politeness, on love, consideration, and respect." This demanded that staff focus on fostering good moods in customers even if the staff members themselves feel sad, angry, or upset.<sup>168</sup> Evoking a positive affective response meant reacting appropriately when a customer's mood took a turn for the worse. As a 1980 manual for restaurant workers insisted, "If the customer is dissatisfied with something, is upset and expresses this sharply, the server should display especial reserve and tact." The staff member needed to respond in such a way as to return the client to an upbeat mood without creating more tension.<sup>169</sup>

How successful were these efforts to get Muscovites to recreate in a "cultured" manner? This remains difficult to gauge. The archival record provides few clues to how officials assessed their relative success or failure. Nor does it offer a comprehensive view of how people acted in or reacted to youth cafés and restaurants. Rather, it delivers snapshots, most often depicting problems with supply, service, and "uncultured" behavior on the part of staff and consumers alike. While we should resist the urge to generalize broadly from these snippets, we can still use them to understand how some customers and service personnel chose to interact with spaces of "cultured leisure," and how officials viewed breaches of protocol. Further, catching a glimpse of

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<sup>168</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 287, ll. 37-41.

<sup>169</sup> N. A. Nadezhdin, V. A. Krasil'nikov, and N. A. Krasil'nikov, *Sovremennyi restoran i kul'tura obsluzhivaniia* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1980), 17.

what constituted inappropriate behavior can help us see more clearly the ideal contours of culturedness in late Soviet restaurants and cafés.

Reviews conducted by Moscow's Main Administration of Public Dining in the mid-1960s found time and again that many youth cafés failed to perform according to their mission. Few organized approved cultural events oriented on classical music, literature, poetry, or intellectual debate.<sup>170</sup> Those that hosted events mainly held jazz performances, a form of leisure that Soviet youth loved, but that officials did not consider all that "cultured." In 1966, shocked dining officials thus complained that crowds would gather to watch the patrons of Café Molodezhnoe (Youth) listening to jazz or "clumsily" doing "fashionable," "modern" dances.<sup>171</sup> Several youth cafés neglected to provide the right menu items and allowed heavy drinking on the premises. In 1965, officials found that Café Fantaziia (Fantasy) served port wine and Cuban rum, while permitting customers to bring in their own vodka.<sup>172</sup> A number of youth cafés violated menu guidelines by dishing out fried liver and meat patties, rather than ice cream and appetizers. Others received criticism for pouring cognac and keg beer, drinks considered insufficiently refined for such venues.<sup>173</sup>

Conditions in both Moscow's youth and nonyouth cafés deteriorated throughout the late 1960s. An administrative review conducted in 1970 found an unruly and liquor-soaked atmosphere. The capital's cafés were "resurrecting the morals of old taverns and inns"; they had become places "no self-respecting citizen" would choose to visit. Stylish interiors and "lyrical"

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<sup>170</sup> TsAGM, f. 453, op. 1, d. 1818, ll. 10-13; f. 453, op. 1, d. 1869, ll. 18-23; f. 453, op. 1, d. 2019, ll. 11-15.

<sup>171</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 280, l. 12.

<sup>172</sup> TsAGM, f. 453, op. 1, d. 1869, l. 21.

<sup>173</sup> TsAGM, f. 453, op. 1, d. 2019, l. 12.

names masked cafés' true nature—as “drunk houses, in which service staff shamelessly rob visitors.” After bribing the doorman to gain entry, many customers found dirty tables, filthy washrooms, meager menus, and servers bent on overcharging the clientele. At Café Molodezhnoe, workers encouraged the consumption of vodka purchased off-site and sold fortified wines and cognac without limit. Here and elsewhere, the same regulars showed up “night after night, gambling for small sums and vodka.” Black marketers also lingered in the crowd, looking for foreigners to hassle. Evenings concluded with drunks “reeling, crawling, [or] being carried” from the premises, sometimes launching themselves unceremoniously into snowbanks. The reviewers found the presence of drunken women singularly troubling. At Café Khrustal’noe (Crystal), an intoxicated young Russian woman had tried to tempt some young “Arabs” to dance with her. At Café Krymskoe (Crimea), a table of girls “warmed” themselves so effectively with strong drink that they decided to wander the dining room, hugging strangers. Good cafés were “few.” Most had become “hotbeds of unculturedness and alien morals.”<sup>174</sup>

When it came to restaurants, problems arose more often from staff behavior and food supply failures. Restaurant workers habitually cheated diners by serving smaller quantities than those listed on the menu or by overcharging.<sup>175</sup> Some drank on the job, sold supplies out the back door, watered down the liquor, or neglected to cut off customers who had had too much to drink.<sup>176</sup> Doormen seemed to spend more time keeping customers out than letting them in.<sup>177</sup> When such violations came to light, the offending staffers or managers were generally either

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<sup>174</sup> GARF, f. R-5446, op. 104, d. 1069, ll. 22-26.

<sup>175</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 285, ll. 21-23, 41-43; f. 224, op. 1, d. 300, ll. 3-4; f. 224, op. 1, d. 340, l. 5.

<sup>176</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 285, ll. 22-23, 39, 53, 105, 141, 167; f. 224, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 5, 66-67; f. 224, op. 1, d. 361, l. 2; f. 224, op. 1, d. 240, ll. 66, 71.

<sup>177</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 287, l. 50.



demoted or fired, but they had a way of popping up again, making trouble in some other establishment.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, throughout the rest of the Soviet period, poor discipline, theft, and cheating would persist in numerous—but by no means all—Moscow dining establishments.<sup>179</sup>

Shortages of supplies also plagued the capital's eateries, hampering their capacity for cultured leisure. Speaking at trade meetings, chefs from such restaurants as the Leningrad and the Sovetskii (Soviet) complained of low-quality meats and shortages of fresh produce. Equipment also could be hard to acquire. Chefs had to use their "connections"—and sometimes bribes of vodka—to procure meat grinders, sieves, and knives. Faced with subpar meals, visitors often grew "extremely irritated," as a representative of the Sovetskii Restaurant remarked, and understandably so.<sup>180</sup> If the dining experience left a customer feeling angry or frustrated, the restaurant had failed in its mission to help its clientele to relax in a "happy and cultured" manner.

Restaurants, cafés, and youth cafés often fell short of their own goals in terms of creating the necessary conditions for cultured leisure, but this did not necessarily drive potential diners away. For Soviet restaurant-goers, a trip to a restaurant remained, in the words of journalist Irina Glushchenko, "an exceptional, memorable, rare event . . . of social significance."<sup>181</sup> And with the number of dining establishments growing throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s countrywide, it became increasingly feasible for the average urbanite to enjoy a special evening meal away from home (see tables 9 and 10). The long lines that confounded locals and visitors alike attested

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<sup>178</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 286, l. 10.

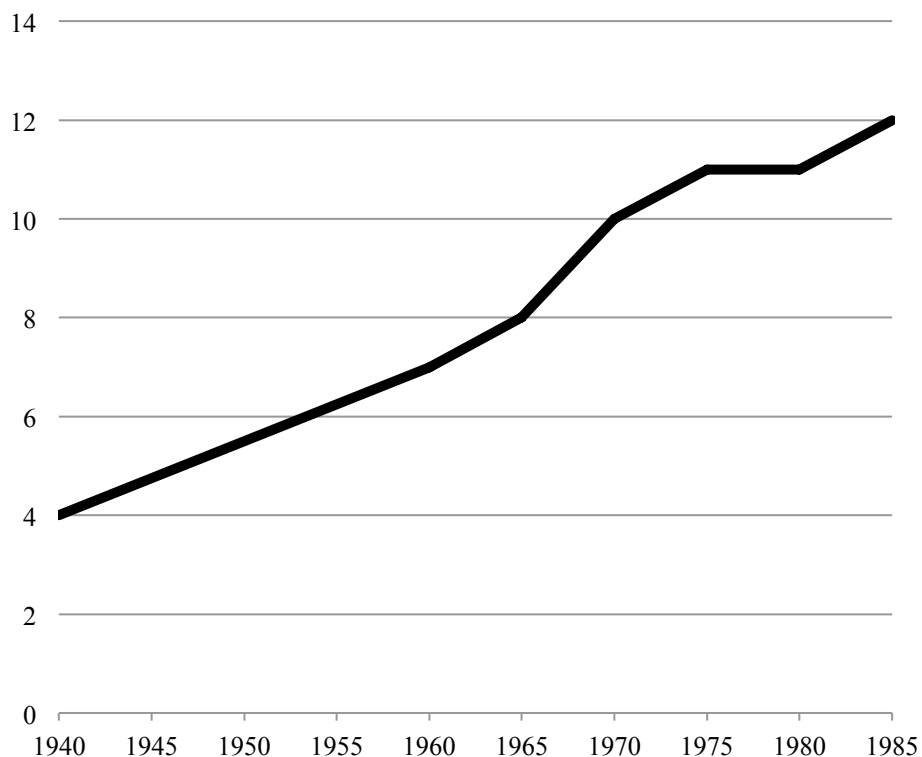
<sup>179</sup> These problems were symptomatic of a deeper vein of corruption that ran through Moscow's trade organizations. Several restaurant directors and other trade leaders were involved in corruption during the late Soviet period and, on account of their own shady dealings, tended to look the other way when their subordinates behaved badly. On some of the restaurant managers and MRT officials involved in bribery and theft, see Duhamel, *KGB Campaign against Corruption*, especially 101-3 and 134-35. Also see note 67 above.

<sup>180</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 15, 17, 21, 39-41.

<sup>181</sup> Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 188.

to the fact that a considerable number of Soviet citizens at least *tried* to patronize restaurants and cafés. Writing in 1974, the American authors of the food-oriented travel handbook *The Moscow Gourmet* thus remarked upon the popularity of dining out among urban professionals and university-age Muscovites. Getting into some restaurants, such as the Uzbekistan, could prove “almost hopeless,” so long were the lines of hungry locals familiar with the Uzbekistan’s exceptional Central Asian fare.<sup>182</sup> A defining feature of the Soviet restaurant experience, the challenges one faced in gaining access added to the aura of exclusivity that made dining out feel like a special occasion.

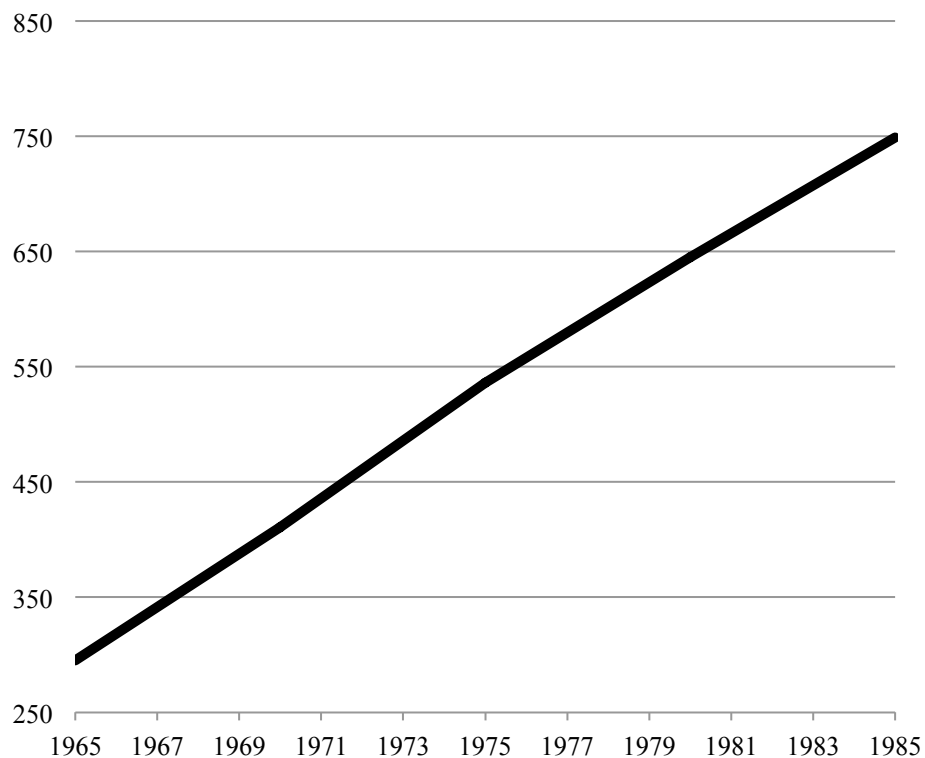
**Table 9** Dining Establishments per 10,000 people in the USSR, 1940-85



Source: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR, 1922-1982* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1982); *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 70 let*. Statistical manuals did not disaggregate different types of dining establishments (restaurants, canteens, etc.) when calculating these metrics.

<sup>182</sup> Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 27-29.

**Table 10** Seats in Dining Establishments per 10,000 people in the USSR, 1965-86



Source: *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR, 1922-1982*; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 70 let*.

Interestingly, these experiences may have proven “exceptional” and “memorable” thanks in part to long lines, heavy drinking, wild dancing, and other features that rendered the dining scene *un-cultured*. A documentary aired on Russian television in 2005 provides a telling example of nostalgia for the bad old days of the Soviet restaurant. Entitled *Zlachnoe mesto*, the film approaches the late Soviet restaurant as a kind of debauched wonderland. “Zlachnoe mesto,” after all, refers to a place of great abundance for all—as in the Biblical “green pastures” (*zlachnaia pazhit*)—and, more colloquially, to a seedy nightspot.<sup>183</sup> According to this film,

<sup>183</sup> Psalms 23:2 reads, “He maketh me to lie down in *green pastures*: he leadeth me beside the still waters.” In Russian, “Он покоит меня на *злачных пажитях* и водит меня к водам тихим.” (Emphasis added.) Meanwhile, Ozhegov’s *Dictionary of the Russian Language* defines “zlachnoe mesto” as “a place where [people] indulge in drinking and debauchery.” Slovar’ Ozhegova: Tolkovyi slovar’ russkogo iazyka, <http://www.ozhegov.org/>.

Soviet restaurants provided respite from everyday deprivations, making “elite food . . . available to everyone.”<sup>184</sup> In the 1970s, wages were high and prices for restaurant dishes low. Everyone could—so the story goes—sit with their friends and enjoy deficit goods, such as tongue and caviar, often unattainable in average shops. Food aside, drinking, dancing, and live music also played a role in creating a “carnavalesque” atmosphere and a sense of freedom at odds with the world outside. Restaurants had their own rules. You had to understand how to bribe the doorman, how to get in good with the bartender, and how to get the band to play your favorite song. All other codes of conduct seemed to vanish. Here, the narrator recounts, the “Soviet man . . . could pay bribes, approach unfamiliar women . . . and throw money around. He could demonstrate complete unruliness [and impropriety].” In this vision, Soviet restaurants served as “un-Soviet” spaces, where sensual pleasure reigned and the decorum required at work and at home mattered far less than a fistful of rubles and a desire for mischief.

Cafés remained both popular and controversial for similar reasons: their embrace of social experimentation and their flirtations with Western popular culture. In the 1960s and 1970s cafés delighted young adults with jazz and, later, rock performances, experimental poetry and comedy, and foreign films, among other entertainments, all of which were offered in an “intimate and unconstrained atmosphere.”<sup>185</sup> For some these venues represented “little islands of urban culture,” while for others they served as places for coming of age, starting romances,

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<sup>184</sup> *Zlachnoe mesto*, dir. Maksim Katushkin (2005), online video, Kanal 5 Peterburg, <http://www.5-tv.ru/video/1015583/>.

<sup>185</sup> Tsipursky, “Pleasure, Power, and the Pursuit of Communism,” 385-88; Frederick S. Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1991* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 267-70. On rock music in cafés and restaurants, see William Jay Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 226-32.

listening to Western pop music, and being part of a daring nightlife.<sup>186</sup> Outside Moscow, as well, cafés and restaurants became hangouts for the bohemian milieu that blossomed in the 1960s and 1970s. As historian William Risch writes, L'vov (L'viv), Ukraine, became home to “bars, coffee houses, and cafés . . . where, free of the constraints of official institutions, people could more or less be themselves.”<sup>187</sup> Similarly, Leningrad’s legendary Café Saigon represented for its regulars “a source of information, books and ideas, a territory where you established contacts with the opposite sex, [and] a shelter from parents’ moralizing.”<sup>188</sup> Much of this irritated officials and the presence of dissidents and foreigners attracted the attention of the KGB.<sup>189</sup> Yet, if anything, the presence of KGB informants and the blustering of enraged bureaucrats added to the aura of adventure and edginess—the divergence from official notions of culturedness—that largely defined late Soviet dining culture.<sup>190</sup>

Officialdom’s dream for public dining and its ability to create a more cultured public appears to have, for the most part, failed to come true. Many Soviet restaurant- and café-goers simply did not behave in ways that conformed to ideals of culturedness, nor did the individuals who staffed these establishments. Some Soviet citizens may have developed a greater appreciation of tact, table manners, and high culture through their visits to public dining

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<sup>186</sup> Georgii Iskenderov, “Molodezhnye kafe 1960-x,” Moscow Mod Scene, 18 April 2014, [http://modscene.ru/articles/culture/m\\_cafe.html](http://modscene.ru/articles/culture/m_cafe.html). Iskenderov’s post in fact discusses cafés and clubs in the 1960s and 1970s. Also see, Mariia Arbatova, *Mne 40 let: Avtobiograficheskii roman* (Moscow: Zakharov/Ast, 1999), 72-73, 94, 158; Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 55, 119.

<sup>187</sup> Risch, *Ukrainian West*, 105.

<sup>188</sup> As quoted in Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 142. On Leningrad youth cafés, also see Lebina and Chistikov, *Obyvatel’ i reformy*, 255-56.

<sup>189</sup> Starr, *Red and Hot*, 270; Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 144.

<sup>190</sup> Yurchak quotes one observer as stating that the presence of informants at Saigon added “some feeling of romanticism and adventure” to the café experience. While not all café patrons would have felt this way, Yurchak hints that this individual was not alone. As quoted in Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 144.

establishments, but this is difficult to gauge. The entire enterprise of “culturedness” remains almost hopelessly vague, giving the historian little by which to judge its success. Still, restaurants and cafés certainly did *not* meet their own standards in providing the environment and instruction believed necessary for cultured behavior. Dining workers sometimes behaved rudely or dishonestly, kitchens failed to turn out the right dishes, storerooms lacked necessary items, and lines formed outside the doors even when the dining room sat half-empty.

Apathetic trade workers, food shortages, and public drunkenness all carried a whiff of stagnation. After all, the state controlled the entire public dining system and therefore ultimately shouldered the burden of delayed produce deliveries and sloppy labor discipline. It also set goals—fuzzy as they were—for using public dining to mold society. In other words, with a governmental dining apparatus running the show, discrepancies between lofty ideals and shoddy practice had the potential to make problems read as epic failures. The fact that these difficulties not only persisted, but may have grown more pronounced during a period when new emphasis was placed on public dining as a site for shaping and pleasing Soviet citizens suggests that the officials in charge of Moscow’s restaurants and cafés were either unwilling or unable to remedy these problems.

In the popular consciousness, a feeling of decay and stasis developed also from expanded opportunities for comparing Soviet and foreign living conditions. In the 1960s and 1970s, millions of Soviet citizens traveled abroad in the Eastern Bloc, where they marveled at well-stocked food shops, polite clerks and servers, and clean, well-managed restaurants. These experiences, as Donald J. Raleigh writes, “created an unquenchable thirst for material goods and services, as well as envy and a sense of humiliation over the Soviet Union’s poverty and

deficits.”<sup>191</sup> Soviet tourists came home burdened not only with canned food, instant coffee, and foreign-made pantyhose, but also with a nagging suspicion that their homeland had somehow fallen woefully behind its socialist brethren.

Yet stagnation is not the whole story of the Brezhnev era.<sup>192</sup> Many Russians now hold fond memories of these restaurants and cafés, either in spite or because of their sometimes-uncultured atmosphere. The reminiscences discussed above, the present day vogue for Soviet throwback restaurants, and contemporary discussions of the Soviet eatery all speak to the retrospective allure of the late Soviet dining scene.<sup>193</sup> In the face of rude servers and inflated tabs, the Soviet public used restaurants and cafés for their own purposes, evidently taking or leaving the lessons that dining officials sought to teach them, and having a grand time in the process. Soviet restaurants may not have been cultured and they may have appeared dismal in comparison to eateries in Tallinn or Prague, but patrons often felt them to be *fun*. In short, whether or not dysfunction in restaurants and cafés contributed to popular disillusionment with

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<sup>191</sup> Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 210. On the growth of travel to Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, also see Anne Gorsuch, *All This is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially 86-87.

<sup>192</sup> See introduction.

<sup>193</sup> In 2012 and 2013, there was a flurry of discussion about Soviet restaurants in the Russian blogosphere. Many of the assessments were positive, focusing on low prices, the availability of luxury goods (e.g., black caviar), and the fun people had dining out in the Soviet era. Boris Iakemenko, “Kak my zhili, kak prygali veselo...” boris\_yakemenko’s Journal (LiveJournal), 1 December 2012, <http://boris-yakemenko.livejournal.com/289246.html>; simpsons, “Menu sovetskogo restorana,” Pikabu.Ru, 12 March 2013, [http://pikabu.ru/story/menyu\\_sovetskogo\\_restorana\\_1083547](http://pikabu.ru/story/menyu_sovetskogo_restorana_1083547); “Menu sovetskogo obshchepita,” Istoricheskaja pravda, 11 November 2013, <http://www.istpravda.ru/artifacts/6037/>; Mindflicx, “Menu restoranov i kafe v SSSR,” Fishki.Net, 19 November 2013, <http://fishki.net/1215422-menyu-restoranov-i-kafe-v-sssr.html>. “Soviet” eateries abound in Russia today, and range from canteens and beer bars to white-tablecloth restaurants. In Moscow, these spots include Petrovich (Ulitsa Miasnitskaia, d. 24, str. 3), Varenichnaia No. 1 (Arbat, d. 29), Zhiguli (Novyi Arbat, d. 11, str. 1), Cheburechnaia “Sovetskie vremena” (Pereulok Varsonof’evskii, d. 6), and Sluzhebnyi vkhod (Bol’shaia Dmitrovka, d. 15).

the Soviet project, the bygone experience of this dining culture now fuels longing for a period that some view as a kind of “golden age.”<sup>194</sup>

## Conclusion

In the discourses discussed here nutritionists, dining officials, and food writers tend to focus on questions of health, sophistication, or happiness. Consuming the right foods at the right time of year would provide necessary vitamins and, when the Soviet food system one day overcame seasonal fluctuations, everyone would eat a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables. Health also represented one of the main selling points—at least in the eyes of food writers—for novel new fish products. Dining out in restaurants and cafés would help the Soviet public grow more sophisticated, as they learned and performed culturedness in these venues. This would in turn make the public happier, as workers spent their growing number of leisure hours surrounded by polite conversation, live music, and good food. Dining out would have a salubrious emotional effect, rendering the diner not only more cultured, but also happier and more satisfied.

A concern for modernization linked these projects. Nutritional experts sought to overcome the patterns of seasonal fluctuation that, they believed, kept Soviet citizens from consuming sufficient amounts of fruits and vegetables. These cyclical changes represented a very old feature of Russian food culture; condemning them meant working to make the Soviet diet look more like that of other modern states, where one could, at least theoretically, have strawberries in January or pomegranates in April. The drive for increased fish consumption speaks even more directly to the modernizing impulse. A technologically advanced fishing fleet

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<sup>194</sup> On popular attitudes toward Brezhnev in the post-Soviet era, see Bacon, “Reconsidering Brezhnev.” The “golden age” interpretation has gained little traction among scholars, although at least two of Brezhnev’s biographers have taken this idea up enthusiastically: Sergei Semanov, *Brezhnev: Pravitel’ “zolotogo veka”* (Moscow: Veche, 2004); B. V. Sokolov, *Leonid Brezhnev: Zolotaia epokha* (Moscow: AST-Press KNIGA, 2004).



funneled growing quantities of ocean fish into Soviet stores and homes, and food experts often promoted these products by addressing their novelty and the future possibilities that these foods offered the Soviet people. The ongoing emphasis on cultured leisure in the public dining sphere also dovetails with the Soviet modernizing project. Transforming restaurants and cafés into places where individuals would learn appropriate sociality and good taste reflects an urge to civilize the public, to further modernize Soviet society.

Although these efforts met with mixed success, their outcomes proved meaningful. In the case of seasonality, food writers concerned themselves not with eradicating seasonal fluctuations, but with offering advice on how to best make use of in-season produce, either by consuming it fresh or preserving it for the lean months of winter and early spring. The activities that Soviet Russians engaged in to make up for seasonal variations in availability—including growing and preserving their own produce—emerged centrally as traditions that many regard as integral to their national identity, as vital national traditions. The discourse on ocean fish and seafood also speaks to an important tension between modernity and tradition, explored at greater length in later chapters. Asking readers to adopt new foods, experts understood that novelty alone would not prove sufficient. Some appealed to concerns with health and others to Russians' sense of national custom. Even if ocean fish had been scarce in the Russian diet before the second half of the twentieth century, it could be made to appear well suited to the Soviet table, thanks either to the country's age-old tradition of freshwater fish cookery or to its connection to the seafaring culture of ancient Greece. The increase in fish consumption—and the variety of species consumed—that came along with this discourse represents a meaningful change to the Soviet diet. Further, the difficulties officials faced in their push for cultured leisure attest not only to problems with food distribution, labor discipline, and corruption, but also to the

commitment shared by many Soviet urbanites to carve out a public space for the kind of fun that they wanted to have, regardless of officials' opinions. So, while the utopian visions embodied by these discourses remained only partially realized, they may have in fact made some Soviet Russians healthier and happier, although not in the ways the state had in mind.

## CHAPTER 2

### AN EDIBLE EMPIRE: SOVIET NATIONAL CUISINES BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY, 1965-85

In 1967 Muscovites received a special present to commemorate the October Revolution's fiftieth anniversary. It came in the form of a newly renovated food shop, *Kulinariia* (Cuisine), located at 23 Gorky Street in the city center.<sup>195</sup> Like other such stores across the city, this *Kulinariia* had previously been unpopular, dirty, and poorly lit. Now, in accordance with the Communist Party's call for more modern, "progressive" trade, the Gorky Street *Kulinariia* was remade to honor the big holiday.<sup>196</sup> In late September the store reopened with larger windows, softer lighting, and newer equipment, as well as a fresh assortment of foods representing "national cuisines" from across the USSR. Working with eight of the most popular restaurants in the Soviet Union's capital, *Kulinariia* offered Chicken Kiev, Belarusian and Caucasian sausages, Uzbek steamed dumplings, and many other edible treats. Officials in charge of the store declared that, up to this point, the "great mass of consumers" had virtually "no opportunities to experience national dishes."<sup>197</sup> Henceforth one ideally could just stroll in and sample exotic delicacies. The Gorky Street *Kulinariia* not only offered a little something new for the coming celebrations, it

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<sup>195</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, ll. 1-7.

<sup>196</sup> The Twenty-third Congress of the CPSU was held 29 March-6 April 1966 in Moscow. The Congress's Directive on the Eighth Five-Year Plan called for the "large scale [integration] of progressive forms of trade that are convenient for the population" and for the opening of new stores. Both measures were intended to improve popular living conditions. See "Direktivy XIII s"ezda KPSS po piatiletnemu planu razvitiia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR na 1966-1970 gody," *Izvestiia*, 9 April 1966, 4. This section of the directive is quoted in TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, l. 2.

<sup>197</sup> Restaurants Ukraine, Leningrad, Uzbekistan, Central (Tsentral'nyi), Minsk, Aragvi, Peking, and Volga supplied this *Kulinariia* store with ready-to-eat items (e.g., cakes and pirozhki) and semiprepared foods (e.g., uncooked handmade dumplings). TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, l. 2.

also promoted an image of Soviet food culture as embodying “modern” commerce, improved living standards, gastronomic abundance, and rich cultural diversity.

The grand reopening of the Gorky Street Kulinariia represented just one of numerous measures intended to promote so-called “national” cuisines (*natsional'nye kukhni*) to Soviet consumers. National cuisines formed the core of a major postwar food trend that reached its pinnacle in the Brezhnev period. To explore the meaning, political implications, and cultural importance of this development in late Soviet Russia, this chapter examines state efforts to promote a national vision of Soviet cuisine through public dining establishments and cookbooks. By the late 1960s, a considerable number of Moscow’s restaurants and cafes claimed to represent the cuisines of various Soviet republics and fraternal socialist states. Operated by the Moscow Restaurant Trust, one of several organizations housed in Moscow’s Main Administration of Public Dining, their records offer an especially useful view into the national cuisines idea. Trade officials intended these restaurants to showcase the best of socialist gastronomy and to provide a model for similar establishments throughout the USSR. Food writing opens another window onto the national cuisines paradigm. In the late Soviet period, an increasing number of cookbooks and press articles worked to define and propagandize the food customs of the Soviet republics, as well as those of allied states. These writings delivered both familiar and exotic dishes in nationally specific packages, dividing the modern world up into tidy mouthfuls. Together, public dining records and cooking advice literature reveal the assumptions underlying the national cuisines paradigm, as well as its relationship to larger trends in the culture of late Soviet Russia and the USSR more generally.

The national cuisines trend aligned in key ways with a longer-term Soviet preoccupation with culinary modernization. In the 1920s, Soviet nutritionists and ideologists first proposed

various means of rendering the diet more “modern” and “rational.” These food “futurists” sought to relieve hunger, ensure good nutrition, and break down prerevolutionary social structures by replacing traditional cookery with communal dining and factory-made food surrogates.<sup>198</sup> In the Stalin years, the state pulled back from these efforts and reoriented toward a more “bourgeois” domestic ideal. Still, a commitment to modernization persisted. Under Stalin, fantasies of modern socialist dining entailed consuming the fruits of contemporary agriculture and industry, and reveling in a kind of splendor once reserved for elites, while also adhering to the principles of scientific nutrition.<sup>199</sup> Beginning in the mid-1950s, the Khrushchev leadership launched reforms aimed at revitalizing popular belief in communism. These extended to the culinary sphere, where convenience and nutritional value now trumped the imaginary opulence of the Stalin period.<sup>200</sup> While “de-Stalinization” arguably ended with Khrushchev’s ouster in 1964, the project of culinary modernization continued. Under Brezhnev, dining officials endorsed the expansion of “progressive” forms of trade, such as self service, while food writers emphasized rational nutrition. The national vision of Soviet cuisine offered a powerful means of promoting Soviet achievements in these realms. Restaurants and cookbooks could display the supposed vitality and modernity of various ethnic groups by depicting their bountiful agriculture, healthful cuisine, lively culture, and technological prowess.

Popularizing national cuisines also meant discussing the history and culture of the “nation” and, over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the historical aspect of national cuisines

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<sup>198</sup> Rothstein and Rothstein, “Beginnings of Soviet Culinary Arts.”

<sup>199</sup> Of courses, this fantasy was not broadly attainable. Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*; Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*; Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik.”

<sup>200</sup> Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy”; Susan E. Reid, “The Khrushchev Kitchen: Domesticating the Scientific-Technological Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, 2 (April 2005): 289-316.

grew ever more central. Soviet food writers added lengthy disquisitions on culinary traditions to their cookbooks, while dining officials sought to lend national restaurants an air of historical authenticity. These efforts corresponded to what historian Denis Kozlov has described as the “historical turn,” an important defining feature of late Soviet culture. As Kozlov argues, the cultural and political “Thaw” that followed Stalin’s death spurred many to rethink individual and group identities that depended upon received narratives about the Russian and Soviet pasts. This, in turn, “[stimulated] society’s attention to the past as a model for contemporary existence and intellectual activities.”<sup>201</sup> During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, segments of the Soviet public became intensely interested in the national past; some came to fetishize historical data and ephemera. In this context, exploring historical narratives and artifacts (including recipes) represented not only an exercise in nostalgia, but also a desire to construct meaningful continuities.<sup>202</sup> An examination of national-themed restaurants and food writing further reveals that Soviet food professionals sought to satisfy these cravings for history, and thereby adds to our understanding of the culinary aspect of this “search for origins.”

This chapter proceeds in four parts. The first examines the concept of national cuisine and the prehistory of the late Soviet national cuisines craze, discussing Soviet cookbooks and restaurants espousing a national approach to food from the 1940s through the 1960s. Next, it explores the relationship among national cuisines, foreign cuisines, and the idea of socialist modernity in the Brezhnev years. The chapter’s third section focuses on the historical component

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<sup>201</sup> Kozlov, “Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture,” 582.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 591-97. Kozlov notes in passing that during this period some individuals also took an interest in “bygone gastronomic plenty,” which they exercised by, for instance, poring over descriptions of imperial cuisine in such works as Giliarovskii’s *Moscow and Muscovites*. Ibid., 595-96 and 596n66. On new scholarship dealing with historicity in late Soviet culture, see Elie and Ohayon, Foreword in “L’expérience soviétique à son apogée: Culture et société des années Brežnev,” 39-43. In her recent memoir, Anya von Bremzen also recalls her childhood interest in Giliarovskii’s food “porn.” See Von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*, 18.

of the national cuisines trend, which grew ever more prominent over the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, it addresses the tensions that emerged as Soviet food experts sought to reconcile tradition and modernity while promoting national cuisines. Ultimately, it becomes clear that the national vision of Soviet cuisine raised tricky questions about the Soviet past and gave voice to anxieties about cultural loss, while also offering an appealing and long-lasting means of interpreting socialism's culinary legacy.

### **Making Soviet Cuisine “National”**

The concept of “national cuisine” carries with it no fixed definition, no specific criteria or guidelines for defining a set of culinary practices as “national.”<sup>203</sup> Much like nations themselves, national cuisines are cultural constructs, the result of complex and contested historical and contemporary processes.<sup>204</sup> A conventional definition of “national cuisine” might point to the foods, methods of cooking and service, and related practices considered most fundamental to the lifestyle of a specific people. Yet these elements are not always agreed upon. Nor are they, as historian Alison K. Smith asserts, “necessarily synonymous . . . with all the foods actually eaten by all citizens of a given nation or with actual age-old tradition in a given place.”<sup>205</sup> Any one representation of a national cuisine may bear a historical character, focus on describing contemporary practice, or do both. Such a representation might blur or emphasize regional and

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<sup>203</sup> This discussion of the definition of “national cuisine” draws on Alison K. Smith, “National Cuisines,” in *Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Pilcher, 444-60; Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. DuBois, “The Anthropology of Food and Eating,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 99-119; Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine.”

<sup>204</sup> On the social and cultural construction of nations, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 5-7.

<sup>205</sup> Smith, “National Cuisines,” 446.

cultural difference or religious divisions.<sup>206</sup> It might embrace or reject changes wrought by agricultural development, immigration, or other factors. Most often connected with a “homeland,” national cuisines carry a geographic association, but may also be identified in diasporic communities.<sup>207</sup> Definitions of national cuisine, then, are almost limitlessly fluid and negotiable. Making sense of “national cuisine” means acknowledging the changeability of foodways, the constructedness of the very idea of national cuisine, and the specific ways in which the members of a given society think and talk about their own and other peoples’ food customs. To understand the concept of national cuisine in the late Soviet context, then, we should begin by looking back to the development of national identities in the Soviet Union, as well as early manifestations of the national cuisine trend and its evolution over time.

Importantly, the “nations” whose cuisines the Soviet state sought to enshrine in national restaurants and cookbooks were fairly recent inventions. Specifically *national* identities began to coalesce among the peoples of the former Russian Empire only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the global age of nationalism, and under the pressures of revolution and war. “National” republics and autonomous regions were established under Bolshevik (later Soviet) rule, largely as the result of the conscious nation-building efforts of the Party leadership.<sup>208</sup> Lenin endeavored to organize the peoples of the former Russian Empire into

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<sup>206</sup> For instance, Appadurai has argued that the Indian national cuisine that emerged in the postcolonial era was rooted in regional food customs and “[did] not seek to hide its regional or ethnic roots.” Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine,” 5.

<sup>207</sup> For a discussion of cookbooks dealing with Russian cuisine in emigration, see chapter 4.

<sup>208</sup> Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 15; Smith, “Soviet Nationality Policies from Lenin to Gorbachev,” in *Tragediia velikoi derzhavy: Natsional’nyi vopros i raspad Sovetskogo Soiuza*, ed. G. N. Sevost’ianov (Moscow: Sotsial’no-politicheskaia mysl’, 2005), 516-17. On early Soviet nation-building, also see Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, 2 (Summer 1994): 414-52; Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*.



“nations” that they would eventually integrate into a Soviet whole.<sup>209</sup> Under Stalin’s rule, however, the state deemphasized plans for a “merger” or “fusion” of peoples, and instead touted a “friendship” or “brotherhood” of nations, albeit one in which Russians held a dominant position. In the post-Stalin era, the “chronic ethnophilia” that united Lenin and Stalin’s approaches persisted.<sup>210</sup> Both Khrushchev and Brezhnev made only ad hoc and superficial changes to nationalities policy. Khrushchev emphasized a national “merger,” *à la* Lenin, yet altered the state’s approach to nationalities little. Brezhnev championed a “friendship of peoples,” but supported this mainly through propaganda efforts and by allowing political elites in the republics to enjoy unprecedented job security.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, while Soviet public culture was awash in images of national diversity, non-Russian Soviet peoples continued to hold unequal status. Titular nationalities retained and even gained greater political and cultural privilege within their respective republics, while smaller ethnic groups struggled for recognition alongside “major” nations.<sup>212</sup> As the Brezhnev leadership aimed to obscure these inequalities and assuage

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<sup>209</sup> Francine Hirsch describes this process as “double assimilation,” that is, “the assimilation of a diverse population into nationality categories and, simultaneously, the assimilation of those nationally categorized groups into the Soviet state and society.” Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 14.

<sup>210</sup> Slezkine, “USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 415, 419-21, 436-38, 442.

<sup>211</sup> After 1957, as Jeremy Smith writes, “Khrushchev now began to talk about the ‘merger of nations’ into one Soviet nation. This nation would be based around Slavic culture and Russian language.” Smith, “Soviet Nationality Policies,” 521. Also see Ben Fowkes, “The National Question in the Soviet Union under Brezhnev: Policy and Response,” in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, ed. Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 68-89, especially 72.

<sup>212</sup> Slezkine, “USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 449-51. As Jeremy R. Azrael noted in his contemporary observations of Brezhnev-era policy, some of the concern about the “nationalities problem” was bound up in anxieties about the USSR’s changing demographic balance. Birthrates among most “European” ethnic groups were declining, while Central Asian populations continued to grow. Some leaders in Moscow felt threatened by the “yellowing” (*ozheltenie*) of the population, though the most pressing anxieties about this change in demography were related its economic (rather than racial) implications. With the groups that dominated the most industrially developed regions of the USSR dropping in numbers, the state needed either to rapidly boost development in Central Asia or to somehow forestall population decline in the country’s European region, lest the Soviet economy become even less efficient. Azrael, “Emergent Nationality Problems in the USSR,” in *Soviet Nationality Policies and Practices*, ed. Azrael (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978), 363-90. Also see Azrael for a discussion of national

the tensions they generated, official “ethnophilia” intensified. In the late Soviet period, politically acceptable expressions of ethnic identity—including food customs—served as a pressure valve for nationalist feeling and as evidence of the USSR’s embrace of diversity and cosmopolitanism.

Meanwhile, the national cuisines trend itself began at the dining table of Iosif Stalin, after he secured leadership of the USSR in the mid-1920s. A native of Georgia, Stalin longed for the flavors of the Caucasus, as did his cronies, many of whom also hailed from this region. As historian Erik Scott reveals, such cravings had a profound influence on the development of Soviet cuisine in general and the national cuisines paradigm in particular. Comestibles flowed from Georgia into Moscow, political elites attended Georgian-style feasts, and the larger public soon adopted a passion for Georgian fare, which they regarded as both delicious and sophisticated.<sup>213</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s, menus and cookbooks in Soviet Russia started including the zesty soups, fragrant grilled meats, and herb-laden stews of the Soviet republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.<sup>214</sup> Indeed, the earliest Soviet national cookbooks included *100 Dishes of Armenian Cuisine* (100 bliud armianskoi kukhni, 1939), *100 Dishes of Georgian Cuisine* (100 bliud gruzinskoi kukhni, 1940), and *50 Dishes of Azerbaijani Cuisine* (50 bliud

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unrest in the first half of Brezhnev’s tenure. Ibid., 376-77. For an excellent general overview of the experience of the Soviet “nationalities”—including Russians and non-Russians—see Smith, *Red Nations*.

<sup>213</sup> Scott, “Edible Ethnicity,” 837, 839.

<sup>214</sup> The first wave of national cookbooks to appear after the Second World War included Caucasian and Central Asian cuisines. These targeted a local readership, being published in small print runs, in republic capitals, and typically in the language of the titular nationality: P. M. Chastnyi, *Osnovnye natsional’nye bliuda Kazakhskoi SSR* (Alma-Ata: KazOGIZ, 1948) was published in 5,000 Kazakh-language copies. G. Khanbekian, A. Anan’kina and A. Parsamian, *Kniga o natsional’noi armianskoi pishche domashnei khoziaike* (Erevan: Armgiz, 1949-50) appeared in 2,000 Russian copies and 5,000 Armenian copies. In contrast, just one printing of the 1952 edition of the popular *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* counted 500,000 copies. On publication and print run information see note 77 above.

azerbaidzhanskoi kukhni, 1940).<sup>215</sup> Moscow's first luxury national restaurant, Aragvi, began serving its signature Georgian dishes in 1940. Inspired by the Aragvi's example, the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) cooperated with officials in Moscow to open the Ararat, Baku, and Uzbekistan restaurants after the Second World War. Offering more than food and drink, the establishments evoked abundance and cultural wealth through extravagant interior design and ethnic musical and dance performances. While access remained restricted to party elites, privileged members of the intelligentsia, and foreign tourists, these restaurants represented early attempts to promote certain national cuisines beyond the boundaries of their republics and to create within the country's political center a culinary map of the USSR's ethnic landscape.<sup>216</sup>

These Stalin-era national cookbooks and restaurants represented a departure from the period's dominant vision of Soviet cuisine, which tended to stress unity, rather than difference. As sociologist Jukka Gronow and historian Sergei Zhuravlev note, in major cookbooks of the Stalin years, "Soviet ethnic cuisines were not codified, nor was their culinary peculiarity emphasized."<sup>217</sup> Instead, recipes for dishes such as spicy Georgian lamb soup (*kharcho*) were embedded in a cuisine dominated by Russian dishes but generally presented as ethnically non-specific.<sup>218</sup> Experts proposed an ideal diet for the whole of the USSR: a pan-Soviet cuisine that

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<sup>215</sup> S. I. Mesropian, *100 bliud armianskoi kukhni* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1939); V. I. Skhirtladze, *100 bliud gruzinskoi kukhni* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1940); S. I. Mesropian, *50 bliud azerbaidzhanskoi kukhni* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1940).

<sup>216</sup> Scott, "Edible Ethnicity," 840-45. On the Soviet hierarchy of consumption, also see Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit'*; Osokina, *Ierarkhiia potrebleniia*. Access to restaurants became somewhat more democratic in the post-Stalin era, but for most people getting into a restaurant could still prove difficult on any given evening.

<sup>217</sup> Gronow and Zhuravlev, "Book of Tasty and Healthy Food," 50.

<sup>218</sup> Geist describes the pan-Soviet cuisine envisioned in *The Book about Delicious and Healthy Food* as being based in "Russian bourgeois cuisine." Glushchenko also notes the predominance of Russian dishes in this text. Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik," 306; Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 154.

would offer all Soviet citizens the same everyday luxury, the same fruits of modern industry.<sup>219</sup> In the post-Stalin era, food experts continued to promote this non-national, pan-Soviet cuisine through general knowledge cookbooks, and to further the real unification of dining habits through standardized recipes and menus for public dining.<sup>220</sup> This approach, however, now had to compete with the idea of national cuisines, which emphasized cultural distinction and difference.

After Stalin's death in 1953, Khrushchev sought to remake Soviet society through sweeping reforms focused on de-Stalinization.<sup>221</sup> This extended to the realm of food, in which the new regime promoted modernization and rationalization, directing the public away from "bourgeois" frivolity. The ideal Soviet kitchen would now be clean and efficient, above all else.<sup>222</sup> Time-consuming, from-scratch preparations of national delicacies—Armenian stuffed grape leaves, for example—did not necessarily fit with this new domestic paradigm, but many food experts still wanted to see Soviet cuisine as a mosaic of distinctive national customs. Indeed, even as ideologists mulled over a national "merger" that would transform many nations into one Soviet people, food experts treated national cuisines as distinct entities.

Although it may seem to conflict with Khrushchev's longed-for fusion of nationalities, the national cuisines paradigm was not entirely at odds with this regime's priorities. In fact, Soviet ethnic cookbooks and restaurants created a platform for demonstrating Soviet

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<sup>219</sup> On this trend, see Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik"; Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*.

<sup>220</sup> Both Lebina and Catriona Kelly emphasize the importance of efforts at culinary standardization in the post-Stalin era. Lebina, "Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy," 220; Kelly, "Leningradskaia kukhnia / *La cuisine leningradaise*—protivorechie v terminakh?" *Antropologicheskii forum* 15 (2011): 243-44.

<sup>221</sup> On reforms and daily life in the Khrushchev era, see Lebina and Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy*, 150-306.

<sup>222</sup> Lebina, "Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy"; Reid, "Khrushchev Kitchen."

achievements in agriculture, social development, technology, and even geopolitics. While describing the contours of a given cuisine, Khrushchev-era national food writing treated the dawn of socialist power as a precondition for culinary achievement and agricultural abundance. The 1960 cookbook *Armenian Cuisine* (*Armianskaia kulinariia*) provides a vivid example. Its introduction finds every opportunity to praise the Soviet state, insisting that the great Armenian people enjoyed true fulfillment and freedom only under socialism. Even better, in the near future, “The stores will be full of the widest variety of consumer goods. . . . Agriculture will completely supply the population with grapes, fruits, wine, meat, [and] milk. . . . Beautiful Armenia will become even more beautiful!”<sup>223</sup> *The Cuisine of the Peoples of the Northern Caucasus* (*Kulinariia narodov severnogo kavkaza*, 1963) employed similar logic. Here, contributor V. E. Veprintseva used the phrase “children of the Great October Socialist Revolution” to describe the peoples living in the autonomous republics of Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, and Chechnya-Ingushetia, and the Adyghe and Karachai-Cherkess autonomous regions. Whereas these peoples’ diets had previously been meager, they now enjoyed sugar, tea, candy, a greater variety of grains, vegetables, and fruits, and larger quantities of meat. Agricultural productivity had increased and socialism had delivered new structures for “rational” public dining.<sup>224</sup> In this view, the North Caucasus possessed abundant natural and human resources, but had required the Bolsheviks’ brand of “liberation” to attain a higher cultural and culinary level. This narrative sat comfortably with the Khrushchev regime’s bright vision for the future and its concurrent promises to “overtake” the West in terms of consumption, though it blatantly ignored the fact

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<sup>223</sup> A. S. Piruzian, ed., *Armianskaia kulinariia* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1960), 18-19.

<sup>224</sup> V. E. Veprintseva, “Predislovie,” in *Kulinariia narodov Severnogo Kavkaza*, ed. E. S. Omel’chenko (Makhachkala: Dagestanskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1963), 3-4.

that some of the peoples who now allegedly lived so well had been subject to violent repression and internal exile less than two decades earlier.<sup>225</sup>

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Soviet national cookbooks began to flourish, appearing in larger print runs and in more editions in Russian, the Soviet *lingua franca*.<sup>226</sup> Yet these cookbooks by no means covered national cuisines evenly. Rather, Caucasian, Central Asian, and Ukrainian cuisines featured most prominently.<sup>227</sup> As food writers Ol'ga Siutkina and Pavel Siutkin recently revealed, this was thanks largely to active proponents of national cuisine in these regions. For instance, Karim Makhmudov (1926-89), one-time head of the Tashkent State University philosophy department, raised the profile of Uzbek cuisine. A culinary enthusiast as well as a scholar, Makhmudov penned numerous Soviet-era works on Uzbek cookery, including *Uzbek Dishes* (*Uzbekskie bliuda*), which appeared in more than a half-dozen editions between 1958 and 1982.<sup>228</sup> Meanwhile, Ukrainian cuisine found its champion in an institution, rather than an individual. According to historian Edward Geist, after the Second

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<sup>225</sup> On Khrushchev-era reforms and consumption, see Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," 221-22, 221n35; Reid, "Khrushchev Kitchen"; Leбина and Chistikov, *Obyvatel' i reformy*, 231-35. The Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, and Karachai were deported in 1944 as part of Stalin's broader project of repressing "enemy" peoples at the end of the Second World War. Khrushchev rehabilitated these and other persecuted ethnic groups in 1956 as part of his program of de-Stalinization, but violent interethnic conflict followed the return of deported peoples to the North Caucasus. On the forced deportation of ethnic minorities in the Stalinist 1940s, see Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 89-99; "Non-Russians in the Soviet Union and After," in *Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 3, ed. Suny, 502-3. On national strife in the North Caucasus in the Khrushchev years, particularly the 1958 Grozny uprising, see Vladimir A. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, trans. Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), ch. 4.

<sup>226</sup> See, for example, T. P. Sulakvelidze, *Gruzinskie bliuda* (Tbilisi: Izdatel'stvo Ministerstva trgovli Gruzinskoi SSR, 1959); M. Aripov and A. Tsukerman, *Tadzhikskie natsional'nye bliuda* (Stalinabad: Tadzhikgosizdat, 1959); K. Makhmudov and A. Sandel', *Uzbekskie bliuda* (Tashkent: Gosizdat UzSSR, 1958). The first national cookbooks to enjoy print runs of 40,000 or more copies were Sulakvelidze, *Gruzinskie bliuda* (40,000) and Piruzian, *Armianskaia kulinariia* (100,000). Print runs of 100,000 copies or more became common for national titles published between the late 1960s and the early 1980s.

<sup>227</sup> On the popularity of Caucasian cuisine in the Soviet Union, see Scott, "Edible Ethnicity."

<sup>228</sup> Siutkina and Siutkin, *Nepridumannaia istoriia sovetskoi kukhni*, 110-11. Also see their discussions of Tamara Sulakvelidze and Iunus Akhmetzianov, champions of Georgian and Tatar cuisines, respectively, in *Ibid.*, 112-14.

World War the Ukrainian Ministry of Trade called for a national cookbook that would help unite culinary practices and identity in the region and aid the assimilation of newly acquired Western Ukrainian territories. The resulting volume, *Ukrainian Dishes* (Ukrains'ki stravy, 1957), remained a classic throughout the Soviet era, appearing in numerous Ukrainian-language editions and more than 400,000 copies.<sup>229</sup> Not all Soviet national cuisines gained such champions.

Even as cookbooks continued to focus on certain favored cuisines, Moscow's dining scene grew considerably more diverse, with officials exploiting the allure of foreign cuisines to create a sense of connection with peoples who had recently come into the socialist fold. The Peking Restaurant opened, along with the Peking Hotel, in 1955, as part of a trade agreement between Moscow and the People's Republic of China.<sup>230</sup> That year the Prague Restaurant also greeted its first visitors, commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Soviet "liberation" of Czechoslovakia in 1945.<sup>231</sup> The Savoy, formerly the Berlin, once more became an ostensibly German restaurant (again called Berlin) in 1958, to honor the German Democratic Republic. The Ukraine, Budapest, Warsaw, Sofia, and Bucharest restaurants, among others, also opened in Moscow.<sup>232</sup> These establishments trumpeted international friendship, while binding Soviet allies to the Soviet capital through trade agreements that promised the Moscow-based restaurants ongoing supplies of foodstuffs and equipment.<sup>233</sup> In this scheme, national restaurants serving

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<sup>229</sup> Edward Geist, "Kulesh for Khrushchev: Socialist-Realist Foodways and National Distinctiveness in Postwar Soviet Ukraine" (paper presented at the Food for Thought Symposium, Austin, Texas, 7-8 February 2014).

<sup>230</sup> Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 60-61; "Gostinichno-ofisnyi kompleks 'Pekin' vchera, segodnia, zavtra," Gostinichno-ofisnyi kompleks 'Pekin,' <http://hotelpeking.ru/ru/about/hotel-history/>.

<sup>231</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 495, l. 5.

<sup>232</sup> Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 95-96.

<sup>233</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 455, l. 6; f. 224, op. 1, d. 495, ll. 1-3, 7, 10-11; "Istoriia," Gostinitza Ukraina, <http://www.ukraina-hotel.ru/history/section304/>.

foreign cuisines promoted awareness of the cultures of “fraternal socialist” peoples, thereby furthering a sense of international brotherhood and reinforcing the existence of a large “progressive” bloc of socialist states. This dovetailed well with the approach to Soviet national cuisines presented in cookbooks and elsewhere, which celebrated cultures existing within the USSR in order to shed light on the gains—real or alleged—that the Soviet peoples had made since 1917.

Building on these developments, the national cuisines trend reached its peak in the Brezhnev years, when the number and variety of national-themed eateries grew both in Moscow and countrywide. By the early 1980s, the Soviet capital offered restaurants representing each of the USSR’s major regions, as well as the majority of other socialist countries, while national eateries popped up in cities and towns across the USSR. The publication of national cookbooks also boomed with more than eighty cooking texts billed as “national” appearing in print (including reprints and multiple editions) between 1960 and 1980.<sup>234</sup> These texts targeted a much broader readership than their predecessors, enjoying print runs of 100,000 copies or more, and frequently appearing in Russian, as well as other languages. While some volumes on foreign cookery became available, most national cookbooks focused on the USSR.<sup>235</sup> There now existed texts dedicated to the titular national cuisines of each and every union republic and those of several of the RSFSR’s autonomous regions. In the 1970s and 1980s, comprehensive cookbooks emerged, aiming to cover all of the major cuisines of the USSR, while also taking on less well-

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<sup>234</sup> On publication and print run data, see note 77 above.

<sup>235</sup> Examples of cookbooks promoting the cuisines of non-socialist states include, V. V. Petrochenko, N. I. Pilipchuk and D. N. Poliakov, *Retsepty frantsuzskoi kukhni* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1968); Dzhein Uorren (Jane Warren), *Shotlandskaia kukhnia* (Moscow: Legkaia i pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1983); D. I. Tomson, *Irlandskaia traditsionnaia kukhnia* (Erevan: Alastan, 1985).



known food customs, such as those of Karelia and Udmurtia.<sup>236</sup> Soviet periodicals also offered national recipes, including excerpts from cookbooks, recipes provided by readers, and the advice of chefs from national restaurants.<sup>237</sup> The food discourse of the Brezhnev era truly seemed to represent, as Siutkina and Siutkin have suggested, “the cuisine of a great empire.”<sup>238</sup>

### National Cuisines and the Idea of Socialist Modernity

During the Brezhnev years, the Soviet state remained committed to modernizing dining and diet. National cookbooks and restaurants complemented this mission by envisioning Soviet culture as modern and cosmopolitan. Moscow’s national restaurants played an important role in this by both prioritizing national cuisines and also pioneering new methods of food service. In 1966, at the behest of the Communist Party leadership, the Moscow Restaurant Trust introduced “progressive” measures aimed at broadening their customer base beyond elites and foreigners.<sup>239</sup> Restaurants began hosting special events, inviting workers from various factories and organizations to enjoy “diverse national dishes” and to learn to engage in “happy and cultured”

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<sup>236</sup> See, for example, V. V. Pokhlebkin, *Natsional’nye kukhni nashikh narodov: Osnovnye kulinarne napravlenie, ikh istoriia i osobennosti: Retseptura* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1978); V. M. Mel’nik, *Kukhnia narodov SSSR* (Kishinev: Timpul’, 1982); T. V. Reutovich, ed. *Kukhnia narodov SSSR* (Minsk: Polymia, 1981).

<sup>237</sup> *Rabotnitsa*, for example, published an excerpt from Pokhlebkin’s *Natsional’nye kukhni nashikh narodov* in 1982, providing recipes for desserts from across the Soviet Union. “Sladosti na stole,” *Rabotnitsa*, December 1982, 30-31. Recipes from the 1968 French cookbook *Retsepty frantsuzskoi kukhni* appeared in *Nauka i zhizn’* shortly after the book’s publication. “Retsepty frantsuzskoi kukhni,” *Nauka i zhizn’*, August 1968, 151. Over the years, *Krest’ianka* ran reader recipes for Kabardian, Russian, Georgian, and Caucasian “national” dishes. “Sovetuiut chitateli,” *Krest’ianka*, March 1965, 32; “Sovetuiut chitateli,” *Krest’ianka*, May 1965, 32; Z. Dadunashvili, “Khachapuri,” *Krest’ianka*, January 1974, 31; “Sovetuet chitel’,” *Krest’ianka* supplement, July 1980, 4-5. For examples of recipes offered by restaurant chefs see “Russkaia kukhnia,” *Krest’ianka*, January 1972, 24-25; N. Zaitseva, “Ukrainskaia kukhnia,” *Krest’ianka* supplement, February 1982, 5-6; Iu. Bol’shakov, “Khleb da sol’,” *Krest’ianka* supplement, January 1982, 7-8; V. P. Ivko and T. V. Shamrina, “Vy zhdete gostei,” *Rabotnitsa*, December 1965, 29; “Natsional’naia kukhnia,” *Rabotnitsa*, September 1967, 30-31; A. K. Aimal’dinova, “Obed po-gruzinski,” *Rabotnitsa*, February 1972, 31; E. Pinchuk, “Chashka chaia,” *Krest’ianka* supplement, February 1981, 5; Askabovich, “Tabloki po-belorusski.”

<sup>238</sup> Siutkina and Siutkin, *Nepriidumannaia istoriia sovetskoi kukhni*, 108.

<sup>239</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 283, l. 26.

relaxation.<sup>240</sup> The Ukraine served up garlic-studded lard and baked lamb stew (*smazhenina*) at its first Leisure Day (1966), while the Budapest's Blue Danube Ball (1967) featured dishes from Hungary, Moldavia, and Romania. At such fêtes, diners even had the opportunity to learn how to prepare national foods at home, thanks to recipe cards, on-site consultations, and cooking demonstrations led by restaurant chefs.<sup>241</sup> Here, consuming foods labeled as “national” meant participating in a larger project of social and cultural modernization.

These dining establishments also reveal that the concept of “national cuisines” did not stop at Soviet borders. In order to promote an image of the USSR as a champion of international fellowship, Moscow's national restaurants worked to embody the spirit of unity in the communist bloc. For example, officials believed that sending Soviet chefs for training in Budapest fostered “friendship between the Soviet and Hungarian peoples,” while ensuring that the Budapest's dishes would prove equal to those served in Hungary.<sup>242</sup> In 1974, the Sofia Restaurant acquired carved wooden reliefs “depicting the themes of Bulgarian-Soviet friendship” as part of a program of renovations overseen by architects from the People's Republic of Bulgaria.<sup>243</sup> Similarly, specialists from Czechoslovakia visited Moscow in 1975 to ensure that the Prague Restaurant's décor sufficiently expressed “the idea of Soviet-Czechoslovak friendship,” and to provide advice on making the menu truly “national” (it had previously offered mainly Russian and pan-European fare).<sup>244</sup> Moscow's national restaurants depicted the contemporary world as one in which close cross-cultural partnerships bound together the world's

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<sup>240</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, ll. 108, 117. For more on leisure days, see chapter 1.

<sup>241</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, l. 109, 111-12; f. 224, op. 1, d. 280, l. 49; f. 224, op. 1, d. 283, l. 28, 35, 100.

<sup>242</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 280, l. 70.

<sup>243</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 495, l. 10.

<sup>244</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 455, ll. 6-9.

“progressive” nations. By extension, socialist modernity involved developing a taste for these other like-minded cultures.

Moscow now positioned itself as the gastronomic center of the communist universe. By striving ever more to showcase the cuisines of the Soviet peoples and their allies, the city alleged to offer residents and visitors the opportunity to taste all the flavors of the communist world without ever setting foot outside Moscow. Although some other socialist capitals offered more satisfying dining experiences, this fantasy of becoming the communist culinary capital nonetheless drove the development of Moscow’s restaurant scene in the Brezhnev years. Especially during the 1970s, Moscow dining officials emphasized the need for complete geographical coverage and placed increasing emphasis on restaurants’ national character. Café Palanga, named for the Lithuanian resort town, appeared on the scene, as did the Yugoslav-themed Adriatic Café (*Kafe Adriatika*).<sup>245</sup> The Havana Restaurant opened in January 1973, with support from the Soviet and Cuban Ministries of Trade. Cuban specialists helped design the interiors, which featured Cuban ceramics, palm trees, and seashell-shaped wall sconces.<sup>246</sup> The Peking Restaurant also clung to life, in spite of the Sino-Soviet split. No longer boasting its former Chinese chefs or imported foodstuffs, the restaurant retained its Chinese-themed decor and a selection of ostensibly Chinese dishes, including “appetizers” (*zakuski*) called Szechuan chicken and sweet-and-sour shrimp.<sup>247</sup> In the early 1970s, the MRT felt confident praising the success of the capital’s national restaurants, including their appropriate representation of

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<sup>245</sup> Café Palanga and the Adriatic Café both appear on a list of “thematic restaurants” dating from 1972. TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 340, l. 56.

<sup>246</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 495, l. 1.

<sup>247</sup> Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 60-61.

“national themes” and the way their dining rooms always “overflowed” with guests.<sup>248</sup> By 1980, the capital’s system of national restaurants encompassed the vast majority of the socialist world, with eateries representing China, Cuba, Yugoslavia, the Warsaw Pact member states, and each of the Soviet republics except Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.<sup>249</sup>

Restaurants serving other non-Russian national cuisines also popped up in cities elsewhere in the RSFSR. For instance, V. I. Malyshkov—a top dining official who worked in various Soviet cities during the Brezhnev years and after—recalls taking it upon himself to establish national restaurants in Krasnoiarsk after his arrival there in 1973. On Malyshkov’s watch, dining establishments serving Latvian, Georgian, and Uzbek cuisines opened, with the aid of designers and chefs from the republics in question.<sup>250</sup> Some national restaurants were thus established thanks to local initiative, while others appeared as a result of Moscow’s expansive influence. In the late 1960s, dining officials in Leningrad credited Moscow with providing them the inspiration to create the popular Caucasian (*Kavkazskii*) and Russia (*Rossiia*) restaurants, both of which featured national-themed menus and decor.<sup>251</sup> Moscow’s national restaurants further served as training-centers for chefs from across the Soviet Union. During the mid-1960s, the Budapest alone hosted visiting workers from Vladimir, Voronezh, L’viv, Khabarovsk,

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<sup>248</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 303, l. 1; f. 224, op. 1, d. 344, l. 6.

<sup>249</sup> In addition to the national eateries discussed elsewhere in this chapter, the restaurants Riga, Vilnius, Turkmenia and Moldavia appear on a list of dining establishments serving tourists in Moscow during the 1980 Olympic Games. TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 261, l. 91 and 189. The only Soviet republics that appear to have not had individual restaurants representing them in the capital were Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, though dishes from these republics appeared on the menus of other establishments, such as the Uzbekistan and Turkmenia restaurants. Finally, Belgrade, serving “Yugoslav national cuisine,” opened in the 1970s. V. Kovchenkov, *Moskovskaia kukhnia* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1981), 40.

<sup>250</sup> Siutkina and Siutkin, *Nepridumannaia istoriia sovetskoi kukhni*, 118.

<sup>251</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 277, l. 29.

Krasnodar, Krivoi Rog, and Khar'kov.<sup>252</sup> Outside of the RSFSR, restaurants named for local cities could serve as reminders of the USSR's goodness and benevolence. Another Café Palanga opened in Vilnius, capital of the Lithuanian SSR, as a "gift" to the people from the Soviet state in honor of the anniversary of Lithuania's liberation (and annexation) by Soviet forces. News of the restaurant's opening featured on the front pages of major Soviet newspapers, with *Pravda* featuring the story alongside articles praising the expansion of industry in the other Baltic republics over the preceding two decades.<sup>253</sup>

Soviet food writers and publishing houses trumpeted this idea to the broader Soviet public by promoting the cuisines of allied states in press columns and cookbooks. Recipes for dishes including Romanian stuffed tomatoes and Polish herring in sour cream turned up in women's magazines under headlines reading, "Our Friends Cook Like This," and "Our Friends' Recipes."<sup>254</sup> In addition to evidence of "friendship," these recipes provided new ways of using common ingredients. For instance, one could try a fresh twist on the USSR's ubiquitous potatoes by making Czech-style potato soup, or make an omelet more exciting by adding Bulgarian *brynza* (a cheese similar to Greek feta).<sup>255</sup> Cookbooks even attempted to make some non-European cuisines more familiar. To this end, *The Dishes of Chinese Cuisine* (Bliuda kitaiskoi kukhni, 1981), a Russian translation of a Chinese publication, emphasized that Chinese cookery relied on many of the same ingredients as Russian cuisine. If the reader followed the correct

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<sup>252</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 280, l. 71.

<sup>253</sup> A. Rudzinskas, "Raportuiui stroiteli," *Pravda*, 13 July 1965, 1; N. Kasiukov, "Sdelano k iubileiu," *Izvestiia*, 14 July 1965, 1; B. Baianov and I. Reidi, "Trudovye podarki Estonii," *Pravda*, 13 July 1965, 1; K. Debet'iarov and I. Dizhbit, "Nakanune iubileia," *Pravda*, 13 July 1965, 1.

<sup>254</sup> "Tak gotoviat nashi druž'ia," *Krest'ianka*, June 1973, 32; "Kulinarnye retsepty nashikh družei," *Krest'ianka* supplement, January 1980, 6.

<sup>255</sup> "Kartoshka—ob'edenie!" *Krest'ianka*, September 1968, 30; "Brynza—vkusno i polezno," *Krest'ianka*, February 1969, 30-31.

methods of preparation, he or she could transform common foods—including eggplant, mushrooms, and eggs—into a truly Chinese dish.<sup>256</sup>

Moscow dining officials also strived to render the nonsocialist world legible—and edible—to residents of the capital by expanding their geographic reach into Western Europe. In 1970, the Ministry of Trade proposed cooperating with France to create a French restaurant in Moscow, with a sister establishment serving Russian fare in Paris. Yet the plan fell flat after a breakdown in trade negotiations, as the French side feared the Soviets would fail to provide necessary supplies for their Paris-based eatery.<sup>257</sup> A taste of Italy, however, did come to Moscow during the Brezhnev years. In the early 1980s, a team of Italian specialists helped transform the city's Café No. 1 into a “real pizzeria.” Those not lucky enough to visit this café could learn about it in the women's magazine *Rabotnitsa*, which hinted that this new taste for pizza united the USSR with those Western European states that had already opened pizzerias of their own.<sup>258</sup> Yet *Rabotnitsa*'s promotional recipes also suggested, however unintentionally, that Muscovite pizza may have been far more Soviet than Italian. For instance, they advised that one could use any available cheese, such as the USSR's soft cheeses (products not entirely unlike processed “American cheese”), in the absence of mozzarella, and that frankfurters would also make a perfectly acceptable topping. Many Italians likely would beg to differ. Still, the Soviet home cook could now theoretically access treasures from just about everywhere. In the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet cookbooks featured recipes from every populated world region, describing everything from Syrian lentil soup to Cuban chicken and rice to Chinese Guangzhou-style

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<sup>256</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Osnovnye osobennosti kitaiskoi kukhni, spetsifika ee metodov i priemov,” in *Bliuda kitaiskoi kukhni* by Li Tsin, trans. L.N. Lanskii (Moscow: Legkaia i pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1981), 5, 22-24, 31-32.

<sup>257</sup> RGAE, f. 465, op. 1, d. 844, l. 13.

<sup>258</sup> L. Makarova, “Eta znamenitaia pitstva,” *Rabotnitsa* supplement, January 1983, 5.

seaweed.<sup>259</sup> While finding the ingredients to prepare some foreign dishes would have proven difficult or impossible, these recipes made the Soviet diet appear cosmopolitan in the extreme, at least on paper.

Cookbooks concerned with the national customs of the Soviet Union treated culinary diversity as one of the material benefits of socialist modernity. Dining tables from Alma-Ata to Kiev now displayed a greater variety of dishes, thanks to improvements in agriculture and the “economic ties” that linked one republic to another.<sup>260</sup> Soviet national cuisines had, so the story went, also become healthier. For example, chef N. I. Kovalev claimed that Russians could now cast off dishes such as *tiuria*—a soup of stale bread and water or kvas—that were “as out of place in [their] lives as an old sleigh on the streets of a modern city.”<sup>261</sup> National cuisines further served as evidence of the “friendship of the peoples” that allegedly abided in the Soviet Union. Under Soviet rule, as historian and food writer V. V. Pokhlebkin asserted, the nations of the USSR had experienced “an authentic flowering of national cultures, preserving their unique identities and becoming enriched through mutual influence.”<sup>262</sup> Vibrant, diverse cuisines stood as a testament to this fact.

Yet socialist modernity was not all tasty treats and international camaraderie. Organizational hiccups and supply shortages remained common features of everyday life in Soviet Russia. Even as MRT officials confidently praised national restaurants’ popularity and

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<sup>259</sup> I.A. Fel’dman, *Kulinarnaia mudrost’: Kukhnia narodov mira* (Kiev: Reklama, 1979), 144 and 174, originally published 1973; Tsin, *Bliuda kitaiskoi kukhni*, 23.

<sup>260</sup> See, for example, S. G. Ershov et al., *Mariiskie natsional’nye bliuda* (Ioshkar-Ola: Mariiskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1970), 8; S. A. Shalimov and E. A. Shadura, *Sovremennaia ukrainskaia kukhnia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Kiev: Tekhnika, 1985), 4; *Tatarskaia kulinariia* (Kazan’: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1981), 13-14; *Kazakhskaia kukhnia: Sovremennye i traditsionnye bliuda* (Alma-Ata: Kainar, 1981), 7.

<sup>261</sup> N. I. Kovalev, *Russkaia kulinariia* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1972), 4.

<sup>262</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional’nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 3.

ability to capture “national themes,” some of these dining establishments had trouble maintaining a truly “national” feel.<sup>263</sup> Translator Lynn Visson and her then-husband Wesley Fisher highlighted these problems in *The Moscow Gourmet*, a 1974 dining guide to the Soviet capital. Of the Ukraine, Visson and Fisher wrote, “on none of several visits was it possible to get anything Ukrainian except one greasy so-called borshch and badly overcooked cutlets,” and concluded that “the cuisine of the Soviet Union’s second largest nationality [deserved] better.” The Minsk similarly did not “do full justice to Byelorussian cuisine,” offering few national dishes and filling the “gaps” with “standard Russian fare.” The Berlin served higher quality food, but similarly failed to accurately represent the culture of its namesake locale. “The cuisine,” Visson and Fisher remarked, “rarely gets further West than the Baltic republics.” Plates of cold cuts and dishes of chopped salad differed from those found in other Moscow restaurants only insofar as they bore the name “Berlin,” while “German specialties [were] often unavailable.” Other restaurants, although named for socialist cities or republics, maintained only a vague pretense of specialization. The Bucharest served standard Soviet fare and the Havana was “Cuban in name only.” Meanwhile, Café Palanga gained popularity for its jukebox’s selection of American pop music, not its phantom Lithuanian dishes, and, perhaps most confusingly, the Narva Café served Uzbek dishes, without making so much as a nod to Estonia.<sup>264</sup>

No one factor caused these shortcomings. Sometimes food production and distribution floundered, resulting in shortages of much-needed foods, drinks, and equipment. At a 1970 MRT workers’ congress, one of the Prague’s chefs complained of shortfalls in their gelatin supply,

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<sup>263</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 303, l. 1; f. 224, op. 1, d. 344, l. 6.

<sup>264</sup> Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 52, 69-70, 95-96, 114, 116, 119 and 96-97; TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 340, l. 51.



reminding her colleagues that “Czechoslovak cuisine cannot exist without jellied dishes.”<sup>265</sup>

Only in 1977 did the Prague expect to finally have necessary supplies of foodstuffs and dishware guaranteed through new agreements between the Czechoslovak and Soviet Ministries of Trade.<sup>266</sup> Meanwhile, the Havana experienced difficulties obtaining ingredients, such as citrus fruit, from Cuba and it relied on tape recordings, rather than live performances, of Cuban music. Until the mid-1970s, the Sofia Restaurant operated without the *skara* grills it needed to prepare Bulgarian-style meat dishes.<sup>267</sup> Administrative oddities could also produce disappointing dining experiences. The Narva Café served Central Asian fare in large part because it operated as an affiliate of the Uzbekistan Restaurant. This did not save the Narva from censure. In 1972, I. I. Shevelev, director of Moscow’s Main Administration of Public Dining, complained of the café’s culinary incongruity, *and* of the Uzbekistan’s own failure to dress its servers in national costume. All national restaurants ought, he insisted, to ensure that their decor, uniforms, dishes, furniture, and menus conformed to the appropriate national style.<sup>268</sup>

Still, the MRT appears to have never abandoned efforts to propagandize national cuisines. This suited the state’s larger goal of implementing progressive forms of trade and also encouraged dining workers to advocate for these policies, as working for a national restaurant offered opportunities for foreign travel. At a 1967 MRT workers’ meeting, representatives of the restaurants Warsaw and Bucharest not only advocated for more nationally appropriate menus,

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<sup>265</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 295, l. 35. The Prague’s director had raised the same issue two years earlier, as well, apparently without result. TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 286, l. 61.

<sup>266</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 455, ll. 8-9.

<sup>267</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 495, ll. 1-2, 10.

<sup>268</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 340, l. 51-54; Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 96.

but also argued for staff trips to Poland and Romania.<sup>269</sup> During the 1970s, the Soviet Ministry of Trade dispatched numerous chefs, servers, and restaurant administrators to foreign capitals, including Prague, Sofia, Budapest, and Havana for periods of one to six months.<sup>270</sup> Only by traveling to the homes of these cuisines, so the logic went, could chefs learn to effectively reproduce them in Moscow. Further, these restaurants tended to enjoy financial success, in part thanks to their thematic trappings. For example, in 1968 a representative of the Budapest reported to his MRT colleagues that special events featuring national themes not only helped restaurant staff “understand more deeply the intricacies of Hungarian cuisine,” but also increased the restaurant’s average Sunday income by as much as 100 percent.<sup>271</sup> Several years later, the MRT’s Administrative Council, which oversaw economic development, emphasized the importance of “national coloring” to ensuring a restaurant’s profitability.<sup>272</sup>

The benefits of promoting national cuisines outweighed the difficulties restaurants faced in actually producing such fare, much as the drive to celebrate Soviet culinary cosmopolitanism in cookbooks sometimes overrode the demands of practicality. National cuisines had a powerful potential to entice diners, please dining workers, and speak to the home cook of an ideal socialist modernity. Through national cuisines, dining officials and food experts projected an image of the USSR as a thriving global power, a home to numerous flourishing ethnic communities, and a country in which the population could—or, at the very least, soon would—be able to sample all the flavors of the world.

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<sup>269</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 13-14, 33, and 35-36.

<sup>270</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 455, ll. 6-7; f. 224, op. 1, d. 495, l. 2, 11; f. 224, op. 1, d. 280, l. 70; f. 224, op. 1, d. 302, l. 2.

<sup>271</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 283, l. 29; f. 224, op. 1, d. 286, l. 22.

<sup>272</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 344, l. 7.

## Dining on History

Even as they emphasized modern, “progressive” forms of trade and cross-cultural friendship, late Soviet restaurants also sought historically oriented authenticity. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, national-themed cookbooks and restaurants grew ever more oriented on a hazy prerevolutionary past. Focusing closely on specifically Russian cookbooks and restaurants lays bare the ever more historical nature of the Soviet national cuisines paradigm in the Brezhnev years. Here, we see that historical narratives, allusions, and imagery all became central to the promotion of Russian cuisine. The late Soviet “historical turn” extended to food culture, helping to bolster a sense of cultural distinctiveness, as well as an air of historical continuity and authenticity.

Moscow’s Russian-themed eateries provide a striking example of this phenomenon, as they took on a nostalgic mood in the 1960s and after, using the past as a source for culinary pleasure and cultural meaning. For instance, in honor of 1967’s revolutionary anniversary, the Horseshoe (*Podkova*) Restaurant adopted a more dramatically Russian national style.<sup>273</sup> Embroidered Russian linens decorated the walls and featured in staff uniforms, while the menu offered special dishes including Russian fish stew and “surprise” *bliny* (Russian pancakes). That same year, the Russia (*Rossiia*) Hotel stocked its main restaurant with china, crystal, and linens from famous Russian factories and ordered staff uniforms inspired by Russian national dress. Its signature dishes offered a taste of prerevolutionary fine dining with sautéed mushrooms in puff

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<sup>273</sup> The Horseshoe (*Podkova*) was located at the Exhibition of National Economic Achievements (VDNKh) in Moscow, which featured a pavilions advertising the specific accomplishments and products (industrial and comestible) of each Soviet republic.

pastry cups and the rustic flair of Russian-style pikeperch served in a frying pan.<sup>274</sup> The exclusive Russian Hall (*Russkii zal*), which opened in 1970, tempted foreign tourists with caviar, bliny, and live balalaika music, while the more affordable Russian Tea Café (*Kafe Russkii chai*) boasted a homey birch-wood interior, embroidered linens, glimmering samovars, and tasty filled pies (*pirozhki*).<sup>275</sup> These and other “Old Russia” eateries reminded foreign visitors and residents alike that Moscow was capital of not only the Soviet Union, but also of the Russian Republic.<sup>276</sup>

Some establishments had a special advantage in appearing historical, in that they possessed concrete connections to Moscow’s past. The Central (*Tsentral’nyi*) Restaurant (originally Filippov’s, est. 1865) underwent work in the late 1960s to appear more thoroughly Russian.<sup>277</sup> The kitchen now turned out a greater variety of Russian dishes, with 60 of the restaurant’s 100 menu items representing Russian cuisine. According to MRT officials, the Central’s chefs focused on “the resurrection of old forgotten Russian dishes.” Of these, monastery-style sturgeon in sour cream and a mixed-meat aspic called “Russian Appetizer” (*russkaia zakuska*) gained especial popularity with diners. As of the mid-1970s, the Central catered primarily to foreign tour groups, but locals could sample the restaurant’s famous meat

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<sup>274</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 283, l. 34; f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, ll. 27-28.

<sup>275</sup> The Russia Hall was located in the Intourist Hotel, to which only foreign tourists could gain access, while the Russian Tea Café was open to the public. Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 66-67 and 104-5. The Intourist Hotel was opened in 1970 and torn down in 2002. Sabrina Tavernise, “Soviet Hotel in Moscow to be Razed,” *New York Times*, 9 January 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/09/business/soviet-hotel-in-moscow-to-be-razed.html>.

<sup>276</sup> Other Old Russia themed teahouses sprouted up all over the city. As of 1974, there were three Russian Tea Cafés, and a 1972 report projected opening at least a half-dozen similar establishments. Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 66-67, 88-89, 104-5, 108; TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 56-59.

<sup>277</sup> Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 73.

aspic, “Fairy Tale” fish salad, savory chicken pie, and other treats at the Gorky Street Kulinariia.<sup>278</sup>

The Slavic Bazaar (*Slavianskii bazar*) also cut a historical profile. Originally opened in 1872, this restaurant had been a favorite of the Russian creative intelligentsia until it closed in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>279</sup> In spite of its closure, the old Slavic Bazaar continued to hold a place in Muscovites’ memories, not only because the building itself remained standing, but also because writer Vladimir Giliarovskii had helped immortalize it in his *Moscow and Muscovites* (*Moskva i moskvichi*, 1926), which described life in Moscow before the revolution.<sup>280</sup> Although the city flirted in the early 1960s with the idea of demolishing the Slavic Bazaar’s decrepit edifice, the restaurant was resurrected in April 1966.<sup>281</sup> The new 500-seat Slavic Bazaar intended to call up the spirit of prerevolutionary Moscow. The interiors drew on fairy tale themes and each room reflected, in the words of one high-level Moscow dining official, “the traditional and unique character of Old Russia.”<sup>282</sup> The menu boasted dishes allegedly based on “age-old recipes.”<sup>283</sup> These included a combination of recognizable Russian staples and newer

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<sup>278</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 282, l. 49; f. 224, op. 1, d. 283, l. 100; Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 73. The components of the Russian Appetizer aspic (*rusaskaia zakuska*) served at the Central included beef, tongue, chicken, ham, boiled eggs, and herbs.

<sup>279</sup> Kovchenkov, *Moskovskaia kukhnia*, 12; Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 82-83.

<sup>280</sup> Giliarovskii remembered the Slavic Bazaar as a “fashionable” restaurant that was popular among parties who had already spent much of the evening out drinking and carousing. Here, they would end their night with coffee, champagne, and elegant carafes of fine cognac. V. A. Giliarovskii, *Moskva i moskvichi* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1983), 298. Originally published in 1926.

<sup>281</sup> L. Kariov and N. Ter-Minasova, “Mozhno, no nuzhno li?” *Izvestiia*, 16 December 1963, 6; TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 280, l. 41.

<sup>282</sup> The official in question was V. Gorshunin, director of the MRT. TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 317, l. 2; f. 224, op. 1, d. 344, l. 7. One dining hall celebrated the Ural Mountains, two others featured folk art themes, while yet another suggested the interior of an old peasant hut. Kovchenkov, *Moskovskaia kukhnia*, 12.

<sup>283</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 300, l. 13; Kovchenkov, *Moskovskaia kukhnia*, 10.

inventions named for features of Russian nature or history.<sup>284</sup> As of 1982, Slavic Bazaar offered a borshch that omitted the New World's potatoes and tomatoes, alongside "Slavic Vegetable" salad, a typically Soviet combination of boiled root vegetables, canned peas, cheese, and mayonnaise.<sup>285</sup> Regardless of whether all its dishes could have been found on prerevolutionary tables, the Slavic Bazaar evoked a sense of continuity between the prerevolutionary and Soviet periods. Its name and location tapped into the city's past, while the menu and decor offered linguistic and aesthetic markers meant to imply authenticity and tradition.

Public dining administrations in other towns and cities undertook similar efforts at creating historical dining experiences. My sources do not make clear whether these initiatives came from authorities at the national level or emerged in these localities. Regardless, in this period, it became common for Russian cities famed for their history and architecture to host at least one restaurant that offered visitors an experience of "Old Russia." In the late 1960s, Suzdal' opened an eponymous restaurant, whose menu featured sixty recipes collected by historian and ethnographer Galina Shamrai. A 1969 magazine article promoting the restaurant claimed that, after numerous changes and adjustments, the Suzdal' now offered wholly authentic fare, prepared without any "falsifications." These dishes included cucumbers with honey, liver with mushrooms, and "Old Russian" dumplings filled with a mixture of lung, heart, mushrooms, and onions.<sup>286</sup> In 1968, the restaurant Detinets had opened in the ancient fortress (also known as the *Detinets*, or Novgorod Kremlin) in Novgorod's city center. Like the Suzdal' Restaurant, Detinets

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<sup>284</sup> These dishes included Slavic-style *ukha* (fish soup), Old Moscow soup (*pokhlebka*), *bliny* (Russian pancakes), fish-filled *rasstegai* pastries, and "Russian Mushrooms" salad (mushroom-shaped mounds of cottage cheese topped with tomatoes). Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 83; TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 408, ll. 1-2.

<sup>285</sup> Bol'shakov, "Khleb da sol'"; Catriona Kelly discusses the "saladization" of Soviet cuisine in "Leningradskaia kuhnia," 252-58. Also see Anna Kushkova, "At the Center of the Table: The Rise and Fall of the Olivier Salad," *Russian Studies in History* 50, 1 (Summer 2011): 44-96.

<sup>286</sup> V. Kovchenkov, "Ugoshchaet drevnii Suzdal'," *Rabotnitsa*, January 1969, 30-31.

offered “historical” dishes, painted wooden tableware (*khokhloma*), and servers in national dress, all aimed at recreating the world of prerevolutionary Russia.<sup>287</sup>

Cookbooks also took the historical turn, perhaps in part because focusing on national cuisines in the present had not always been comfortable. For instance, the authors of *Russian Cuisine* (*Russkaia kulinariia*, 1962), the first Soviet cookbook to focus explicitly on Russian national cooking, ran into trouble while attempting to create an ideal vision of Soviet life. This volume featured dishes from older Soviet and prerevolutionary cookbooks, as well as the winning entries from a chefs’ competition.<sup>288</sup> This approach helped the authors—a collective of food professionals—to define Russian cuisine both in terms of historical custom *and* contemporary practice. As in other national cookbooks published during this period, the book’s introduction focuses on Russia’s dominant foodstuffs and dishes, while giving a brief outline of the cuisine’s history. The authors included recipes for dishes widely regarded as traditional, such as *ukha* (clear fish soup) and *kulebiaka* (a large savory pie with a yeasted crust), while using other dishes’ names to associate them with the likes of poet Alexander Pushkin (Pushkin-style Fried Potatoes) or the Volga River’s famed barge haulers (Barge-haulers’ Fish Soup).<sup>289</sup>

Still, the authors saved their kindest words for the Soviet period and its technological advances, new consumer goods industry, and modern nutritional science. In this view, history provided the stage on which Soviet power would perform its wisdom and benevolence. But the authors got a lot wrong about the present. For example, refrigeration had not all but eliminated

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<sup>287</sup> K. Runov and E. V. Andreev, “Dobro pozhalovat’ v ‘Detinets’!” *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, 19 October 1968, 2.

<sup>288</sup> P. V. Abaturov et al., *Russkaia kulinariia* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’sтво trgovoi literatury, 1962), 5; Gronow and Zhuravlev, “Book of Tasty and Healthy Food,” 52.

<sup>289</sup> See recipes for *Kartofel’ zharenyi (po-pushkinskii)* and *Ukha burlatskaia* in Abaturov et al., *Russkaia kulinariia*, 214, 87.

the practice of salting meat in the USSR.<sup>290</sup> About half of Soviet families did without personal refrigerators well into the 1970s, and this very book included instructions for several different methods of salting meat.<sup>291</sup> Further, did the authors base their admonition to cook with vegetable oils (rather than butter) solely on their concern for everyone to consume the right “fatty acids”?<sup>292</sup> Perhaps not. The year of *Russian Cuisine*’s publication saw shortages of butter and other staple foods, 25-30 percent price hikes on meat and dairy items, and, subsequently, the tragic Novocherkassk massacre, in which Soviet Army troops fired on factory workers protesting food shortages and high prices.<sup>293</sup>

Chef and food technologist N. I. Kovalev’s identically named *Russian Cuisine* (Russkaia kulinariia, 1972) turned more resolutely to history, offering recipes, as well as lengthy discussions of historical Russian food customs.<sup>294</sup> The idea of “national taste” figured centrally. This embodied not only the unique nutritional needs of the Russian people, but also the “collective experience of [their] ancestors.” Only “national taste” could explain why, “to a Russian person cabbage soup . . . [seems] tastier than a refined French consommé.” Further, the healthfulness of many traditional dishes attested to the fact that cuisines develop in a deliberate, not arbitrary, manner. Russia’s native soups, grain porridges, and wholesome dairy products provided “beautiful examples of the correct combinations of ingredients in terms of taste and

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>291</sup> Abaturov et al. provide two methods for salting beef and one method for tongue, in addition to recipes for making salted hams and salt pork. Ibid., 403-4. According to Barbara Alpern Engel, only about half of Soviet families owned refrigerators by the mid-1970s. Barbara Alpern Engel, “Women and the State,” in *Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 3, ed. Suny, 489.

<sup>292</sup> Abaturov, et al., *Russkaia kulinariia*, 12.

<sup>293</sup> On food shortages in the early 1960s, see Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy,” 232; Lebina and Chistikov, *Obyvatel’ i reformy*, 234-35; Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems*, 207-17.

<sup>294</sup> Siutkina and Siutkin offer a brief discussion of Kovalev’s career in *Nepridumannaia istoriia sovetskoi kukhni*, 127-29.



physiology.” Yet a dish’s historical origins would not guarantee its healthfulness. One should not, as Kovalev put it, “blindly or out of false patriotism resurrect long-forgotten, primitive, and unnourishing dishes,” such as the aforementioned tiuria, which “reflected the beggarly lifestyle of the prerevolutionary Russian peasantry.” Kovalev aimed to unite national cuisine with the principles of scientific nutrition and rational dining. He would assist the Soviet population by “select[ing] the recipes of the most completely nutritious and tasty folk dishes, using the diversity of Russian cuisine to improve and vary of the population’s diet.”<sup>295</sup> In this view, home cooks needed expert guidance to properly understand what history had to offer.

V. V. Pokhlebkin took the historical approach a step further.<sup>296</sup> Like other national cookbooks of this period, his comprehensive *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* (Natsional’nye kukhni nashikh narodov, 1978) defined Soviet cuisine as a patchwork of distinctive ethnic customs, rather than as a uniform diet dominated by Russian-style fare. Historical information aided Pokhlebkin in demonstrating the diversity of Soviet ethnic foodways. His chapter on Russian cuisine thus described how the “Old Russian” customs that existed prior to the sixteenth century had provided the foundation of the Russian peasant diet into the early twentieth century: extensive use of sour rye dough, wild foods, and vegetables; a heavy reliance on soups and porridges; and a divide between Lenten (*postnyi*) and non-Lenten (*skoromnyi*) dishes. Meanwhile, the diet of the upper classes changed considerably, thanks in large part to encounters with non-Russians. Imperial expansion led to greater contact with the peoples of the southern steppes and Siberia, who gave Russians such beloved items as black caviar and spit-roasted

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<sup>295</sup> Kovalev, *Ruskaia kulinariia*, 3-5.

<sup>296</sup> On Pokhlebkin’s life and work see chapters 5 and 6. Also see Ronald F. Feldstein, “An Introduction to William Pokhlebkin and his Contributions to Russian Culture,” *Glossos* 11 (Fall 2011), [http://slaviccenters.duke.edu/uploads/media\\_items/issue-11-feldstein.original.pdf](http://slaviccenters.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/issue-11-feldstein.original.pdf).

meat. Peter the Great oversaw the introduction of German and Dutch foods and customs, including the cold appetizer (*zakuska*) table. French influence transformed elite dining habits during the first half of the nineteenth century and Russian cuisine, in turn, infiltrated France in the century's second half.<sup>297</sup> Juxtaposing the constant reinvention of the elite diet with the relative stability of peasant traditions, Pokhlebkin suggested that commoners retained the authentic, national character of real Russian cookery. Simultaneously, his insistence on Russian cuisine's popularity in Europe and the "respect" it once commanded abroad pointed to his pride in the propagation of elite, Franco-Russian traditions, those which spread west during the nineteenth century. Pokhlebkin did not appear concerned with weeding out obsolete dishes. Instead, he expressed a nostalgic view that celebrated at once the timeless authenticity of Russian peasant foodways and the former grandeur of elite Imperial gastronomy.

As much as the national cuisines paradigm reflected the forward-looking orientation of socialist modernity, it also encouraged food experts and their readers to consider the past. This development not only reaffirms that late Soviet culture underwent a "historical turn," but, particularly in the Russian case, it also highlights the fact that inquiries into the past can readily converge with nationalist sentiments. In earlier decades, publishing houses and food writers had sidestepped Russia in their discussions of national cuisines. This may have been to avoid the appearance of "Great Russian chauvinism," or simply because pan-Soviet cuisine had been so firmly rooted in Russian customs.<sup>298</sup> Either way, as the Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes courted Russian nationalists, seeking to co-opt them before they could pose a political threat, it

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<sup>297</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 8-12.

<sup>298</sup> Gronow and Zhuravlev suggest the first Russian national cookbook appeared in the USSR only in 1962 because publishers and authors feared accusations of "Great Russian chauvinism." Gronow and Zhuravlev, "Book of Tasty and Healthy Food," 52.

became ever more acceptable to celebrate Russian culture—cuisine included—in explicitly national terms.<sup>299</sup> Food writers and dining officials used national history to appear to differentiate between the Russian and the Soviet, thereby crafting cultural roots for relatively recent innovations in diet and dining, such as take-out meals and canned vegetable salads. Such historical musings would later set the stage for post-Soviet Russian gastronomic nationalism.<sup>300</sup> In the meantime, by delving into culinary history, some experts found themselves skirting uncomfortable aspects of the not-so-distant past.

### Reconstructing Tradition

The late Soviet enthusiasm for historical cookery raised thorny questions about both the past and the present, as a critical look at Russian and other national cookbooks reveals. Discussing “traditional” cuisines, food writers selected certain customs over others, only sometimes providing justifications for their choices. As noted above, Kovalev rejected tiuria on the grounds that it represented the subjugation of the Russian peasant. Others echoed Kovalev’s condemnation of bread-and-water soup in their later works on Russian cuisine. The authors of *Cuisines of the Peoples of the USSR* (Kukhnia narodov SSSR, 1981) insisted that “it is not worth pitying” the loss of this dish, which had “vanished into the irretrievable past.”<sup>301</sup> A. I. Titunnik and Iu. M. Novozhenov, authors of the professional handbook *Soviet National and Foreign Cuisines* (Sovetskaia natsional’naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia, 1977), similarly listed tiuria among

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<sup>299</sup> Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*; Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*; Yanov, *Russian New Right*.

<sup>300</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>301</sup> T. V. Reutovich, ed., *Kukhnia narodov SSSR*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minsk: Polymia, 1983), 9.

the “insufficiently nourishing” dishes that, happily, “now exist only in literature.”<sup>302</sup> And in the mid-1980s, food writer Elena Barsukova expressed similar disdain for “dishes of low nutritional value” that no longer darkened Russian tables.<sup>303</sup>

Sometimes food writers disagreed on whether a certain custom ought to be preserved, especially with Orthodox food customs. Soviet cookbooks had long left out ritual and holiday dishes, such as *kulich* (Easter cake) and *paskha* (a cheesecake-like dessert served on Easter), a fact that some Soviet émigrés saw as evidence that Russian culture faced potential destruction in its very homeland.<sup>304</sup> In the USSR, Kovalev and others simply remained silent on the topic of ritual foods, neither denigrating nor perpetuating them. However, exceptions existed and became more noticeable in the mid- and late 1970s, when the national cuisines trend hit its stride. Titiunnik and Novozhenov, for instance, provided a recipe for a “village-style” cheese dish identical in its ingredients (farmer’s cheese, egg, butter, sugar, raisins, and lemon zest) and preparation to *paskha*. It lacked only the older dish’s telling name, the Russian word for Easter.<sup>305</sup> Pokhlebkin even provided a recipe for *kulich* without changing its name.<sup>306</sup> These dishes also lived on in popular practice. For example, peasant diarist E. G. Kisileva recorded preparing *paskha* for an Easter-season memorial meal in 1980, treating this as an utterly normal

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<sup>302</sup> A. I. Titiunnik and Iu. M. Novozhenov, *Sovetskaia natsional'naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia* (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1977), 14.

<sup>303</sup> E. F. Barsukova, *Russkaia kukhnia* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1986), 7.

<sup>304</sup> Gronow and Zhuravlev note such omissions in “Book of Tasty and Healthy Food,” 49. Nina Nicolaeff and Kyra Petrovskaya, both post-World War II émigrés, treated the suppression of Orthodox food customs as evidence of Soviet power threatening Russian cultural traditions. Nina Nicolaeff and Nancy Phelan, *The Art of Russian Cooking* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1969), 213-14; Kyra Petrovskaya, *Kyra's Secrets of Russian Cooking* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1961), 152. Also see chapter 4.

<sup>305</sup> Titiunnik and Novozhenov, *Sovetskaia natsional'naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia*, 38.

<sup>306</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 58.

task.<sup>307</sup> Even the General Secretary himself consumed traditional treats in their season.

According to his niece, Luba Brezhneva, Leonid Il'ich enjoyed paskha, kulich, and decorated eggs at Easter, a habit Brezhneva attributed to her uncle's vestigial religiosity.<sup>308</sup>

Jewish food traditions also went undercover during the Soviet period; much as "[Soviet] Jews learned to keep their Jewishness hidden," Jewish foods often appeared under alternative names in public and in novel arrangements in the home.<sup>309</sup> As literary scholar Alice Nakhimovsky observes, *challah*, an egg-rich bread customarily consumed on the Sabbath, lost its Yiddish name to become the Russian *pletanka*—"braid" or "plait"—in Soviet bakeries.<sup>310</sup> Jewish-style cabbage rolls (which included meat, but not dairy, in conformity with Jewish dietary law) reemerged as "Eastern-style" cabbage rolls in at least one cookbook, possibly carrying an oblique reference to the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Russian Far East.<sup>311</sup> Other dishes lost their ritual significance. *Charoset*—a mixture of honey, apples, and nuts—sometimes appeared at parties for birthdays and official holidays, instead of at the Passover Seder.<sup>312</sup> Yet Pokhlebkin's *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* represented Jewish fare by

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<sup>307</sup> N. N. Kozlova and I. I. Sandomirskaia, "*Ia tak khochu nazvat' kino*": "*Naivnoe pis'mo*": *Opyt lingvo-sotsiologicheskogo chteniia* (Moscow: Russkoe fenomenologicheskoe obshchestvo Gnozis, 1996), 169. Kisileva was a Russian-speaker who resided in Voroshilovgrad Oblast (now Luhansk Oblast), in the easternmost part of the Ukrainian SSR.

<sup>308</sup> Luba Brezhneva, *The World I Left Behind: Pieces of a Past*, trans. Geoffrey Polk (New York: Random House, 1995), 364.

<sup>309</sup> Alice Nakhimovsky, "Public and Private in the Kitchen: Eating Jewish in the Soviet State," in *Food and Judaism*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon, Ronald A. Simpkins, and Gerald Shapiro (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2005), 149. Also see, Nakhimovsky, "You are What They Ate: Russian Jews Reclaim their Foodways," *Shofar* 25, 1 (2006): 63-77.

<sup>310</sup> Nakhimovsky, "You are What They Ate," 67.

<sup>311</sup> I. I. Guba, ed. *Priglasaem k stolu* (Dnepropetrovsk: Promin, 1973), 82, as cited in Nakhimovsky, "Public and Private in the Kitchen," 156. Nakhimovsky *does not* draw the possible connection between the labels "Eastern-style" or "Oriental-style" (*po-vostochnomu*) and the geographic location of the Jewish Autonomous Region.

<sup>312</sup> Nakhimovsky, "You are What They Ate," 68.

including recipes for gefilte fish, tzimmes, and chopped herring in a chapter dedicated to the cuisines of the Far East. Still, Pokhlebkin shied away from any open discussion of dietary law, simply stating, “specific limitations on the selection and combination of certain food products is typical of Jewish cooking.”<sup>313</sup> This Jewish cuisine thus appeared as an ethnoterritorial phenomenon, rather than a set of customs historically associated with the practice of Judaism and recognized as part of Jewish culture (particularly among the Ashkenazim) in Russia and abroad.

The cuisines of other national minorities also tended to be subsumed in a discourse that focused largely on the customs of the titular nationalities of the union republics. Indeed, looking at three of the period’s major comprehensive national cookbooks reveals a distinct national-culinary hierarchy. Titiunnik and Novozhenov’s *Soviet National and Foreign Cuisines, Culinary Wisdom: Cuisines of the Peoples of the World* (Kulinarnaia mudrost’: Kukhnia narodov mira, 1973) by I. A. Fel’dman, and Pokhlebkin’s *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* all follow a common pattern.<sup>314</sup> Each covers the three East Slavic peoples (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians) before touching any other regions or customs. These categories also tend to enjoy the longest lists of recipes. The 1979 edition of *Culinary Wisdom*, for example, features 85 Russian entries, 57 Ukrainian, and 44 Belarusian, compared to an average recipe list of about 23 recipes per “nation.”<sup>315</sup> In all three books, Central Asian (Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and

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<sup>313</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional’nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 284-85. In his chapter on the Far East, Pokhlebkin included Jewish, Mongolian, and “Polar” cuisines. On Pokhlebkin and Jewish cuisine, also see Feldstein, “Introduction to William Pokhlebkin.” Pokhlebkin was not the first Soviet food writer to cover the topic of Jewish cuisine. One volume on Jewish fare had appeared in 1939. It was never reprinted and as a result copies are very rare today. A. B. Gutchina, S. I. Mesropian, and V. M. Tamarkin, *50 bliud evreiskoi kukhni* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1939). For more on Jewish food in the Soviet Union, see Nakhimovsky, “Public and Private in the Kitchen.”

<sup>314</sup> Titiunnik and Novozhenov, *Sovetskaia natsional’naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia*; Fel’dman, *Kulinarnaia mudrost’*; Pokhlebkin, *Natsional’nye kukhni nashikh narodov*.

<sup>315</sup> Fel’dman attributed comparable numbers of recipes to only a few other cuisines: Uzbek (40), Georgian (48), and Turkmen (40). Fewer than twenty recipes each represent about half of the cuisines listed in the book, while some sections include as few as three (Chechen-Ingush) or four (Yakut) recipes. Fel’dman, *Kulinarnaia mudrost’*.

Turkmen), Caucasian (Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani), and Moldavian cuisines vie for second place, followed by Baltic (Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian) cuisines. Cuisines associated with smaller ethnic groups inhabiting autonomous republics, such as the Tatar ASSR, appear only occasionally. For instance, Titiunnik and Novozhenov stopped with the cuisines of the union republics, preferring to shift their attention to foreign cuisines, rather than the foodways of smaller ethnic minorities, whereas Pokhlebkin dealt with several additional Soviet regions (the North Caucasus, the Volga region, Karelia, and the Far North) and ethnic groups (Permyak, Yakut, Mongolian/Buryat, and Jewish).<sup>316</sup> Fel'dman similarly provided recipes from each of the union republics and a number of areas frequently overlooked in gastronomic discourse, including the Bashkir, Buryat, Chechen-Ingush, Kalmyk, Karelian, Komi, Udmurt, Kabardino-Balkarian, Chuvash, and Yakut ASSRs. Still, *Culinary Wisdom* includes only a few dishes for each of these smaller peoples, offering, for instance, just four Yakut recipes: boiled meat, raw fish with mustard sauce, wild-berry mousse, and Yakut-style tea. Pokhlebkin eschewed recipes altogether in some cases, instead providing only descriptions of the cuisines of such peoples as the Komi, Permyaks, and the Yakuts.<sup>317</sup>

Since Russian state archives have retained so few Brezhnev-era editorial records from major publishing houses responsible for cookbooks, it is difficult to assess whether or not this hierarchy was consciously constructed and, if so, why. Yet we can make some educated guesses.

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<sup>316</sup> The Titiunnik and Novozhenov volume's second half includes chapters on Bulgarian, Yugoslavian, Hungarian, German, Polish, Romanian, Czechoslovak, English, Arab, Indian, Italian, Asian (Chinese, Korean, Mongolian, and Japanese), Scandinavian, French, and Latin American cuisines. Titiunnik and Novozhenov, *Sovetskaia natsional'naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia*, 209-382. Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 274-85.

<sup>317</sup> Fel'dman, *Kulinarnaia mudrost'*, 93-102 and 109-114. In his chapter titled "North Caucasian, Volga-region, Permyak, Karelian, and Yakut Cuisines," Pokhlebkin provides no recipes. He describes common dishes, generally noting their similarity to items found in other sections of the cookbook or, in the case of Yakut customs, emphasizing their simplicity. The implication is that these dishes are too simple to bother providing recipes for their preparation. Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 274-77.

First, this hierarchy could reflect anticipated consumer demand. The state presumably wanted to sell these texts, and it may have been the case that publishing officials regarded the cuisines of smaller ethnic groups (e.g., Buryats) a less desirable product than, say, books on the cuisines of larger population groups (e.g., Russians) or groups whose cuisine already enjoyed broad popularity (e.g., Georgians). Second, some ethnic cuisines presented greater challenges to home cooks than others. The dearth of Yakut recipes in these texts may have stemmed in part from the fact that important Yakut foods, such as reindeer milk and thinly sliced frozen raw fish, were unavailable or unappealing to many Soviet consumers. Third, some peoples' customs remained sufficiently similar to those of a larger ethnic group that authors may have felt their recipes did not offer sufficient diversity. Minorities residing within the RSFSR, such as the Mordvins and the Mari, shared many dishes, cooking methods, and dining habits with Russians, with whom they had long been in close contact. For instance, Mordvins enjoyed chilled vegetable and kvas soup (*okroshka* or *salved'*), cabbage-filled pies, and other dishes beloved by Russians and considered by many to be *Russian*.<sup>318</sup> Finally, this also reflected, at least in part, a real system of privilege in which the titular nationalities of the union republics enjoyed greatest access to political power, resources, and union-wide representation.

This hierarchy aside, even simple ingredients could cook up controversy. Authors writing on the cuisines of ethnic minorities residing in Soviet Russia thus took opposing approaches to hempseed, a crop common in the Russian Empire.<sup>319</sup> The authors of *Mari National Dishes* (1970) disparaged both hempseed and flaxseed, describing dishes that include them as “a reflection of the plight of the Mari people under tsarism” and as evidence that before 1917 the

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<sup>318</sup> See A. V. Zotova, *Mordovskaia kukhnia* (Saransk: Mordovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1977).

<sup>319</sup> On hemp as a food crop in Russia, see Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 5, 121, 251.



Mari “were left to die out in destitution and hunger.”<sup>320</sup> A 1977 volume on Mordvinian cuisine took a different approach, proclaiming,

The time has come to return hempseed oil to our table—for centuries it was the Mordvinian people’s closest companion. Crisp wheat or millet bliny that crunch between your teeth, drizzled with hempseed oil—it’s just delicious! . . . And if you take freshly grated black radish, sprinkle it with coarse salt, pound it with a pestle, and splash it with [hempseed] oil, you get an incomparable snack. When the people ate this Lenten (hempseed) oil everyday, there was no sign of [arteriosclerosis]. This oil . . . has a beneficial effect on the cardiovascular system.<sup>321</sup>

In this way, cookbooks afforded non-Russian food experts residing in Soviet Russia an opportunity to assert their culture’s distinctiveness, while also allowing specific foods to serve as proxies for the authors’ perspectives on prerevolutionary custom. Hempseed could thus represent either hardship and repression or wholesome traditions in danger of being lost. In the culinary realm, history offered few clear-cut lessons.

Another tension emerged between the vision of Soviet cuisine as a mosaic of longstanding national customs and cookbook authors’ desire—or, possibly, need—to praise the interconnectedness of the Soviet peoples. Some cooking texts, as noted above, touted the “tight economic ties” that allowed fresh and processed foodstuffs to move freely from one republic to another. Others celebrated the cross-cultural influences that had enriched cuisines across the Soviet Union. Pokhlebkin had presented food customs as evidence of the “flowering of national cultures” after 1917 and of the beneficial effects of “mutual influence.” This “mutual influence” involved regional dishes, such as Caucasian meat pies (*chebureki*), becoming union-wide favorites, and the introduction of new foods into various diets, as in the case of the once-nomadic

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<sup>320</sup> Ershov, et al., *Mariiskie natsional’nye bliuda*, 7. The Mari ASSR (today the Mari-El Republic) is located in Russia’s Volga-Kama region.

<sup>321</sup> Zotova, *Mordovskaia kukhnia*, 12. The Mordovian ASSR (today the Republic of Mordovia, or Mordvinia) is located in European Russia, straddling the Volga Elevation and the Oka-Don River Plain.

Kazakhs, who began eating far greater quantities of cultivated produce during the Soviet period.<sup>322</sup> Yet Pokhlebkin also expressed concern that certain historical customs could be extinguished through this very cultural interpenetration, writing,

National cuisines and the tasty, healthy dishes they have created should be preserved, both because they have ‘comforting’ qualities and also because they can serve future generations. Yet the techniques of a national cuisine can change and, in the end, be forgotten, losing once and for all their authentic national coloring. This is why it is necessary to collect recipes for national dishes . . . and leave them as a legacy for our descendants.<sup>323</sup>

He was in good company. In the 1960s and 1970s, numerous food experts claimed to resurrect or preserve “forgotten” elements of various cuisines. *Distinctive Cuisine* (Samobytnaia kukhnia, 1965) dedicated an entire chapter to such “forgotten dishes,” including Russian *kolduny* dumplings, buckwheat bliny, bliny pie (*blinchatyi pirog*), and stewed kohlrabi.<sup>324</sup> A 1970 text on Mari cooking also claimed to provide recipes for both new and “old forgotten” dishes, although the authors did not necessarily make clear which were which.<sup>325</sup> Titunnik and Novozhenov praised Ukrainian chefs for protecting “the traditions of the national culinary art” and resurrecting “many unjustly forgotten foods.”<sup>326</sup> They also neglected to identify which dishes had been “forgotten.” The idea of culinary resurrection appeared more important than the details of what was being saved from oblivion.

Further, scarcely anyone seemed enthusiastic about discussing how these customs had been lost in the first place, probably because the answers to this question resided in the tumult of the preceding half-century. Although Soviet nationalities policy had long promoted ethnic

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<sup>322</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 3, 275, 224.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>324</sup> P. M. Chastnyi, I. I. Bepalov, and A. S. Lebedev, *Samobytnaia kukhnia* (Alma-Ata: Kazakhstan, 1965), 225-36.

<sup>325</sup> Ershov et al., *Mariiskie natsional'nye bliuda*, 5.

<sup>326</sup> Titunnik and Novozhenov, *Sovetskaia natsional'naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia*, 45.

particularism, in the 1920s and 1930s population transfers, industrialization, and political repression dealt heavy blows to traditional cultures all across the USSR.<sup>327</sup> For decades afterward, urbanization, internal migration, and industrialization continued to remake life throughout the USSR. Although Russians came to occupy a position of privilege, Russian culture also underwent massive changes.<sup>328</sup> In terms of cuisine, this meant the spread of industrially produced foods, standardized cafeteria fare, and the erasure of certain customs (such as the Russian Orthodox food traditions noted above) from state-sponsored food writing.<sup>329</sup>

Finally, national cookbooks also remained silent over the fact that women had long been responsible for the vast majority of home cooking in Russia, a “tradition” that continued throughout the Soviet period. Of course, the Bolshevik leadership had promised in their first decades to “liberate” women from the “exploitation” of domestic labor. This aim provided one of the justifications for largely unsuccessful attempts to move kitchen chores out of the home and into communal public eateries.<sup>330</sup> Although a more old-fashioned ideal reemerged in the Stalin years, the Khrushchev regime attempted to breathe new life into the rhetoric of women’s

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<sup>327</sup> As Jeremy Smith writes, “Religion and other practices, such as nomadism, [came] under attack, threatening the traditional way of life for minorities, as well as for Russians, as a consequence of the ideological assault and the drive to industrialize the country.” Smith, “Non-Russians,” 500-501.

<sup>328</sup> Geoffrey Hosking cites the damage that anti-religious campaigns and collectivization did to Russian peasant culture. Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union* (London: Fontana Press/Collins, 1985), 249.

<sup>329</sup> Irina Glushchenko argues that during the prewar period, “the Soviet system was oriented on standardization,” including in the realm of food. Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 74. In his lengthy and detailed history of Russian cuisine, published posthumously in 2000, Pokhlebkina similarly homed in on the 1920s and 1930s as a period of culinary standardization, also describing it as a time when many culinary riches were lost. Pokhlebkina, *Kukhnia veka*, 174. As Natalia Lebina points out, standardization reemerged as an ideal for food experts in the Khrushchev era. Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy,” 220.

<sup>330</sup> Mauricio Borrero, “Communal Dining and State Cafeterias in Moscow and Petrograd, 1917-1921,” in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Glants and Toomre, 163; Rothstein and Rothstein, “Beginnings of the Soviet Culinary Arts.”

emancipation.<sup>331</sup> The public dining industry grew, more prepared foods appeared in stores, and the consumer goods industry offered more labor-saving devices. Still, the state trumpeted these advances as being beneficial especially for women, betraying its own understanding of kitchen labor as “women’s work.”<sup>332</sup> Cooking remained primarily a female task throughout the late Soviet period, with urban adult women spending three or more times as many hours on food preparation each week as men.<sup>333</sup> Since this reality broke so starkly with the state’s professed ideals, Soviet cookbook authors could hardly have endorsed this division of kitchen labor, even as they touted the virtues of historical cookery. Yet their nostalgic vision of diverse cuisines prepared at home may well have helped reinforce the “tradition” by which cooking remained women’s responsibility.

In sum, acknowledging the flattening out of culinary culture in the Soviet period, food experts lamented and sought to resurrect food traditions they feared would fade from cultural memory. But in this they found themselves in a tricky position, as they could not speak with any specificity on this topic without potentially impugning the past Soviet leadership. Similarly, they proved unable or at least reticent to endorse “traditions” that persisted throughout the decades but conflicted with communism’s stated goals, such as women’s responsibility for food production.

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<sup>331</sup> Engel, “Women and the State”, 479-82. This vision of rational culinary abundance as an aspect of culturedness dominated the iconic *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food* (*Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche*, 1939). See Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik.” On taste, “culturedness,” and consumer goods in the Stalin era, see Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*, 147-49.

<sup>332</sup> Reid, “Khrushchev Kitchen”; Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen”; Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy.”

<sup>333</sup> In the mid-1960s, urban adult women devoted on average five times as many hours per week to food preparation as men did. Although this gap narrowed somewhat over subsequent decades, women continued to spend a great deal more time than men on food-related tasks. In 1965, men spent an average of 1.8 hours per week in the kitchen, compared to women’s 9.4 hours. In 1986, men spent an average of 2.5 hours per week on food preparation, while women still far outstripped them with 7.6 hours on such tasks. V. D. Patrushev, “Obshchaia kartina izmenenii ispol’zovaniia biudzheta vremeni gorozhan s 1965 po 1997/98 gody,” *Biudzhety vremeni i peremeny v zhiznedeiatel’nosti gorodskikh zhitelei v 1965-1998 godakh*, ed. T. M. Karakhanova (Moscow: Institut sotsiologii RAN, 2001), 15-16; T. M. Karakhanova, “Trudovoe povedenie gorodskikh zhitelei v bytovoi sfere i ego dinamika za 30 let,” *Biudzhety vremeni i peremeny v zhiznedeiatel’nosti gorodskikh zhitelei*, ed. Karakhanova, 32.

Food experts needed to celebrate prerevolutionary culture without praising the Imperial social order. They had to commend Soviet power, while eliding much of the Soviet past. They celebrated national custom, but excised from “tradition” any seeming failures to align with official ideology. From these efforts, national cuisines emerged as handpicked assemblages of the “right” traditions, packaged in folk art and historical silences.

## **Conclusion**

A fairly clear conception of “national cuisine” emerged in Soviet cooking advice literature and public dining practice over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. National cuisines belonged primarily to titular nationalities, that is, the peoples for whom republics, autonomous regions, or foreign states were named. Presenting Soviet cuisines as territorially situated, cookbook authors and dining officials created a map of culinary difference. It aligned neatly with political borders, while often ignoring cultural diffusion and migration, unless to highlight brotherly cooperation or “mutual influence.” If the USSR was a “communal apartment,” with each nation occupying a different room, it was an unusually luxurious one, wherein each family enjoyed its own separate kitchen.<sup>334</sup> Here, the Soviet peoples were simultaneously to perform both tradition and modernity. According to Soviet culinary rhetoric, each group manipulated a set of raw ingredients, dishes, and methods that had grown out of a centuries-long cultural evolution, and which was therefore uniquely suited to the environmental and historical conditions that prevailed in their homeland. And, indeed, these cuisines did build on past customs—salting mushrooms, cooking stews in clay pots—that retroactively acquired “national” significance. At the same time, these peoples were to embrace the advantages of the

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<sup>334</sup> Yuri Slezkine employs this concept, introduced by I. Vareikis, in Slezkine, “USSR as a Communal Apartment.”

contemporary world. They came into their own culturally thanks to their “liberation” in socialism; they practiced the tenets of rational dining and scientific nutrition.

Soviet national cuisines were meant to embody the synthesis of progress and continuity that theoretically characterized socialist modernity. This suited the idea of “developed socialism,” which Brezhnev had first promulgated in the late 1960s and which entered ascendance in the 1970s. According to this doctrine, the USSR had entered a stage during which social relations would finally be restructured according to the principle of collectivism, thereby laying crucial groundwork for the achievement of communism, which would come about much more slowly than Khrushchev had promised.<sup>335</sup> Hinging on gradual evolution rather than swift, revolutionary change, developed socialism opened the door for attendant theories of measured social progress. The national cuisines paradigm embodies one such theory. In essence, it told the public that worthy traditions lived on, distinctive cultures thrived, and everyone benefited from participation in the Soviet project. The trappings of modernity helped national customs appear vibrant and contemporary. In Soviet culinary thought, a food such as Russian sauerkraut with lingonberries not only reflected age-old custom, but also suited current understandings of proper diet and nutrition. Through a connection to historical tradition, the idea of national cuisine helped legitimize the present and render it authentic. Restaurants and cookbooks argued that the customs Soviet peoples practiced in the late twentieth century had deep historical roots, and the coming of socialism had strengthened, not fractured, beloved traditions.

For food experts and amateurs alike, the national culinary trend provided a means of shaking things up in the kitchen. The caviar-and-champagne luxury that Stalin-era propaganda envisioned had not materialized for the vast majority of the population. By the 1970s, the public

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<sup>335</sup> Mark Sandle, “Brezhnev and Developed Socialism: The Ideology of *Zastoi*?” in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, ed. Bacon and Sandle, 165-87.

had grown acutely aware not only of these broken promises, but also of the fact that well-connected elites *did* enjoy such treats as black caviar and fine smoked sausage.<sup>336</sup> Khrushchev-era attempts to modernize and rationalize the diet had similarly produced some disappointing edible outcomes, such as whale sausage and dank bread made with pea and corn flours.<sup>337</sup> The late Soviet culinary field arguably wanted some sprucing-up. Soviet and non-Soviet culinary cultures promised variety, novelty, and satisfaction. One might search national cuisines for something new and exciting, or old and comforting. Meanwhile, foreign cooking could promote an image of Soviet society as fully modern, connected, and cosmopolitan. Domestic customs broadcast the idea of a harmonious family of peoples, sharing their home and their favorite dishes.

Yet the new and the old did not always come together easily. Socialism had promised—and in many ways accomplished—a break with the prerevolutionary past, and this meant that the very idea of tradition tended to exist in tension with that of socialist modernity. This proved true especially as the rhetoric on national cuisines grew increasingly concerned with historical traditions. After all, celebrating national cuisines in this way could mean highlighting, however inadvertently, the shortcomings and inconsistencies of the Soviet system. Suggesting that a particular dish needed resurrecting, or that a culture cried out for preservation, readily implied the existence of some past or present threat. Further, national restaurants and cooking advice literature made claims that the Soviet food system could not fulfill. Food writers served up the

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<sup>336</sup> On the culinary ideals of the Stalin era, see: Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*; Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*; Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik.” As Elena Osokina has demonstrated, the concept of socialist abundance belied a reality marked by scarcity for the masses and a strict “hierarchy of consumption” that favored regime-loyal elites. Osokina, *Ierarkhiia potrebleniia*; Osokina, *Za fasadom*. The hierarchy of consumption, which granted a privileged segment of the population special access to consumer goods, was an open secret in the 1970s. Historian Natalya Chernyshova thus discusses filmic depictions of class, privilege, and material comforts in Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, 66-78.

<sup>337</sup> Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy,” 229.

whole world, but it fell to readers to move these ideas from page to plate. And, unfortunately, home cooks likely had trouble finding necessary ingredients for more than a few of the dishes described in late Soviet cookbooks. At the same time, some restaurants that intended to promote ethnic cuisine continued to be national in name only. As Soviet citizens took advantage of new opportunities for foreign travel, many may have become all the more aware not only of these discrepancies, but also of the generally higher quality and greater availability of many foods outside the USSR.<sup>338</sup>

Still, many people grew attached to the idea of a Soviet culinary empire. During the Brezhnev years, countless diners patronized national restaurants in Moscow and other cities. Periodicals responded to scores of requests from readers for recipes for national dishes, occasionally printing such recipes provided by the readers themselves.<sup>339</sup> Today, new works on the “cuisines of the peoples of the USSR” still appear in Russian bookstores, and many home cooks revere classic works of this genre from the Soviet era.<sup>340</sup> The national approach to cuisine provided—and continues to provide—not only variety, but also a sense of cultural continuity and stability. Evoking the flavors of the past, national cuisines offered an antidote to the disruptive, homogenizing influences of modernity. National restaurants and cookbooks connected the eater to foreign cultures and to the foodways of his or her own “nation,” while providing a means of

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<sup>338</sup> Donald J. Raleigh discusses the influence of foreign travel on late Soviet worldviews in Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 210-17.

<sup>339</sup> See, for example, Bol'shakov, “Khleb da sol',” 7; V. Shatilova, “Moldavskaia kukhnia,” *Krest'ianka* supplement, July 1981, 1-2; N. Merkvilishvili, “Gruzinskie bliuda,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, January 1966, 62-63; “Detskoe pitanie: Letniaia kukhnia,” *Sem'ia i shkola*, July 1977, 58-59.

<sup>340</sup> See, for example, E. Turkina, *Luchshie bliuda na liuboi vkus: Retsepty narodov SSSR* (Moscow: Kron-Press, 2000); M. A. Antonova and S. V. Antonov, *Luchshie kulinarne retsepty narodov SSSR* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2004). Pokhlebkin's *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov* has appeared in more than a half-dozen reprints since 1991, including as part of Pokhlebkin, *Bol'shaia entsiklopediia kulinarного iskusstva* (Moscow: Tsentropoligraf, 2003). Portions of *Natsional'nye kukhni* are now also being published as separate volumes, including Pokhlebkin, *Kukhni slavianskikh narodov* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2013); Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia Zakavkaz'ia i Srednei Azii* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2012).



understanding and preserving these traditions. Now “the cuisines of the Soviet peoples” call up imaginings of centuries-old “national” customs, while also granting Russians access to a fantasy of the more recent Soviet past, in which they existed in a “brotherhood of peoples.” Although it illuminated fundamental tensions in late Soviet culture, the national cuisines paradigm also gave Russians something to savor, something that they would call their own even after the Soviet collapse. Now, frozen in time, referring to a defunct political entity and a bygone way of life, Soviet national cuisines still represent something appetizing: a glorious edible empire, diverse but unchanging, embodying abundance and friendship, while eliding scarcity and strife.

### CHAPTER 3

#### “EVERY WOMAN BECOMES A HOUSEWIFE”: GENDER IN THE LATE SOVIET KITCHEN

In March 1968 the Soviet women's magazine *Krest'ianka* marked International Women's Day by poking fun at men's domestic ineptitude. In a short story entitled “The Loving Husbands' Surprise,” a woman explained how it came to pass that she and all of the other women at her collective farm spent *their* holiday behind the stove. The day began auspiciously enough, she recounts, with the women attending an awards ceremony and leaving their husbands in charge of the cooking. The men, however, quickly proved incapable of dealing with even the simplest kitchen tasks and began begging their wives to come help them sort things out. Having returned to her kitchen to assist a friend's husband who had somehow sealed his eyes shut with dumpling dough, the narrator found a sorry sight: “What a surprise they're preparing! Something's burning in the oven, some genius moved the jellied meat from the window sill to the stove, the burner's going out—it's all such a mess, I can't even describe it!” All the women eventually ended up back at home, preparing their own meal, while their husbands accepted awards and praise in their place. And, once Women's Day had passed, the husbands appeared only too happy to declare that washing dishes could in no way be considered “men's work.” Resignedly, the narrator concluded, “Maybe it's for the best—trust these louts with our dishes and they'd leave us with nothing but broken pieces!”<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Mikula Bilkun, “Siurpriz liubiashchikh muzhei,” *Krest'ianka*, March 1968, 29.

As this story insinuates, the Soviet kitchen was very much a female space, and state-sponsored attempts to relieve women of these responsibilities never amounted to much. In the kitchen, a woman became both servant and mistress, submitting to sometimes extensive daily tasks, while also enjoying a strong measure of autonomy and control. In its broadest outlines, this experience mirrored that of women around the world. Doyenne of food and gender scholarship Carole Counihan confirms, “women are almost universally in charge of reproduction: cooking, feeding, teaching table manners and gender roles. . . . This gendering of feeding and caring work defines women in ways that confine them and restrain their choices, but also give them a channel for creating important ties that bind.” Food, she asserts, is a “double-edged sword,” simultaneously “tying women to the home,” while granting them means of attaining “social and economic power.”<sup>342</sup> Yet even if this is a nearly “universal” characteristic of women’s relationship to food, the practices, beliefs, and representations that express and govern this relationship remain largely specific to each cultural and political context. Uncovering these specificities can tell us a great deal about the dominant social norms and worldviews of a given society, in this case, the USSR in the Brezhnev era.

This chapter explores women’s responsibilities vis-à-vis food in late Soviet Russia, as well as the mainstream social expectations that reflected and influenced these duties. In addition to cookbooks and state trade and public dining records, I target relevant periodicals, memoirs, and popular films. *Krest’ianka* and its sister publication *Rabotnitsa* provide especially rich material. Like other Soviet periodicals, they served a socializing purpose, in this case seeking to shape the opinions, behaviors, interests, and tastes of women readers, particularly those of the working and peasant classes. By the Brezhnev era, they enjoyed great popularity, boasting

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<sup>342</sup> Carole Counihan, “Gendering Food,” in *Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Pilcher, 104-5.

millions of subscribers—and an even greater number of readers—across the Soviet Union.<sup>343</sup> I reviewed each issue of both magazines from the years 1965-85, targeting regular features on cooking and housekeeping, which typically appeared at the end of the issue or in a pullout supplement. I also analyzed articles about the food supply and public dining systems, which appeared occasionally in both publications. Each type of article provides insights into officially approved conceptions of the ideal relationship between women and food in Soviet society. Further, I examined published readers' letters pertaining to food-related topics, which make it possible to access—at least in a limited way—individual women's (and, in some cases, men's) engagement with culinary ideals.

Memoirs and films add further depth to this study. Recent memoirs by women who lived in late Soviet Russia offer telling details and sometimes indicate the extent to which individuals accepted or rejected Soviet food and gender ideals. I have focused in particular on two recent books by Soviet émigrés: Elena Gorokhova's *Mountain of Crumbs* (2009) and Anya von Bremzen's *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking* (2013). By tapping into the current obsession with all things comestible in their adopted homeland—the United States—both Gorokhova and Von Bremzen provide the historian fascinating clues about home cooking and domesticity in the Brezhnev era. Finally, I have exploited a selection of comedic and melodramatic films produced during this period. I focused on these films for several reasons. First, they were popular with Russian audiences. Several topped the Soviet box office or were voted fan favorites by readers of the film journal *Soviet Screen* (Sovetskii ekran), and were seen by tens of millions of Soviet

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<sup>343</sup> Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women's Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-53* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 11-14. Further, as Attwood points out, "the number of people actually reading [a given issue of *Rabotnitsa* or *Krest'ianka*] would have been much higher [than the number of subscribers] since magazines were passed from friend to friend, one family member to another, and between the members of a work collective." Ibid., 16, 16n82.

cinemagoers.<sup>344</sup> Second, they all depict daily life in the period in which they were produced, that is, they do not have historical or fantastic settings. Third, food plays an operative role in each picture, with scenes of food procurement, preparation, or consumption setting the stage for critical moments of plot or character development (although this aspect of the films was never, to my knowledge, addressed by Soviet film critics). Such cinematic representations of cooking and eating offer “clues to understanding how food performs as an instrument for communication” in late Soviet Russia.<sup>345</sup> Especially in movies focusing on the daily lives of average Soviet citizens, this imagery illuminates the connections among food, social roles, and personal relationships in the Brezhnev years.

I offer here an impressionistic, yet important view of this critical aspect of late Soviet food culture. I argue that in this period we can speak meaningfully of a new emphasis on “tradition” in the food sphere with regard to gender roles. While the state declared that its efforts to increase access to public dining and prepared foods would “liberate” women from their kitchen responsibilities, the press and popular culture celebrated home cooking, chiefly on the part of women, with new vigor. This latter tendency emerged early in the Brezhnev years, gained considerable momentum in the 1970s, and continued into the early 1980s. Significantly, this coincided with a shift in public discourse that permitted a more open discussion of the so-called “woman question,” which, as Soviet leaders and the press now confessed, had not truly been

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<sup>344</sup> Of the films discussed here, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1980) sold the greatest number of tickets and earned the highest accolades. More than eighty-four million viewers saw it in Soviet theaters. It also won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language film, among other international prizes. *Afonia*, *A Train Station for Two*, *Love and Doves* also all reached the top three in ticket sales for the years 1975, 1982, and 1984, respectively. Other films did not fill as many seats but were nonetheless popular with viewers. For instance, *Soviet Screen* readers named Natal’ia Gundareva, star of *A Sweet Woman*, the Best Actress of 1977, though the film was only twelfth in the box office that year. Data on ticket sales can be found online. See, Nashe kino, <http://nashekino.ru/>. Thank you to Marko Dumančić for directing me to this valuable resource.

<sup>345</sup> Jane Ferry, *Food in Film: A Culinary Performance and Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 4.

“solved,” but would be answered in the course of constructing communism. We should not necessarily see this as a conflict between women’s alleged emancipation and the social expectation that they devote themselves to reproductive labor. Rather, this seeming contradiction highlights the fact that in late Soviet Russia, women’s “liberation” did not entail a rejection of “traditional” domestic responsibilities, but rather guarantees of equality (before the law, in employment, and so forth) and the provision of services that would ease women’s burden while respecting their “special” roles as wives and mothers. Further, as an exploration of Soviet film suggests, this growing concern for home cooking dovetailed neatly with the burgeoning interest in Russian national cuisine in the 1970s. Women often appeared in popular culture as nurturing, maternal figures, responsible not only for their family’s nourishment, but possibly also for the perpetuation of national culture. Meanwhile, for men it remained socially acceptable to avoid cooking and worthy of note when they did step up to the stove.

Although in this scheme women could retain a measure of control in the domestic kitchen, it did not guarantee high public regard for female authority in the world of food. Rather, in spite of the renewed interest in the “woman question” we find in much Brezhnev-era public discourse, culinary writings often overlooked or denied any effective authority women might exercise in the overlapping spheres of professional food service and home cooking. Women occupied the majority of positions in food-related industries, yet male experts dominated cooking advice literature and illustrations accompanying this advice consistently gendered archetypal chefs male. Women faced expectations that they cook, teach their daughters to become good housewives, use food to improve their relationships, and even make themselves appear more attractive, while men could participate or not. Food may have provided women authority and

social power in their daily lives, but in the ever more “traditional” culture of the Brezhnev era, men often had—or appeared to have—the final say in determining the limits of this power.

### **The Tenacity of “Women’s Work”**

In Russia, the domestic kitchen had long been a female space. Prerevolutionary home management guides, such as Elena Molokhovets’s well-known *A Gift to Young Housewives* (Podarok molodym khoziaikam, 1861), specifically targeted women with recipes and advice for running an efficient household.<sup>346</sup> Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century the middle-class Russian housewife took on special cultural importance. Although as historian Alison K. Smith notes, such an individual may not have taken part “in actual cooking and cleaning, she oversaw (at least ideally) the health of her family and the perpetuation of her nation’s culinary traditions.”<sup>347</sup> Among the peasant majority as well, women took care of the kitchen, baking bread, making fermented drinks, preserving produce, and cooking daily meals.<sup>348</sup>

In the Soviet period, women remained primarily responsible for the home kitchen, in spite of officialdom’s attempts to undermine this custom. The years of the Civil War and NEP brought major changes to popular foodways. As part of larger efforts to remake daily life, activists worked to emancipate women from domestic drudgery, while also eradicating “bourgeois” domestic practices. This represented part of a larger program for solving the so-called “woman question” by mobilizing women, integrating them into the workforce, and

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<sup>346</sup> On Molokhovets and other important prerevolutionary cookbooks, see Toomre, introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking*, 3-89.

<sup>347</sup> Smith, *Recipes for Russia*, 148.

<sup>348</sup> Mary Matossian, “The Peasant Way of Life,” in *Russian Peasant Women*, ed. Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11-40, see especially 19-20, 23, 25-27.

resolving tensions between the demands of the family and the demands of a modernizing state.<sup>349</sup>

These aims, and a desire to gain more control over scarce food resources, motivated attempts to socialize and centralize food preparation by moving kitchen chores from the home and into communal public eateries. This “public hearth,” however, often repelled or sickened diners, who contended with its meager offerings, poor sanitation, and bad service.<sup>350</sup> By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the state had already begun stepping away from the rhetoric of women’s liberation, declaring the “woman question” solved. Under Stalin (1927-53), the USSR caught the pronatalist fever sweeping Europe in the interwar years. The Soviet state accordingly emphasized motherhood and women’s domestic duties, both before and after the Second World War. Spinning often-stifling realities as something positive, ideologists and officials insisted that women ought to take great care to ensure their own and their family’s “culturedness,” in part by serving a “rational” and “abundant” table.<sup>351</sup>

The post-Stalin years saw some meaningful changes both in how the state approached the “woman question” and in the realities of domestic life. As Barbara Alpern Engel writes, under Khrushchev, the leadership “toned down propaganda celebrating women’s emancipation and took steps to address some of the worst shortcomings.”<sup>352</sup> Child-care services expanded, abortion was once more legalized (even if state propaganda discouraged it), and divorce became more

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<sup>349</sup> For an extended discussion of the “woman question,” see Mary Buckley, “Soviet Interpretations of the Woman Question,” in *Soviet Sisterhood: British Feminists on Women in the USSR*, ed. Barbara Holland (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), 46-69.

<sup>350</sup> Borrero, “Communal Dining and State Cafeterias,” 163, 166-170; Rothstein and Rothstein, “Beginnings of the Soviet Culinary Arts.”

<sup>351</sup> Engel, “Women and the State,” 479-82; David L. Hoffman, *Cultivating the Masses: Soviet Social Intervention in its International Context, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 125-80. The Stalin-era vision of rational culinary abundance as an aspect of culturedness dominated the iconic *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food* (Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche, 1939). See Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik.” On taste, “culturedness,” and consumer goods in the Stalin years, see Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*, 147-49.

<sup>352</sup> Engel, “Women and the State,” 486.



easily obtainable. This renewed push for egalitarianism also impacted the realm of food. The public dining industry grew, more prepared foods appeared in stores, and the consumer goods industry offered more labor-saving devices. Each of these measures aimed to “liberate” women from domestic labor. Even with these changes, women often found themselves relegated to less desirable, lower-paying jobs, and many bore the notorious “double burden” of productive and reproductive labor. Social expectations also changed little. When it came to food, the state heralded advances in trade, public dining, and the food industry as being most beneficial *for women*, revealing that officialdom still regarded cooking as “women’s work.”<sup>353</sup>

These trends continued into the Brezhnev years. According to historian Mary Buckley, between 1965 and 1983, Soviet officials and social scientists admitted that, rather than being already “won,” gender equality was “being worked towards.” This discursive shift was made possible in part by the introduction of “developed socialism,” an ideological innovation of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which held that Soviet state and society were engaged in an ongoing-but-winnable struggle with various obstacles that necessarily cluttered the road to communism. This doctrine created a new space in which contemporary problems, such as women’s double burden, could be discussed. The people and the leadership would solve the woman question gradually, while continuing to build socialism. Full and real equality would be achieved only with the establishment of communism.<sup>354</sup>

Seeking to hold up its end of the deal, in the second half of the 1960s the Brezhnev regime maintained a policy orientation similar to Khrushchev’s. It reintroduced no-fault divorce, expanded the availability of contraceptives (though not birth control pills), opened more

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<sup>353</sup> Reid, “Khrushchev Kitchen”; Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen”; Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy,” 213-42

<sup>354</sup> Buckley, “Soviet Interpretations of the Woman Question,” 40.

daycares, and increased the availability of labor saving consumer goods, such as washing machines. The public dining sector continued to grow, offering urban and rural women the option of dining out or purchasing prepared food, instead of cooking at home. Some of these policies clearly addressed female emancipation by providing means of lightening the double burden and offering women greater control over decisions related to the family and reproduction.<sup>355</sup> The Communist Party also sought to expand female membership at this time. The Brezhnev years saw the greatest proportion of women in the CPSU (more than 24 percent), thanks to “an intensive recruitment campaign” begun in the mid-1960s. By 1977, nearly four million women held party membership. In the late Soviet period women thus gained a modicum more political power, though most were active only at the local level and they almost never broke into the higher echelons of the party leadership.<sup>356</sup> Still, as Brezhnev’s tenure wore on, his policies turned decisively toward embracing—even incentivizing—motherhood and domesticity. For instance, beginning in 1981, women could take longer periods of maternity leave and earn one-time payments for each child they bore.<sup>357</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, public discussions of the “woman question” often favored domestic traditionalism over forms of emancipation as those championed by North American second-wave feminists or by early Bolshevik feminists, such as Alexandra Kollontai.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Engel, “Women and the State,” 488-89.

<sup>356</sup> Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 211, 225-29.

<sup>357</sup> Engel, “Women and the State,” 490. For state policies on women, work, and reproduction between roughly 1953 and 1976, also see Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, chap. 4-8.

<sup>358</sup> Buckley, “Soviet Interpretations of the Woman Question,” 43-45. Alexandra Kollontai famously believed that the family would “wither away” under communism. This perspective fell out of favor with the Soviet leadership by the late 1920s and was never reintroduced into official ideology. Instead, the nuclear family was treated as a necessary tool for crafting the new Soviet citizen.

Concerned about climbing divorce rates and declining birth rates, the state tempted would-be mothers with financial and professional carrots.<sup>359</sup> Public discourse (often produced by male pedagogues and psychologists) wielded the stick, denigrating women who did not embrace femininity and fertility. In this view, emancipated women took the blame for demographic decline and such social problems as alcoholism and hooliganism. When wives and mothers failed to behave in a properly feminine fashion—nurturing, sensitive, and pliable—the social fabric began to unravel. Society needed the moderating, maternal influence of proper wives and mothers.<sup>360</sup> Of course, Soviet lawmakers had no intention of encouraging a female exodus from the workforce; women remained a critical labor resource.<sup>361</sup> Yet voices—and generally female ones—in favor of women’s emancipation continued to be heard in the press and in academic publications. Even those theorists who maintained a focus on women’s legal and social equality, however, generally still regarded women as holding a “special” status in society, on account of their reproductive role and supposed need for “protection.”<sup>362</sup> The late Soviet woman could join the party, enjoy workplace protections, and control her fertility in some limited ways, but she was to find ways of participating in the worlds of labor and politics without abandoning her home, her femininity, or her reproductive duties.

This way of envisioning women’s unique and critical place in society helped the notion that cooking represented “women’s work” to hold fast into the 1980s. Kitchen duties, like other

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<sup>359</sup> On the “demographic crisis” in the USSR, see Jo Peers, “Workers by Hand and Womb: Soviet Women and the Demographic Crisis,” in *Soviet Sisterhood*, ed. Holland, 124-44.

<sup>360</sup> Lyne Attwood, “The New Soviet Man and Woman—Soviet Views on Psychological Sex Differences,” in *Soviet Sisterhood*, ed. Holland, 72-75.

<sup>361</sup> Buckley, “Soviet Interpretations of the Woman Question,” 26; Peers, “Workers by Hand and Womb,” 117-22.

<sup>362</sup> Buckley, “Soviet Interpretations of the Woman Question,” 44. On Soviet social scientists’ perspectives on women’s productive and reproductive roles, also see Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, ed. *Women, Work, and Family in the Soviet Union* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1983).

chores, fell largely to female members of the household throughout the Brezhnev years. As Catriona Kelly recently asserted, “In nine homes out of ten, kitchen work was strongly gendered. Men might help with some outside tasks, such as bringing in food and/or bottles of liquor and carrying out rubbish, but the business of preparing and serving food was generally left to female members of the household.”<sup>363</sup> Statistical data support Kelly’s experiences in late Soviet Russia. In the mid-1960s, according to surveys conducted in the city of Pskov, urban adult women devoted on average five times as many hours per week to food preparation as men did. We might add that food procurement also remained mainly a woman’s task, and a frustrating, time-consuming one at that. Shoppers needed to visit multiple stores to find staple goods and almost invariably had to stand in line and request items from behind the counter, before proceeding to yet another counter to actually purchase their goods. True, the gap between men and women’s time spent in the kitchen narrowed slightly over the decades, but women continued to allot many more hours to such tasks. Between 1965 and 1986, men’s participation in cooking increased from an average of 1.8 hours per week to 2.5 hours, while women could budget less time, devoting an average of 9.4 hours to food preparation in 1965 and only 7.6 hours in 1986. Sociologist V. D. Patrushev suggests that these changes reflect an element of “democratization”: men began to take a more responsibility for domestic chores.<sup>364</sup>

Yet the slight decline in the number of hours women spent in the kitchen during this period does not wholly bespeak “democratization” in terms Soviet social scientists had in mind. Efforts to lighten women’s burden played at least as large a role in decreasing the amount of time

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<sup>363</sup> Catriona Kelly, “Making a Home on the Neva: Domestic Space, Memory, and Local Identity in Leningrad and St. Petersburg, 1957-Present,” *Laboratorium* 3, 3 (2011): 80.

<sup>364</sup> Patrushev, “Obshchaia kartina,” 15-16; Karakhanova, “Trudovoe povedenie gorodskikh zhitelei,” 32. For a succinct and vivid description of the Soviet grocery shopping experience, see Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 268-69.

women devoted to chores, as did any changes in the gendered division of responsibilities in the home. First, the public dining industry expanded considerably between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, as new cafes, cafeterias, restaurants, and shops selling prepared foods opened in cities throughout the USSR (see table 9 above).<sup>365</sup> Second, Soviet industry turned out greater quantities of home appliances, such as refrigerators and blenders, during the 1960s and 1970s. As historian Natalya Chernyshova has shown, by the mid-1980s, consumers had grown comfortable enough with these new technologies that they articulated ever-more elaborate demands, seeking out items with specific features or aesthetic qualities, rather than “obediently swallow[ing]” whatever appeared in stores.<sup>366</sup> Some new appliances could lessen the time spent on certain tasks, such as dicing vegetables for a salad, while owning a home refrigerator potentially meant that the lady of the house could stock up on ingredients and prepare dishes in advance. Less readily quantifiable considerations also played a role. Busy wives and mothers may have consciously selected dishes that demanded less active preparation time. Tellingly, items such as the ubiquitous “guest-at-the-door” charlotte (*sharlotka* “*gost na poroge*,” or *sharlotka na skoruiu ruku*)—a simple cake made by filling a mold with chopped tart apples and pouring over a egg-flour batter—grew in popularity during the 1970s.<sup>367</sup> These changes point less to a process of gender “democratization” and more to modest successes in socializing and mechanizing kitchen labor.

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<sup>365</sup> Also see RGAE, f. 465, op. 1, d. 598, l. 98; f. 465, op. 1, d. 2715, l. 53. In 1965, 137,200 dining establishments existed in Soviet cities. This number grew to 204,652 by 1980, with over half of these eateries serving the urban population of the RSFSR.

<sup>366</sup> Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, 191.

<sup>367</sup> Anya von Bremzen related that the “charlotte *na skoruiu ruku*” that appeared in her cookbook *Please to the Table* came from a recipe that “went viral” in Brezhnev’s Russia. Anya von Bremzen, personal correspondence with the author, 30 May 2012. For her recipe, see Von Bremzen and Welchman, *Please to the Table*, 579-80. Similar recipes began appearing in the Soviet press by the mid-1970s. This version, like Von Bremzen’s, uses stale bread, a fact that likely helped boost the recipe’s popularity: “Poprobuite—vkusno!” *Krest’ianka*, February 1979, 31.

Still, we must bear in mind that these successes were *modest*. As author Natal'ia Baranskaia's famous novella *A Week Like Any Other* (*Nedelia kak nedelia*) reminds us, the average of 65-80 minutes per day that urban Soviet women allotted for cooking could feel burdensome when added to professional responsibilities, daily commutes, and errands such as grocery shopping. Baranskaia's protagonist, a young scientist and mother named Ol'ia, thus scoffs at the very notion of free time when presented with a questionnaire asking how she spends hers. Ol'ia sighs, "Oh, leisure, leisure... What a ludicrous word, 'lei-sure.'" In Ol'ia's mind, her only "sport" is running: "Running here, running there. Bags in each hand. . . . From the trolley to the bus, to and from the metro." Accordingly, *A Week Like Any Other* follows her through one breathless week, in which she sleeps little, repeatedly arrives late for work, constantly risks falling behind on chores at home, and copes with the ups and downs of daily life: her husband's foul moods, her coworkers' demands, her children's upset stomachs, and so forth. Unavoidable tasks appear strikingly laborious. For instance, shopping for food involves hauling bulging sacks of goods over icy sidewalks, standing in multiple lines to buy basic items, and being elbowed aside by other tired, cranky shoppers. When a colleague lauds Ol'ia as a "real Soviet woman," that is, "a good mother and a good worker," Ol'ia reacts with disbelief and confusion, wondering, "Why be proud of me? Am I such a good mother? Am I worth praising as a worker? And what exactly does it mean to be a 'real Soviet woman'?" Describing Ol'ia's hectic weekly schedule and frequent bouts of self-doubt, Baranskaia suggests that a "real Soviet woman" cannot be defined simply as a "good mother and a good worker." Rather, she insists that the reader acknowledge the very real challenges of time, logistics, and energy that Soviet wives and mothers navigated in their quest to balance work, family, and self.<sup>368</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Natal'ia Baranskaia, *Nedelia kak nedelia: Povest'* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves, 1981), 5, 16, 9. Originally

Rural women shouldered an even heavier burden. In the 1970s women living outside of urban centers gave over an average of three to five hours per day to household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and laundry, while men devoted no more than thirty minutes per day to domestic labor.<sup>369</sup> At the end of that decade, central heating, running water, and sanitary piping existed in as little as 20 or 30 percent of rural homes in the RSFSR.<sup>370</sup> Many women cooked on wood stoves, which require daily stoking and regular maintenance, while also making food preparation more time-consuming.<sup>371</sup> *Krest'ianka* sometimes acknowledged the presence of the wood-burning Russian oven (*rusaskaia pech'*), offering advice on its upkeep, or suggesting that certain dishes—for example, *bliny* or buckwheat kasha—would turn out “especially tasty” if prepared in the *pech'*.<sup>372</sup> Yet these articles did not address any of the complications that women depending on Russian ovens might face in attempting to make common foods, such as *kotlety* or macaroni, more readily prepared on a conventional stove. Of course, not all rural homes retained the *pech'*. Rural folk living in Soviet-era apartments used either modern cooking ranges, or the single-burner stoves that urbanites had relied on since the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>373</sup>

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published as “Nedelia kak nedelia,” *Novyi mir* 11 (1969): 23-55.

<sup>369</sup> *Biudzhet vremeni sel'skogo naseleniia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1979), cited in L. N. Denisova, *Sud'ba russkoi krest'ianki v XX veke: Brak, sem'ia, byt* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007), 414n314.

<sup>370</sup> Denisova, *Sud'ba russkoi krest'ianki*, 420.

<sup>371</sup> The Russian oven, or *rusaskaia pech'*, helped determine the predominance in Russian cuisine of soups, stews, and thick grain porridges, all of which benefit from long, slow cooking at a falling (rather than constant) temperature. Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 406-7; Toomre, introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking*, 36-40.

<sup>372</sup> A. Shepelev, “Gotov' pechi letom...” *Krest'ianka*, July 1972, 31; “Provody Russkoi zimy,” *Krest'ianka*, February 1968, 32-33; “Chtoby kasha byla vkusnee,” *Krest'ianka*, April 1969, 31.

<sup>373</sup> The single-burner “kerosinka” survived well into the 1960s in a great number of provincial cities, where many buildings did not yet have gas lines installed, though true gas ranges had become standard in new apartment buildings in major cities as early as the 1930s. Stationary electric ranges appeared in Soviet homes only in the late 1970s and did not gain popularity until the mid-1980s. Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 408-14. On single-burner stoves, their cultural significance, and their ongoing presence in late Soviet homes, also see Lebina, *Entsiklopediia banal'nostei*, 186-87, 291; Kelly, “Making a Home on the Neva,” 62-63.

## Gendering the Late Soviet Kitchen

Because cookbook authors recognized that women did most of the work in Soviet homes, their texts explicitly targeted women throughout the late Soviet period, while vanishingly few spoke to a specifically male readership. In the late 1960s and 1970s, cookbooks addressing the “young housewife” (*molodaia khoziaika*) became common. These included, among others, *The Secrets of Good Cooking: Advice for a Young Housewife* (Sekrety khoroshei kukhni: Sovety molodoi khoziaike, 1969), *Advice for Young Housewives* (Sovety molodym khoziaikam, 1970), *Everything Made with Flour: For the Young Housewife* (Vse iz muki: Dlia molodoi khoziaiki, 1974), and *The Young Housewife’s Kitchen* (Kukhnia molodoi khoziaiki, 1977).<sup>374</sup> These titles clearly echo Molokhovets’s classic *A Gift to Young Housewives*, which retained much of its renown during the Soviet period, although it did not appear in new editions between 1917 and 1989.<sup>375</sup> While *A Gift to Young Housewives* carried a “bourgeois” taint that prevented its republication, these newer texts, by invoking the phrase “young housewife,” may have created for some readers a sense of historical continuity and authority, connecting their present duties to time-tested traditions and women’s age-old responsibility for food preparation. Indeed, Molokhovets’s name and the title of her work would have had great cachet, also, with women

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<sup>374</sup> *Sekrety khoroshei kukhni: Sovety molodoi khoziaike* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1969); I. Kravtsov, *Sovety molodym khoziaikam* (Odessa: Maiak, 1970); M. P. Danilenko and Iu. I. Emel’ianova, *Vse iz muki: Dlia molodoi khoziaiki* (Alma-Ata: Kainar, 1974); V. Mel’nik, *Kukhnia molodoi khoziaiki* (Kishinev: Kartia moldovenianske, 1975); A. G. Bendel’, *Kukhnia molodoi khoziaiki* (Sverdlovsk: Sredne-ural’skoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1982). Also see: M. P. Danilenko, *Kak prigotovit’ doma konditerskie i drugie izdeliia iz muki, sladkie bliuda, varen’e, soki: Posobie dlia molodykh khoziaiek* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1965); D. A. Korshunov, *Kak sokhranit’ urozhai fruktov, ovoshchei i gribov: V pomoshch’ sadovodam i domashnim khoziaikam* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1976); A. N. Kudian, *Khoziaike o produktakh pitaniia* (Minsk: Uradzhai, 1977); I. N. Rashchenko, *Domashnie solen’ia, varen’ia i marinady: Dlia molodoi khoziaiki sela* (Alma-Ata: Kainar, 1977). The majority of these titles appeared in relatively large print runs (sometimes in multiple editions) of more than 100,000 copies.

<sup>375</sup> Toomre, Introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking*, 3-4.



whose grandmothers cooked from it. Yet even those readers who had never heard of Molokhovets could grasp the implication that an older housewife would not necessarily require cooking advice, as she ought to have gained sufficient experience to no longer rely upon the wisdom of others. Young wives, by contrast, had to learn to cook and likely would not already know how to perform even such basic processes as boiling potatoes or frankfurters.<sup>376</sup>

These cookbooks spoke about more than simply cooking *per se*, as they emphasized a woman's duties to ensure her family's health and manage her household wisely. For example, *Advice for Young Housewives* offered extensive guidance on developing an understanding of the relationship between proper nutrition and good health. In the eyes of author I. Kravtsov, a home cook had to guarantee that her family consumed sufficient calories, necessary nutrients, and the right foods at the right times of day. She needed to comprehend everything from which foods one should avoid late in the evening (anything spicy) to the physiological processes involved in digestion.<sup>377</sup> *Everything Made with Flour* by M. P. Danilenko and Iu. I. Emel'ianova promised that their recipes would allow the housewife to bake almost anything "without any special fuss [and] to economize on time and ingredients."<sup>378</sup> Meanwhile, the authors of *The Secrets of Good Cooking: Advice for a Young Housewife* spoke to the housewife as to a professional, insisting that she maintain "ideal cleanliness and order" in her "workspace" (the kitchen) and that she make use of such conveniences as pressure cookers to save time.<sup>379</sup> A. G. Bendel' also suggested

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<sup>376</sup> See, for example, Kravtsov, *Sovety molodym khoziaikam*, 30; V. I. Kapustina, S. M. Ziabreva, and T. V. Beznogova, eds. *Sekrety khoroshei kukhni: Sovety molodym khoziaikam*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1977), 18.

<sup>377</sup> Kravtsov, *Sovety molodym khoziaikam*, 3-30.

<sup>378</sup> Danilenko and Emel'ianova, *Vse iz muki*, 4.

<sup>379</sup> Kapustina, Ziabreva, and Beznogova, *Sekrety khoroshei kukhni*, 3, 5.

economizing on time by doctoring a prepared cake, for example, instead of making an entire dessert from scratch.<sup>380</sup>

According to these cookbooks, a good housewife would be part chef, part scientist, part forager, and part cleaning lady. She could bake a festive cake, recall the quantity of vitamin C found in tomatoes, identify different varieties of mushrooms, and keep her kitchen clean and well stocked. And, of course, since she would also work outside of the home, she would need to know how to do everything quickly and efficiently, incorporating laborsaving devices and convenience foods as needed. In Soviet parlance, after all, “housewife” (*khoziaika*) did not imply that one stayed at home. Food writer Raisa Ivanovna Kosiak most explicitly and eloquently acknowledged women’s dual role, and the complex of skills and responsibilities connected to the title “*khoziaika*,” in *To the Young Housewife* (Molodoi khoziaike, 1985). In Kosiak’s words, “Every woman—whether she is an engineer or a doctor, a scholar or an actress, an agronomist or a teacher—when arriving home, dons an apron and becomes a housewife.”<sup>381</sup>

The Soviet state did recognize that women carried a “double burden,” and not only by printing cookbooks that acknowledged these extensive responsibilities. The ongoing expansion of the public dining system was intended largely to benefit women.<sup>382</sup> First, officials supposed that cafeterias and other dining establishments would ease demands on women by offering increased access to hot meals prepared in professional kitchens. Addressing shortcomings in food service in an internal memo in 1971, members of the Soviet Council of Ministers echoed Khrushchev-era rhetoric about the importance of these services for women, stating that public

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<sup>380</sup> Bendel’, *Kukhnia molodoi khoziaiki*, 66.

<sup>381</sup> R. I. Kosiak, *Molodoi khoziaike* (Minsk: Polymia, 1985), 3.

<sup>382</sup> Lapidus reviewed the debate over women’s double burden among Soviet social scientists during the Brezhnev era in Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society*, 285-334.

eateries would “liberate women to some degree from concerns about preparing food at home and create the conditions for [women] to actively participate in the productive and social lives of our country.”<sup>383</sup> Such ideas popped up frequently in the press throughout the Brezhnev years. In 1968, *Krest’ianka* declared that, by “releasing [women] from the onerous labor connected with the preparation of food in the home,” new eateries would “help elevate [women’s] role in production, as well as their self-assertion in public life.”<sup>384</sup> Local officials who did not support the introduction of new dining halls faced criticisms on these grounds. In 1970, *Krest’ianka* excoriated one collective farm director in the Mtsenskii region for refusing to open new dining facilities; this demonstrated his insufficient concern for women’s labor burden.<sup>385</sup>

The press, meanwhile, encouraged women to embrace food service by emphasizing its convenience and quality, hinting that the meals dished out at the canteen down the street might surpass anything the reader could prepare at home.<sup>386</sup> Dining establishments also sought to disseminate knowledge about proper cooking techniques for use in the home. Rural cafes hosted workshops for young housewives or encouraged female customers to approach dining staff to learn more about how to prepare certain dishes, set the table, or brew coffee.<sup>387</sup> Much of this rhetoric targeted women in villages and on collective farms, as they would have had less experience with public dining than women living in cities, where cafeterias, cafés, and restaurants had existed already for decades. Still, female urbanites also received some special

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<sup>383</sup> GARF, f. R-5446, op. 105, d. 1090, ll. 26-27.

<sup>384</sup> “Obshchestvennoe pitanie na sele,” 22.

<sup>385</sup> G. Branilovskii, “Stolovaia? Ubytochno...” *Krest’ianka*, September 1970, 24.

<sup>386</sup> N. Boroznova, “Spasibo vam, povara!” *Krest’ianka*, August 1973, 18-19; Ermak and Funin, “Dlia tekhn, kto v pole”; P. Nikitin, “Luchshe, chem doma,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, February 1966, 45.

<sup>387</sup> P. Bykhovskaia, “Nov’ sel’skogo byta,” *Krest’ianka*, April 1967, 20-21.

attention. In Moscow, for instance, eateries large and small boasted more extensive offerings for the housewife in this period, even hosting classes with master chefs and pastry chefs from such prestigious restaurants as the Moscow and the Ukraine.<sup>388</sup>

“Home Kitchens” (*domovaia kukhnia*), an innovation of the Khrushchev era, now provided consultations with chefs to help housewives learn how to prepare and serve dishes. These stores, typically located on the first floor of a residential building, served primarily to sell hot and cold prepared foods, such as cabbage rolls and premade salads, essentially Soviet-style takeout. First appearing in major urban centers in 1958 and multiplying throughout the 1960s and 1970s, home kitchens represented initially the Khrushchev regime’s interest in “rationalizing” dining and limiting the amount of time that women spent cooking for their families.<sup>389</sup> After the mid-1960s, they continued to stand as an emblem of the state’s commitment to women’s emancipation. Wives could now simply nip down to the Home Kitchen and pick out a meal, instead of standing in line at several food shops and then laboring at the stove—or so the story went. Through her interactions with the Home Kitchen, a woman could also allegedly improve her own culinary prowess. One dining official claimed to want Soviet husbands to compliment their wives’ cooking by exclaiming, “It’s so tasty, like at the Home Kitchen!”<sup>390</sup> In this view, women benefited doubly from the expansion of the public dining industry, spending less time in their own kitchens and feeling more confident on those occasions when they did cook at home.

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<sup>388</sup> “Dobrye dela moskovskikh kulinarov,” *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, October 1966, 31; TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 283, ll. 105-7.

<sup>389</sup> Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy,” 226.

<sup>390</sup> Nikitin, “Luchshe, chem doma.”

Yet many women remained reluctant to embrace the dining industry's supposed emancipatory potential. A survey published in 1971 revealed that only about 8 percent of women purchased take-out food, while even fewer—just 3 percent—used cafeterias. Importantly, less than 1 percent of respondents stated that they avoided cafeterias because they *liked to cook*. Soviet sociologists found that most women chose to cook at home instead because they because they regarded eating out as too costly or inconvenient, they disliked the food served in public eateries, or they found the menus unsuitable for their children or elderly parents.<sup>391</sup> In 1973, translator Marietta Chudakova recorded an illustrative condemnation of public dining in her notebooks, describing how she observed patrons of one library *stolovaia* eating “food that [had] neither the flavor nor the aroma of food, a product industriously being transformed into a by-product.”<sup>392</sup> Even women who considered cooking a necessary skill did not necessarily hesitate to confess that they hated it. One twenty-three-year-old Muscovite wife and mother expressed both guilt and resignation on this topic in a 1978 interview, lamenting, “I’m not terribly good at everyday cooking, which is something I really ought to know how to do.”<sup>393</sup> For many Soviet women, cooking represented a necessary evil, something that they had to do because the other options before them—e.g., workers’ canteens and Home Kitchens—did not meet their standards for taste, wholesomeness, cleanliness, or affordability.

Somewhat ironically, while the state’s attempts to emancipate women through the socialization of domestic labor met with resistance, the growing nonconformism of the late

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<sup>391</sup> E. E. Novikova, V. S. Iazykova, and Z. A. Iankova, “Women’s Work and the Family,” in *Women, Work, and Family in the Soviet Union*, ed. Lapidus, 169-70. Article originally appeared in *Zhenshchina, trud, sem’ia* (*Sotsiologicheskii ocherk*) (Moscow: Profizdat, 1978), 53-78.

<sup>392</sup> Marietta Chudakova, “Liudskaia molv’ i konskii top: Iz zapisnykh knizhek 1950-1990-x godov. Prodolzhenie,” *Novyi mir* 3 (2000), online, [http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi\\_mi/2000/3/chudak-pr.html](http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2000/3/chudak-pr.html).

<sup>393</sup> Carola Hansson and Karen Lidén, *Moscow Women: Thirteen Interviews*, trans. Gerry Bothmer, George Blecher, and Lone Blecher (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 76, also see 4, 17.

Soviet period created new opportunities for women who wished to subvert or reject social norms.<sup>394</sup> In her memoirs, former hippie Mariia Arbatova expressed a measure of pride that she did not learn to cook as a young woman. She devoted her time instead to her friends, lovers, and art, feeding herself on coffee and canned cabbage rolls. After she married and gave birth to twin boys, she remained unwilling to turn herself into what she called a “kitchen-educational computer.” She viewed her neighbors as a cautionary tale, observing how they were “transformed into clinical creatures with the heavy gaze of cows being led to the slaughter” and spent “whole days standing in line, at the stove, the washing machine, the ironing board, running around the house with a rag and a vacuum cleaner.”<sup>395</sup> Arbatova desired to care for her children, but not to lose her identity as a bohemian intellectual in the process, and she therefore eschewed some of the perceived conventions of Soviet motherhood. Providing a less extreme example, Leonid Brezhnev’s niece, a self-styled nonconformist, reminisced fondly in her autobiography about a housewarming at which she scandalized her father by serving tea in a communal three-liter jar.<sup>396</sup> While scholarship on counterculture groups elsewhere in the world suggests that these communities did not provide an environment free of misogyny or wholly supportive of female emancipation, they did generate an atmosphere in which some women felt freer to value intellectual and creative pursuits over domestic concerns.<sup>397</sup> This contrasted with the mainstream

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<sup>394</sup> On social nonconformism beyond the dissident movement, see Fürst, “Where Did All the Normal People Go?”; Risch, *Ukrainian West*; Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*; Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*.

<sup>395</sup> Mariia Arbatova, *Mne 46* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), 226, 260.

<sup>396</sup> Brezhneva, *World I Left Behind*, 257-58.

<sup>397</sup> Historians have demonstrated that misogyny and masculinist attitudes permeated the counterculture movements in the United States and West Germany in the late 1960s. Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 144-45; Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 231-32. Further research on nonconformist communities in Soviet cities may reveal similar tendencies.

of Soviet society, in which “emancipated” women continued to feel pressure to tend to their own and their loved ones’ alimentary needs.

Women’s responsibility for most kitchen labor in late Soviet households should not obscure the fact that some men, in fact, did cook at home. A team of Soviet sociologists argued in 1978 that men shared in domestic duties in upward of 55 percent of Soviet homes.<sup>398</sup> This number may represent an exaggeration—the researchers in question wanted to locate evidence of social progress—but it still suggests that men increasingly involved themselves in tasks such as cleaning and cooking. Moreover, even those men who did not regularly help in the home often took over household chores on March 8, Women’s Day, allowing their mothers, wives, sisters, and grandmothers a “day off.” For this occasion, the press promoted simple recipes, such as fried eggs and herring in mustard sauce.<sup>399</sup> Further, women whose male relatives performed various kitchen tasks tend to remember this fondly. Émigré food writer Anya von Bremzen has warm memories of her father’s Georgian chicken in walnut sauce, which she included in her 1990 cookbook *Please to the Table*, and his “über-borshch” with beef, mushrooms, apples, and beans, a dish he used to “impress” his former wife.<sup>400</sup> Proud mothers writing in to the parenting journal *Sem’ia i shkola* (Family and School) during the 1970s sometimes praised their sons for taking on household duties.<sup>401</sup> Post-Soviet nostalgic culinary prose also suggests that some Soviet men thoroughly enjoyed home cooking. Writers including Aleksandr Levintov, Aleksandr Genis, and Petr Vail’ have offered up reminiscences about their own happy cooking experiences and the

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<sup>398</sup> Novikova, Iazykova, and Iankova, “Women’s Work and the Family,” 170.

<sup>399</sup> S. I. Protopolov, “Gotoviat muzhchiny,” *Rabotnitsa*, February 1970, 31.

<sup>400</sup> Von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*, 247, 318-20; Von Bremzen and Welchman, *Please to the Table*, 43-45.

<sup>401</sup> M. Kotliarova, “Osobenno vkusno,” *Sem’ia i shkola*, June 1971, 14; A. Koriakina, “Khleb rastit cheloveka,” *Sem’ia i shkola*, July 1978, 18-19.

recipes they used or created while living in the USSR.<sup>402</sup> Finally, one of historian Donald J. Raleigh's male interview subjects happily recalled how campfire cooking "united" him with his friends at summer camp.<sup>403</sup> Cooking could provide men not only with sustenance, but also with satisfaction, enjoyment, and camaraderie.

Men's participation in kitchen labor did not, however, dramatically alter the dominant view of cooking as women's work. As one woman living in Moscow in the late 1970s made clear, her contemporaries generally considered such behavior exceptional. She said of her husband, "When I need some free time at night to read, he takes care of the baby, makes dinner. . . . It isn't common for men in the Soviet Union to help as much as he does. Other women will tell you that." Another young Muscovite similarly explained that the fact that her partner helped "with everything," including cooking, was "unique."<sup>404</sup> Accordingly, virtually no late Soviet cooking advice texts explicitly targeted a male readership. Mariia Lemnis and Khenrik Vitry's *For Students and Lovers* (Dlia studentov i vliublennykh, 1967) represents a partial exception. The authors meted out advice to young singletons living away from their parents' homes, aiming to help them shop, eat, and keep house more capably. Lemnis and Vitry addressed both men and women, although the former appeared as their primary target. The book's numerous illustrations almost exclusively depict male figures or men and women together, while the authors associated their chief nemesis, the notion that "it's better not to eat than to cook for myself," with bachelors. Lemnis and Vitry further suggested that the "masters of the world"—that is, men—would do

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<sup>402</sup> Aleksandr Levintov, *Kniga o vkusnoi zhizni: Nebol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Ol'gi Morozovoi, 2008); Vail and Genis, *Russkaia kukhnia v izgnanii*.

<sup>403</sup> A. O. Darchenko, "Our Entire Generation . . . Welcomed Perestroika!" in *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about Their Lives*, trans. and ed. Donald J. Raleigh (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 134.

<sup>404</sup> Hansson and Lidén, *Moscow Women*, 38-39, 162.



better in courting potential mates by developing their skills as cooks and hosts, since, contrary to what some men might believe, women do not “live exclusively on ice cream and flower nectar” and must be properly fed.<sup>405</sup>

A Soviet cookbook meant exclusively for men did not appear until 1988, when Leonid Karpov published *A Man in the Kitchen* (*Muzhchina na kukhne*), a provincial publication that appeared in moderately-sized print run of just 50,000.<sup>406</sup> Unlike *For Students and Lovers*, which encouraged the development of self-reliance and conviviality through simple meals, *A Man in the Kitchen* sounded a call to arms for males who felt out-of-control or emasculated. This text presented kitchen labor not as “women’s work,” but as an opportunity for men to show their worth, abilities, and even their physical strength, as they “stand in line for deficit goods” or “crack bones” for broth. The author broke with the Soviet standard of suggesting that a homemaker’s burden could be eased through mechanization or removing tasks from the home, stating instead that any “true gentleman” would take upon himself some of the work and thereby “ease women’s labor.” In a conspiratorial tone, Karpov went on to inform his male readers that they would prove more capable than women of “objectively evaluating dishes and drinks,” since males possess “more developed and precise taste.”<sup>407</sup> Yet admonitions to lighten women’s load and show off manly prowess belie Karpov’s expectation that his readers would probably cook for

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<sup>405</sup> M. Lemnis and Kh. Vitry, *Dlia studentov i vliublennykh* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1967), 7, 9.

<sup>406</sup> More than 60 percent of the cookbooks listed in *Ezhegodnik knigi SSSR* for the years 1965-86 boasted printruns of 60,000 or more copies. In this period it was common for popular cooking titles to enjoy printruns of at least 100,000. A printrun of 50,000 was thus average or slightly lower than average for the genre, though considerable for a provincial title.

<sup>407</sup> Leonid Karpov, *Muzhchina na kukhne* (Cheliabinsk: Iuzhno-ural’skoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1988), 3, 5, 8. Karpov appears to be wrong about men’s enhanced sensory abilities. Recent research suggests that women actually tend to be better tasters. C. Michon, M. G. O’Sullivan, C. M. Delahunty, and J. P. Kerry, “The Investigation of Gender-Related Sensitivity Differences in Food Perception,” *Journal of Sensory Studies* 24 (2009): 934, as cited in Counihan, “Gendering Food,” 104n28.

themselves alone. Unlike the overwhelming majority of recipes found in Soviet cookbooks, Karpov's would produce only one serving, rather than three or four. Karpov assumed that when men found themselves in the kitchen, they would be alone. Cooking represented something other than "women's work" only in the absence of women.

Late Soviet popular culture reinforced the idea that a man cooking at home constituted an exceptional event. El'dar Riazanov's 1968 film *The Zigzag of Fortune* (*Zigzag udachi*) thus depicts a sad husband doing all of the housework because his wife, Lidiia, has fallen out of love with him. Lidiia deals with her spouse brusquely, while chasing after another man who has recently won the lottery. Her husband continues to pine, pleading to know if Lidiia married him only so he would do the chores, and trying to tempt her with home cooked meals. Georgii Daneliia's comedy *Afonia* (1975) also hints that kitchen labor could prove emasculating, while using male culinary incompetence to comic effect. The eponymous hero dines at home only when his buddy Kolia, whose wife has temporarily evicted him, does the cooking. Even while playing the role of a concerned mother—dishing out relationship advice along with breakfast—Kolia produces grim bachelor meals of bread and bare noodles that might not have improved on Afonia's usual diet of vodka, dining hall grub, and canned fish. The disjunction between Kolia's matronly behavior and his apparent inability to produce a tasty meal highlights his maleness and implies that circumstances in which men cook are best avoided. Other male characters, however, could turn out a good dish. For instance, Nikolai, the hero of the film *Old Robbers* (*Stariki-razboiniki*, dir. E. Riazanov, 1971), felt comfortable enough at the stove to swap recipe tips with his love interest. As *Zigzag of Fortune*, however, director Riazanov suggests that male kitchen prowess resulted from female absence: Nikolai was a widower. In *A Week Like Any Other*, Baranskaia also offered a sly commentary on men's role in the home. When Ol'ia returns home

late from work one night, she finds that her husband, Dima, has fed the children bread, eggplant caviar, and milk, a combination that Ol'ia finds unacceptable and that upsets one child's stomach. When Ol'ia suggests that Dima should have given the children tea, he retorts, "How am I supposed to know?" In the face of his wife's momentary absence, Dima resorts to passive aggression, allowing their home to slip into a state of "utter bedlam" and refusing to prepare a proper meal.<sup>408</sup> On screen and on the page, when men stepped up to the stove, they did so because their kitchen had no women to oversee it. A man cooking at home not only represented an exception, but also might indicate imbalance, misfortune, or unhappiness.

### **The "Good Khoziaika"**

Late Soviet cooking advice literature and the press continued throughout the Brezhnev years to encourage women to cook for their families by insinuating that the "good khoziaika" knew her way around the kitchen. Importantly, women and men alike often considered culinary skills critical to a young woman's marriage prospects and familial happiness. Émigré memoirist Elena Gorokhova recalled the horror with which her mother regarded her elder daughter's unwillingness to work on becoming good wife material. As an aspiring actress, Elena's sister Marina did not "have time to get married." Her professional life provided many "activities far more enviable and meaningful than standing in lines for bologna or stooping over a pot of borsch." Gorokhova's mother blamed the theater's unorthodox working schedule "for Marina's lack of proper suitors, her single status, and, possibly, her future lonely and childless life." Gorokhova herself looked for a way out of the typical Soviet marriage—and out of the Soviet Union altogether—by pursuing a proposal from an American student living in Leningrad.

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<sup>408</sup> Baranskaia, *Nedelia kak nedelia*, 24-25.

Sensing some reluctance on his part, Gorokhova fretted, “If he goes back to Texas with nothing said, I might as well go back to my apartment and ask my mother for the recipe for borsch.”<sup>409</sup> In the absence of this marriage proposal (which she did eventually receive), she would presumably have ended up toiling in the kitchen for a less enlightened Soviet husband, a man who would demand that pot of soup.

Cookbooks and the press cautioned that, even if a woman managed to marry without learning how to cook, she could destroy her happy family life if she did not gain kitchen skills quickly. A female doctor writing in *Sem'ia i shkola* in 1973 issued such a warning, describing the fate of an acquaintance whose marriage ended in divorce because she felt “helpless with the child and with housework.”<sup>410</sup> New wives, finding themselves overwhelmed in the kitchen, flooded magazine editors with anxious requests for advice on cooking. A young peasant bride writing to *Krest'ianka* in 1974 lamented, “I use the exact same ingredients as my mother-in-law, and I prepare them in more or less the same way and it turns out much worse. Obviously, I'll never become a cook. I can't prepare even simple dishes.”<sup>411</sup> Newlywed Katia V. sent a plaintive letter to *Rabotnitsa* in 1976 about her inability with kitchen chores. She never really learned to cook and she now faced pressure from her condescending mother-in-law, who mocked the nineteen-year-old bride's inability to prepare salad *Provençal* and Napoleon pastries.<sup>412</sup> In fact, *Rabotnitsa* received so much correspondence from women who needed advice on cooking and housekeeping that, in 1976, they launched a new section, “Household Matters” (*Domashnie*

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<sup>409</sup> Gorokhova, *Mountain of Crumbs*, 149, 261.

<sup>410</sup> L. Miutel', “Kak ia uchila svoikh devochek khoziainichat',” *Sem'ia i shkola*, September 1973, 45.

<sup>411</sup> “Chtoby poluchilos' vkusno...” *Krest'ianka*, October 1974, 31-32.

<sup>412</sup> S. Lapteva, “Kak ispech' 'napoleon,’” *Rabotnitsa*, November 1976, 26-27.

*dela*), which provided a space for experts to provide assistance to inexperienced homemakers. The first installment doled out basic information on organizing and managing a home kitchen, though later editions fell into a pattern indistinct from *Rabotnitsa*'s earlier discussions of housework, offering a combination of recipes and advice on other household chores.<sup>413</sup> Renowned food expert V. V. Pokhlebkin reinforced women's worries about an alleged connection between poor cooking and divorce in his popular *The Secrets of Good Cooking* (*Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 1979). He claimed, without citing any concrete sources, that "more than half of all divorces occur in families where the wife cannot manage home cooking. Almost 85 percent of young husbands named the ability to cook well as the first characteristic of an ideal wife." "These facts," he felt, "speak for themselves."<sup>414</sup>

Soviet experts and parents believed in teaching girls kitchen skills from an early age. A special 1973 issue of *Sem'ia i shkola* pooled advice from parents, teachers, and physicians about how to properly raise young girls. Much of this wisdom centered on accustoming female children to housework and thereby transforming them into "good housewives." The magazine's editors warned against reacting to girls playing at cooking or sewing with either proud declarations of approval ("My little helper! A little homemaker!") or resigned sighs ("Oh, there's still so much labor ahead of you!"). Mothers ought to regard such games and efforts to help "calmly," because then girls "will not see women's domestic work as an exceptional virtue or as something oppressive, of secondary importance—[it] is just necessary."<sup>415</sup> One L. Miutel',

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<sup>413</sup> L. Orlova, "Tvoia kukhnia," *Rabotnitsa*, February 1976, 30. Issues from the late 1970s and early 1980s still feature Household Matters, but these segments differ little from the pages on cooking, cleaning, and other chores that appeared in this magazine throughout the Brezhnev years.

<sup>414</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1979), 6.

<sup>415</sup> "Pomoshchnitsy, khoziaiushki . . ." *Sem'ia i shkola*, September 1973, 42.

writing in this issue, described how she encouraged her daughters' participation in kitchen labor from an early age and later rejoiced in their abilities to whip up supper when she could not. Although her neighbors marveled at this, Miutel' regarded the situation with quiet satisfaction, feeling that she had instructed her girls to properly appreciate the "great joy" of performing women's work.<sup>416</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, when *Sem'ia i shkola* ran an issue dedicated to rearing boys the following year, the contributors addressed sport, military service, boys' fashions, and "the male character."<sup>417</sup> No mention was made of the food that would sustain these boys in their energetic pursuits, let alone of the individuals who would prepare it.

Public discourse informed Soviet women that they ought to take responsibility not only for training their daughters in the kitchen, but also for teaching both boys and girls to have the proper attitude to food, especially that seemingly eternal Russian staple, bread. This issue appeared exceptionally urgent in the Brezhnev years, when the state had not only hitched its legitimacy in large part to improving living standards, but had also managed to make bread both plentiful and affordable. From the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, bread was the item that Soviet citizens did not necessarily need to be anxious about obtaining.<sup>418</sup> The public dining industry even flirted at one point with offering free bread in cafeterias and canteens.<sup>419</sup> These improvements resulted, however, not from more successful agricultural practices, but from the state's willingness to sink massive energy and resources into keeping bread on Soviet tables. The Brezhnev regime subsidize bread prices (as the Khrushchev leadership had previously done) and

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<sup>416</sup> Miutel', "Kak ia uchila svoikh devochek khoziainichat'," 45-46.

<sup>417</sup> "Vospitanie mal'chika: Zhurnal v zhurnale," *Sem'ia i shkola*, June 1974, 17-48.

<sup>418</sup> The last bread shortages had occurred in 1962-63 and resulted from Khrushchev's failed agricultural reforms. Lebina, "Plius destalinizatsii vsei edy," 232-33; Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 111-14; Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia*, 210-14.

<sup>419</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 288.

also began importing huge quantities of grain from the West—something that Soviet leaders were loathe to do, as self-sufficiency in food production remained a critical, though perhaps unattainable.<sup>420</sup> Bread thus represented not only a staple food, but also a hard-won and precious resource, a key symbol of the “good life.” Officials needed cooperation at all levels to maintain this delicate balance and, fortunately, they found some vocal allies among the public.

Members of older generations, particularly those who had suffered the deprivations the Great Patriotic War, demanded that children learn to appreciate abundance without becoming wasteful. Concerned *Sem'ia i shkola* readers raised this issue in their letters, fretting over such spectacles as rolls abandoned on school lunch tables and children using stale bread as a soccer ball.<sup>421</sup> In 1970, V. Galochkin, a school director in the city of Cheboksary, wrote in to express his fear that children were losing respect for bread as their elders sat idly by.<sup>422</sup> He called on parents and teachers to ensure that they pass their respect for bread to the younger generation. Another reader, V. Trukhina of Chita, responded to Galochkin, insisting that instead of just raising the alarm, adults ought to “do something real.” She, for one, had always taught her children to “save bread,” but as an urbanite she understood that bread sometimes would go stale. “We tell children one thing and then,” she confessed, “acting against our own conscience, throw the bread in the waste basket.” Her solution: to organize the collection of stale bread for livestock feed. Agriculture Minister N. K. Evseev helpfully replied that he had personally contacted Chita authorities to initiate such a plan.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> On agricultural policy, production shortfalls, and food imports in the Brezhnev years, see Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems*, chap. 8-9.

<sup>421</sup> E. Abramova, “Kusok khleba,” *Sem'ia i shkola*, September 1975, 12; V. Kashutin, “Oskolok solntsa na moei zemli,” *Sem'ia i shkola*, August 1975, 34-35.

<sup>422</sup> V. Galochkin, “Khleb,” *Sem'ia i shkola*, September 1970, 12-13.

<sup>423</sup> “Beregite khleb!” *Sem'ia i shkola*, January 1971, 14.

Several years later, *Sem'ia i shkola* returned to this topic in an article by agriculture scientist V. Kashiutin, who contended that children raised in “satiety and ignorance” would not know how to properly relate to bread. Since urban youth now have little connection to the processes by which bread is produced, parents must “cultivate a careful relationship to bread from a young age, when a child is just starting to walk and talk.”<sup>424</sup> Teacher E. Abramova offered her enthusiastic support for Kashiutin’s views, connecting their shared concerns to wartime hardship. She related to her fellow readers how she had seen an elderly Leningrader shame a young man who had dropped a loaf of bread on the ground. When the teen appeared reluctant to retrieve it, the older man barked, “Pick it up! Who gave you the right to trample bread? Our city remembers the tears and cries of people dying of hunger, and you throw out a whole loaf.” Abramova approved of this approach and further criticized parents who buy too much bread or failed to use up leftovers. “A good *khoziaika*,” she insisted, would always find a use for stale bread. Parents, grandparents, and teachers must tell children about the war, about those who died struggling with the kulaks; then they would understand that they ought never to “defile bread.” “This idea,” she concluded, “must be inculcated in a child from the very moment he picks up his first cookie or roll.”<sup>425</sup>

These messages appeared not only on the pages of magazines. Soviet television also encouraged responsible use of this critical foodstuff. For instance, a 1982 animated short, “Save Bread” (*Beregite khleb*), depicted a man greedily buying up far more bread than he needed and suffering some humorous consequences. Upon arriving home from the store with piles of loaves and rolls, he sets about stuffing them in his already-full breadbox, but is soon conked on the head

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<sup>424</sup> Kashiutin, “Oskolok solntsa na moei zemli.”

<sup>425</sup> Abramova, “Kusok khleba,” 12.



by a stale loaf he had stashed on top of a cupboard. The cartoon ends with the man, unconscious, being blanketed by a poster bearing the widespread slogan, “Bread is our wealth! Save bread!”<sup>426</sup> Perhaps if he had a woman at home, he would already have known better. While this media campaign swept the country, complementary sentiments emanated from the very hearts of the state’s highest authorities. Leonid Brezhnev’s autobiography offered reflections on the need to respect bread, returning tellingly to the theme of generational difference. Recalling his mother’s insistence that her children eat up every last crumb of bread, he wrote of her generation:

They fostered in their children a careful, one might say holy, attitude toward bread. Without such an attitude to our daily bread, one cannot grow into a worthy and fully moral person. Today in cafeterias, cafes, and bakeries there now hang beautifully designed reminders to conserve bread. This is, of course, helpful. However, it is sad that these notices are necessary. Thrift (*berezhlivost’*) should be cultivated from an early age, first of all in the family, by parents.<sup>427</sup>

Brezhnev, arguably the country’s most prominent World War II veteran, thus laid out the most acceptable approach to bread—economy deriving not from necessity, but from a respect for one’s past, one’s elders, and the values of their socialist homeland—while highlighting the important role that female guardians played in inculcating such views.

This rhetoric casts recipes calling for stale bread as something other than an indicator of the paucity of the Soviet diet. Food writers intended their croutons, bread-and-apple puddings, and near-indestructible rusks to help readers not only save money, but also to avoid the shame of throwing unwanted bread in the trash.<sup>428</sup> E. Liaskovets, author of a 1969 cookbook entitled

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<sup>426</sup> *Beregite khleb*, dir. A. Tatarskii (1982), online video, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxQ4P4\\_pErM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JxQ4P4_pErM).

<sup>427</sup> L. I. Brezhnev, *Vospominaniia*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury), 22.

<sup>428</sup> See, for example, “Iz cherstvogo khleba i sukhareĭ,” *Rabotnitsa*, March 1965, 30; A. Morozov, “Iz cherstvoi bulki,” *Rabotnitsa*, March 1972, 30; Natal’ia Tolstova, “Prigotovit’ ‘khelebnii obed’: Chto mozno sdelat’ iz cherstvoi bulki?” *Nedelia*, 27 September–3 October 1982, 17; Iu. Tabanskii, *Sovety khoziaikam* (Moscow: Planeta, 1982).

*Home Cooking* (Domashniaia kulinariia), went so far as to declare—without providing any kind of explanation—that stale bread is more nutritious than fresh bread.<sup>429</sup> Few postwar cookbooks provided recipes for homemade bread, although as recently as the immediate prewar period, the food industry produced less than half of the country’s bread.<sup>430</sup> Advice for using stale bread instead thus bespeaks a culinary ideology that celebrated frugality and despised waste. As living conditions improved, generational divides deepened. Older people felt increasingly responsible for preserving their own values and attitudes with regard to food, lest their children and grandchildren fail to appreciate the relative abundance they enjoyed. As custodians of the Soviet kitchen, women found themselves responsible for fostering correct morality through their own frugality and their ability to adhere to proper norms of feeding and childrearing.

## **Food and Power**

Being a “good khoziaika” offered women a measure of power within the home. As these discussions about saving bread reveal, food could serve as a powerful tool for shaping parent-child relationships within the home. Memoirs by female émigrés shed additional light on this aspect of Soviet women’s interactions with food. The autobiography of Anya von Bremzen, who immigrated to the United States in 1974, revolves largely around the role cooking played in the development of the author’s relationship with her mother. From a young age, Von Bremzen and her mother bonded in their tiny Moscow kitchen, even when they had little to eat, as during Von Bremzen’s childhood in the late 1960s. Reflecting on purplish stew meat, the cabbage soup her

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<sup>429</sup> E. Liaskovets, *Domashniaia kulinariia* (Minsk: Belarus’, 1969), 12.

<sup>430</sup> Glushchenko notes that Anastas Mikoyan was eager to import bread production technology from the US during his visit to America in 1936. At that time, industry met only 40 percent of the population’s demand for bread. Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 91.

mother fancifully renamed *pot au feu*, and the fried black bread with eggs that signaled the end of their week's budget, Von Bremzen expressed a sweet nostalgia for that "private idyll" in which she and her mother had been so "happy together."<sup>431</sup> Elena Gorokhova similarly evoked maternal love through food memories. Growing up in Brezhnev-era Leningrad, Gorokhova saw her mother, an anatomy professor, as a powerful presence in the home, especially in the kitchen. Gorokhova recalls her mother "presiding over the kitchen," maintaining "unquestioned rules," and taking every opportunity to encourage her daughters to finish their meals. While these tendencies irritated a young Gorokhova, she understood as a mature woman her mother's overbearing nature—most often expressed in admonitions to "eat your soup with bread"—as a product of a need "to control and protect," to shield her daughters from deprivation.<sup>432</sup> In Soviet Russia, as elsewhere, the kitchen served as a site for mother-daughter bonding, with food playing an important role in shaping girls' understandings of familial love.

A woman could also use food to manage her personal image. For instance, the women's magazines *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka* advised women to use comestibles to enhance their attractiveness. From their articles, Soviet women could learn to dab oily skin with lemon juice, or treat dryness with a mask made from sour cream and yeast. Plain table salt or even mashed potatoes could be used to lighten skin that had seen too much sun, while egg yolks would soften the appearance of facial wrinkles. Beaten eggs used instead of shampoo would maintain a permanent wave, allowing a frugal woman to delay her next salon appointment.<sup>433</sup> Taken

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<sup>431</sup> Von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*, 161.

<sup>432</sup> Gorokhova, *Mountain of Crumbs*, 1, 213, 150, 304.

<sup>433</sup> L. Dranovskaia, "Krasota i zdorov'e," *Rabotnitsa*, February 1965, 30-31; "Kosmetika iz kukhonnogo shkafa," *Rabotnitsa*, September 1967, 30; "Chtoby ne bylo morshchin," *Krest'ianka*, January 1965, 32; "Domashniaia kosmetika," *Krest'ianka*, January 1970, 32; "Novogodniaia uzhin," *Krest'ianka*, December 1970, 32; E. Ryzhkova, "Ukhod za volosami posle permanenta," *Krest'ianka*, September 1968, 32.

internally, certain ingredients and dishes would promote “good complexion” (a salad of tomatoes or cucumbers and farmer’s cheese) or make the skin appear fresher and rosier (carrot juice).<sup>434</sup> Merely appearing alongside the right food item might heighten a hostess’s appeal, as one *Krest’ianka* article about International Women’s Day (March 8) suggested. When celebrating this holiday, the author insisted, a woman would want to prepare “special dishes, set the table beautifully, and, of course, be the most festive and the most beautiful,” a task that she can accomplish in part by preparing a special cake that displayed her “taste and inventiveness.”<sup>435</sup> The press suggested that women ought to try (and to want) to appear beautiful and youthful while fulfilling their myriad responsibilities. Whether or not a woman embraced these suggestions remained her own choice, of course. Yet these articles hinted that, regardless of any shortcomings in the cosmetics industry or a woman’s natural appearance, having control over a newly abundant Brezhnev-era larder meant that she could choose to exploit food to make herself more alluring.<sup>436</sup>

While Soviet women might use food to exercise some forms of social power, key elements of Soviet food discourse encouraged them still to take their cues from male experts. These men intruded on the predominately female space of the home kitchen most readily via cooking advice literature. Volumes bearing titles that targeted female readers—those dedicated explicitly to the *khoziaika*—came almost exclusively from male experts. In fact, men penned the majority of the cookbooks made available in the Brezhnev years. Out of a sample of 175

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<sup>434</sup> “Meniu dlia krasoty,” *Rabotnitsa*, July 1976, 30; T. Gurevich, “Leto, kosmetika i vitaminy,” *Rabotnitsa*, May 1969, 30-31.

<sup>435</sup> “K nashemu vesennemu prazdniku,” *Krest’ianka*, March 1974, 31-32.

<sup>436</sup> Factory-made cosmetics remain outside the scope of this dissertation and, to date, no studies of the Soviet cosmetics industry exist. It can be assumed, however, that if women had enjoyed satisfactory access to cleansers, moisturizers, and other beauty products, they might not have smeared their faces with sauerkraut or yeast paste.

cookbooks published between 1964 and 1982, men authored 107 titles and co-authored another 14.<sup>437</sup> Men also took credit for the most popular and influential of these texts: Academics A. I. Oparin and A. A. Pokrovskii oversaw the revised editions of the iconic *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (1965, 1971, and 1980), and V. V. Pokhlebkin authored the second most heavily published cookbook of the Soviet era, *The National Cuisines of Our Peoples* (Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov, 1978).<sup>438</sup> Women writing without a male co-author produced only two of the fourteen of “women’s” cookbooks listed in the annual *Ezhegodnik knigi* in this period.<sup>439</sup>

If we focus specifically on the RSFSR, male predominance appears even more striking. Russia-based publishing houses put forth only nineteen of the fifty-eight texts with female authors, and three of these represented translations from other languages (two from Polish, one from French). The remaining cookbooks written by women hailed largely from the western republics of Moldavia, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In other words, if we look at the RSFSR alone, little more than 10 percent of cookbooks were written by members of the group (women) that actually took responsibility for most domestic kitchen labor in Soviet Russia. A cookbook’s existence, to be sure, by no means guaranteed its use and it is extremely difficult to determine whether women employed many of these texts. Still, the existing information on

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<sup>437</sup> These figures are based on data drawn from the annual catalog of books published in the Soviet Union, *Ezhegodnik knigi SSSR*. The volumes dating from 1965 to 1982 list over 300 distinct cookbooks (excluding multiple editions and reprints). It was not possible to determine the gender of each author. In many cases authors were not listed, while in other cases the author’s name did not evidence his or her gender.

<sup>438</sup> Joyce Toomre notes that over one million Russian-language copies of *Natsional'nye kukhni* were printed during the Soviet period, making it the second most heavily published Soviet cookbook, after *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche*. Toomre, “Food and National Identity in Soviet Armenia,” in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Glants and Toomre, 213n39.

<sup>439</sup> Kapustina, Ziabreva, and Beznogova, *Sekrety khoroshei kukhni*; E. Rachiunene, *Molodoi khoziaike* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1970). Rachiunene’s book was published only in Lithuanian.

authorship and publication suggests that the food experts and publishers made three important assumptions with regard to cooking advice literature: that most home cooks were women; that many of these women would benefit from expert guidance; and that this guidance would be best meted out by men.

Accordingly, archetypal chefs appearing in cookbooks and the press were most often gendered male. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Krest'ianka* frequently published recipe columns featuring images of a man in a chef's hat helping a housewife in the kitchen.<sup>440</sup> The trade journal *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* (Public Dining), in spite of often running articles that either targeted a female readership or that acknowledged women's prominent place in the profession, included similar images of a little male chef alongside a regular column—"Did You Know?"—that offered helpful tips on basic kitchen duties.<sup>441</sup> Artists' renderings of male chefs also popped up in an array of popular Brezhnev-era cookbooks. Many of the texts published between 1965 and 1985 included only images of food items, or were devoid of illustrations. Yet I have identified ten books that featured images of chefs and virtually all of these were male (see figure 4).<sup>442</sup> The one drawing of a female chef found in a Brezhnev-era cookbook depicted her alongside male colleagues (figure 5).<sup>443</sup> Male chefs smiled on the covers of a series of cookery pamphlets entitled *We Recommend Preparing* (*Sovetuem prigotovit'*), V. Mel'nik's *Original*

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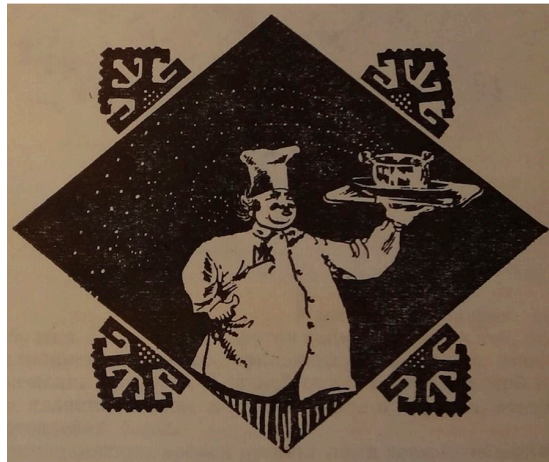
<sup>440</sup> See, for example, "Chtoby pech' pirogi..." *Krest'ianka*, June 1969, 32; "Obed na kostre," *Krest'ianka*, June 1968, 32; "Eto vkusno," *Krest'ianka*, January 1973, 31.

<sup>441</sup> See, for example, "Znaete li vy chto?" *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, March 1966, 44-45.

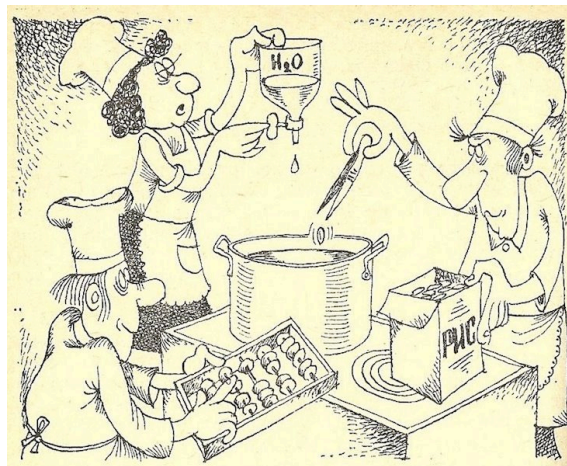
<sup>442</sup> 250 *bluid iz kartofelia* (Minsk: Uradzhai, 1973), cover; Kovchenkov, *Moskovskaia kukhnia*, cover; V. Mel'nik, *Original'naia kukhnia: 7x7* (Kishinev: Kartia Moldoveniaske, 1979), cover; Usov, *Ryba na vashem stole*, 12, 19, 24, 55, 86, and 136; Starostina and Dobrosovestnaia, *Rybnye bluida*, 1, 3, 10, 131; Fel'dman, *Sovety kulinara*, 11, 59, 103; Titiunnik and Novozhenov, *Sovetskaia natsional'naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia*, 9, 208; Pokhlebkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 11, 16, 21, 32, 38, 44, 51, 109, 124, 126, 138, 140, 153; *Sovetuem prigotovit'*, vol. 1, *Pirogi* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1975), cover; Trofimova, *Sovetuem prigotovit'*, vol. 3, cover.

<sup>443</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 90.

*Cuisine* (Original'naia kukhnia), and V. Kovchenkov's *Moscow Cuisine* (Moskovskaia kukhnia). Similar illustrations graced the pages of books as diverse as a 1973 text offering 250 recipes for potatoes, a lengthy guide to preparing fish dishes, and a massive tome of ethnic recipes meant for use in public dining establishments.<sup>444</sup>



**Figure 4** A rotund male chef from Titiunnik and Novozhenov, *Sovetskaia natsional'naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia*.



**Figure 5** A female chef works alongside her male counterparts in Pokhlebin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*.

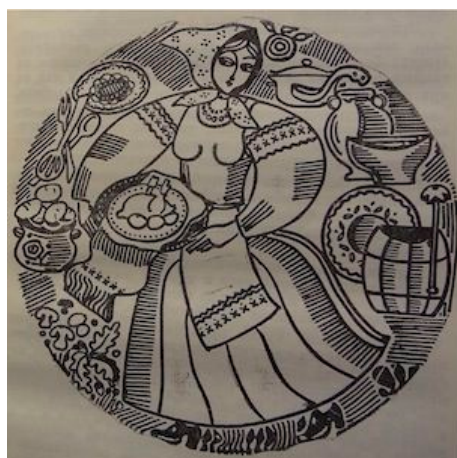
Depictions of female domestic authority—the cozy partner of male professional authority—also permeated late Soviet cooking advice literature. Popular cookbooks presented illustrations of housewives tending their stoves (figure 6) or peasant ladies in national dress (figure 7). Such images associated women with national history and the domestic hearth, rather

<sup>444</sup> See note 442 above.

than the professional kitchen.<sup>445</sup> These illustrations do not necessarily provide a direct reflection of the attitudes of the authors, as publishing house staff often supplied and always vetted artwork for cookbooks.<sup>446</sup> They do, however, betray an assumption on the part of those involved in producing these texts that, when it came to culinary matters, men ruled the professional sphere.



**Figure 6** A serene housewife tends her soup on the cover of Liaskovets, *Domashniaia kulinariia*.



**Figure 7** Peasant women represent each of the national cuisines discussed in Mel'nik, *Kukhnia narodov SSSR*.

<sup>445</sup> See, for example, Liaskovets, *Domashniaia kulinariia*, cover; Pokhlebkina, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 7, 61, 117; Mel'nik, *Kukhnia narodov SSSR*, 34, 69, 174, 212; V. V. Pokhlebkina, *Zanimatel'naia kulinariia* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1983), 5, 33; Pokhlebkina, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1985), 27, 119; Kosiak, *Molodoi khoziaike*, cover.

<sup>446</sup> For example, all artwork appearing in books from the Food Industry publishing house had to gain the approval of the organization's art director. GARF, f. R-9659, op. 2, d. 69, l. 90.



Yet most food professionals were *women*. As table 11 shows, women held approximately three-fourths of jobs in public dining, trade, and related fields (provisioning, sales, and procurement) throughout the Brezhnev era, and had constituted the majority of workers in these fields since at least 1960.

**Table 11** Workers in Trade, Dining, Provisioning, Sales, and Procurement

	1940	1960	1970	1980	1985	1986
Total number of workers	3,351,000	4,675,000	7,537,000	9,694,000	10,031,000	10,108,000
Total number of women workers	1,491,000	3,098,000	5,679,000	7,410,000	7,591,000	7,620,000
Approximate percentage of women workers	44.5	66.3	75.3	76.4	75.7	75.4

Source: Goskomstat SSSR, *Trud v SSSR: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1988), 30-31, 105.

Women cooked in school cafeterias and workers' canteens, and in the kitchens of elite eateries in the capital, including the restaurants Leningrad, Moscow, Slavic Bazaar, Aragvi, Prague, Dnieper, and Ukraine.<sup>447</sup> Appropriately, *Obshchestvennoe pitanie* often read like a women's magazine, running articles on such topics as women's fashion.<sup>448</sup> Soviet journalists writing about public dining sometimes even treated male cooks as novelties.<sup>449</sup> Journalist V. Adushkina thus singled out one of the few male participants in the 1974 All-Union Competition of Village Chefs,

<sup>447</sup> TsAGM, f. 224, op. 1, d. 285, l. 4; f. 224, op. 1, d. 516, l. 54; f. 224, op. 1, d. 538, ll. 1-2; f. 224, op. 1, d. 621, l. 124.

<sup>448</sup> For example, in 1966, three such articles appeared on the pages of *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*: N. Okuneva, "Chto seichas modno?" *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, June 1966, 62-63; O. Mol'kova, "Eto vy mozhetе sdelat' sami," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, August 1966, 59-61; O. Mol'kova, "Dlia kazhdogo dnia," *Obshchestvennoe pitanie*, December 1966, 60-61.

<sup>449</sup> T. Aleksandrova, "Ne krasna izba uglami," *Rabotnitsa*, July 1970, 9-10.

asking if he felt that his profession was primarily a female one. The young chef responded by stating that “a few years ago” he might have considered it “male” work. Now, in his view, it was easier for women to work as chefs, since technological innovations had lightened much of the “heavy” work, such as hauling wood and water or stoking a Russian oven.<sup>450</sup> In his naïveté, this fellow overlooked the fact that many Soviet women completed these very tasks everyday at home, regardless of their profession. At the same time, he helpfully hinted that the disjunction between women’s predominance in food service and the persistence of an archetypal male chef represents a holdover from a past when men did dominate professional cooking, especially in prestigious kitchens.<sup>451</sup> More generally, this highlights an important aspect of the late Soviet understanding of authority. The coding of chefs as male and home cooks as female effectively aligned professional authority with masculinity and domestic authority with femininity. Although these abstractions did not map neatly onto reality, they reveal an expectation that a woman’s authority would likely stop at her front door.

This is not to say, however, that public discourse wholly ignored female food professionals. The press often ran profiles of cafeteria and restaurant workers as part of state efforts to promote public dining. The women featured in these articles tended to embrace the notion that they possessed abilities that made them peculiarly well suited to their line of work. G. I. Slesareva, who cooked during the late 1960s at the Bezrukovskii state farm in Kemerovo region, held forth on the pages of one women’s magazine about the role of femininity in her

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<sup>450</sup> V. Adushkina, “My, povara...” *Krest’ianka*, March 1974, 22-23.

<sup>451</sup> Men had dominated elite kitchens in the prerevolutionary era and, decades later, male experts spearheaded the creation of an elite Soviet gastronomy in the Stalin era. On male chefs in the prerevolutionary period, see: Toomre, Introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking*, 20-27; Pokhlebin, *Kukhnia veka*, 43-44. Male chefs ran the kitchen at the Aragvi restaurant, one of Moscow’s most prestigious eateries, during the Stalin era. Scott, “Edible Ethnicity,” 842. On the creation of Soviet *haute cuisine*, see, Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik”; Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*.

work. Although some dining halls were uninviting and dirty, she believed that it was “in our power as women to make any cafeteria comfortable.” After all, “every khoziaika” when expecting a guest “creates order and beauty [in her home].” Therefore, if women cafeteria workers put their “heart and soul” into their work, they could create a sense of “homey comfort,” improve their guests’ moods and appetites, and “have diners licking their fingers.”<sup>452</sup> Thanks to her work as a chef, everyone in the community had grown “familiar, close, like family.” Even out in the field, a simple canteen for plowmen could create “the atmosphere of a big, happy family,” the field laborers sitting patiently as “kind, attentive women” serve them their lunches, effectively playing the roles of wife and mother.<sup>453</sup> The largely female staff in school cafeterias similarly strove, as one Moscow public dining official asserted in 1979, to ensure that “a school lunch is no worse than one prepared by the loving hands of a mother or a grandmother.”<sup>454</sup> The greatest compliment one might have paid a Soviet canteen would have been to describe it as being “like home.”<sup>455</sup> Female dining staff could bring their skills as mothers and homemakers into play in this arena, creating a sense of comfort that only women could provide. Even in the professional sphere, female culinary authority often retained a domestic character; the female chef remained a “khoziaika.”

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<sup>452</sup> “Obshchestvennoe pitanie na sele,” 24.

<sup>453</sup> V. Iakovlev, “S uvazheniem k pakhariu,” *Krest’ianka*, May 1973, 26-27.

<sup>454</sup> V. Roksanova, “V shkole—obed po-domashnemu,” *Sem’ia i shkola*, December 1979, 22. Roksanova was the deputy director of the Dzerzhinsky Region Cafeteria Trust in Moscow.

<sup>455</sup> V. Adushkina, “Povarikha,” *Krest’ianka*, May 1969, 26-27.

## Food, Love, and Morality in Late Soviet Cinema

Late Soviet cinema offers unique opportunities for exploring the intersection of gender roles and food culture in the Brezhnev era and after. During the 1970s and 1980s, influential filmmakers frequently used comedies and melodramas to provoke laughter and tears, explore quotidian pleasures, take jabs at the bureaucracy, and acknowledge disappointment and alienation.<sup>456</sup> Dealing so closely with the everyday, such pictures provide rich material for the food historian. Films offer more detail and color than we might find in the records of state industries, while also veering closer to lived experience than cookbooks, which could prove more aspirational than practical. Through depictions of cooking and eating, these movies tap into the ways that food helped to define personal relationships, signify character traits, and mark social difference.<sup>457</sup> The comedies and melodramas of the 1970s and 1980s, in particular, offer illuminating encapsulations of complementary shifts in Soviet culinary culture and popular morality, changes that encouraged the retrenchment of traditional gender roles.

As historian Natalya Chernyshova has demonstrated, late Soviet filmmakers wrestled with questions of consumption, often condemning acquisitiveness, first and foremost among women and newcomers from the provinces. They suggested that the overenthusiastic pursuit of material wellbeing could undermine one's personal happiness and even warp one's character. Filmmakers hinted that such comforts as spacious apartments, cars, and imported clothing should have been reserved for established members of the urban intelligentsia, those individuals who allegedly understood where proper socialist consumption ended and *veshchizm* (obsession with

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<sup>456</sup> V. S. Golovskoi, *Mezhdú ottepel'iu i glasnost'iu: Kinematograf 70-x* (Moscow: Materik, 2004), 75. Birgit Beumers notes that during the 1970s, comedies used fewer "physical gags and heightened the exposure of the bureaucratic apparatus to laughter." Beumers, *History of Russian Cinema*, 171; Beumers, "Soviet and Russian Blockbusters: A Question of Genre?" *Slavic Review* 62, 3 (Autumn 2003): 445, 451.

<sup>457</sup> Ferry, *Food in Film*, 4.

things) began.<sup>458</sup> Still, the depictions of consumerism found in pictures such as *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (Moskva slezam ne verit, dir. V. Men'shov, 1980), *A Sweet Woman* (Sladkaia zhenshchina, dir. V. Fetin, 1976), and *The Blonde Around the Corner* (Blondinka za uglom, dir. V. Bortko, 1984) sent an ambiguous message. While criticizing veshchizm, these films presented the viewer with tempting visions of comfort through images of plush apartments, stylish clothing, and well-stocked refrigerators. In attempting “to project an effective anti-consumerist message,” Chernyshova explains, cinema “propagated a new modern vision of everyday socialism, which promised a consumerist paradise open to all.”<sup>459</sup>

Depictions of food procurement, preparation, and consumption fit only very loosely into this paradigm. Unlike cars, radios, and fur coats, food represented a necessity, and therefore sometimes appeared exempt from this critique. Luxury items (e.g., caviar) and convenience goods (e.g., powdered soup) could appear in a negative light, but other foods and behaviors not only boast positive associations, but sometimes even serve as an antidote to the problems generated by an individual's flirtation with more questionable modes of consumption. As in the debate over veshchizm, women bear an outsized burden for morality, taking responsibility for virtuous forms of eating or facing punishment for failing in this. Men primarily act as recipients of love and nourishment, while still retaining dominance in personal relationships. Although the films discussed below present the viewer with diverse visions of Soviet life, they establish common connections between food, feeling, and scruples, expressing a subtle discomfort with the specific forms of socialist modernity.

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<sup>458</sup> Chernyshova provides this translation of the term *veshchizm* in Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, 47.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 66-78.

The works of Vladimir Men'shov provide a valuable starting point. These popular films crafted a rosy vision of contemporary life, while also casting individuals as ideologically acceptable social types and emphasizing, in film historian Anna Lawton's words, "traditional values as the foundation of society."<sup>460</sup> In his blockbuster *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1980), Men'shov suggested that home cooking fosters romantic and familial love, while casting a wary glance at luxury foods and gastronomic snobbery. This film follows two decades in the lives of four young women who move to post-Stalinist Moscow in search of personal happiness. The central protagonist, Katia, suffers a disastrous love affair early in the film. After reluctantly going along with her friend Liuda's plan to fake their social pedigree, Katia plunges into relationship with a handsome television cameraman, Rodion. An inveterate snob, Rodion jilts Katia once he learns of her true working-class status, but not before impregnating her. Only years later, when Katia's daughter is grown and Katia has established herself at the top of her profession, does she find true love and happiness with an erudite and domineering worker, Gosha.

Men'shov's suspicion of culinary modernity finds expression in two key scenes that appear during Katia and Liuda's masquerade as daughters of an illustrious professor. Under this guise, the women throw a dinner party for a group of successful men, whom Liuda has presumably targeted as potential mates. Here, Men'shov uses elite goods to highlight a fundamental difference in character between Liuda and Katia. When a party guest offers his hostesses a stack of exclusive treats—a perk of his position as high-level administrator—Katia tries to refuse, muttering, "It's not necessary!" Liuda, however, encourages him. Men'shov gives the viewer a tight shot of the guest's "contribution": hard-to-obtain cans of crabmeat, caviar, and

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<sup>460</sup> Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 19.

cod livers. Later, still perpetuating this charade, Katia visits Rodion's home, where his mother attempts to show off her own family's supposed culturedness by producing an elaborate spread intended to suit Katia's supposed social status. As the luncheon progresses, Katia grows agitated. Initially, she compliments Rodion's home, picks quietly at the mayonnaise-dressed salad, and politely overlooks the atrocious table manners of Rodion's younger brother, an indication that the family does not normally dine so plushly. Yet once Rodion's mother offers up a truly extravagant dish—jellied sturgeon—Katia can no longer conceal her anxiety. Katia violently refuses it on the false grounds that she has an allergy. Katia cannot bring herself to consume this fish, even though she has probably never been presented with such a treat. She understands the conflict between the cramped apartment, the luxurious food, and her own culpability for perpetuating a lie. This points to Katia's moral sense, her timidity, and to the snobbery of Rodion and his mother. They treat Katia coldly when they learn of her true identity, wanting nothing to do with a perceived social climber; it appears they had some social climbing of their own to do.

Decades pass and Katia manages to obtain a successful career and a chic apartment, which she shares with her teenaged daughter, Aleksandra. Yet Katia remains personally unfulfilled until she meets Gosha, who uses food to woo and dominate her. On his first visit to Katia's home, Gosha marches into the kitchen and prepares dinner, taking over an aspect of daily life that Katia, a single working mother, has neglected. Instead of soup concentrates and pre-made compote, Katia and Aleksandra now sit down to a table laden with salads and vegetables, more food than three people could possibly consume. Next, Gosha whisks Katia and Aleksandra away on a surprise picnic. He prepares a typical "man's" dish, *shashlyk* (grilled, skewered meat), declaring when Katia offers to help, "Shaslyk cannot stand a woman's touch!" Having established his culinary prowess already in the feminine space of the home kitchen, Gosha now

asserts that this skill does not undermine his manliness, but is connected to his ability to master the meat, fire, and metal needed to prepare this “wild” treat. By the end of the film, Katia appears to have given up her reliance on convenience foods, as well as a large measure of her independence. Gosha has domesticated her and she appears sublimely happy in her new role as his submissive lover. Meanwhile, the viewer learns that gold-digging Liuda has descended into a life of loneliness, enjoying few of the material comforts she chased at the film’s outset. Liuda’s venality, displayed previously in her unabashed desire to snaffle up elite delicacies, led her down a dead-end road, while Katia’s fundamental goodness permitted her to accept and value Gosha’s love and the sustenance he offered. In Men’shov’s universe, culinary modernity appears symptomatic of unhappiness, principally for women. Liuda’s youthful lust for deficit treats betrayed the character traits that set her up for middle-aged solitude, while Katia’s one-time reliance on convenience foods highlighted her loneliness as a single career woman.

Considering Men’shov’s affection for “traditional” values and social roles, this manifested not only in his films’ tendency to reward characters who dedicated themselves to “work, moral rectitude, and human compassion,” but also in his subtle celebration of Russian home cooking.<sup>461</sup> Men’shov’s popular 1984 comedy *Love and Doves* (*Liubov’ i goluby*) provides a vivid illustration of this connection of seemingly traditional foods with positive emotions and morally correct behaviors. The central conflict begins when protagonist Vasilii leaves his rural home to relax at a seaside resort, a temporary reprieve from his wife’s nagging and the lack of respect he faces in his village. Sensitive and naive, he falls under the spell of another woman, Raisa, and has to choose between his former life and a new, potentially more comfortable city existence. The two central female characters—Nadia, Vasilii’s hysterical but

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid.



morally steadfast wife, and Raisa, his flashy, flighty mistress—embody, respectively, the worlds of tradition and modernity. Food ultimately helps guide Vasilii’s decision to abandon the modern and embrace the traditional.

To Vasilii, Raisa appears sophisticated and knowledgeable, completely at ease in the exotic setting of the resort town. She dances and drinks at a beachside club, while Vasilii gazes at her in a naïve stupor. Raisa chatters on about telekinesis and extraterrestrials, and eventually coaxes Vasilii into returning home with her. But before long, the initial passion of their weekend romance fades and Vasilii finds himself hungering for physical and emotional nourishment. Raisa, Vasilii learns, cannot cook. In Raisa’s city apartment, Vasilii dons a flowered apron and helplessly piles grated carrots, cabbage, and beetroot onto plates. Hunching over the counter, nursing a cut on his finger, he appears outsized, out-of-place, and tremendously uncomfortable, as he continues to address Raisa formally by her first name and patronymic. Meanwhile, Raisa paces in the living room, holding forth about her dietary restrictions. She calls salt “white poison” and sugar “sweet poison,” even rejecting bread as “venom.” Vasilii responds by mumbling about how he would love to have a crust to poison himself with. Raisa thus exposes herself as insufficiently womanly, and hungry Vasilii eventually skulks back to Nadia. Although Nadia initially shows resistance to welcoming Vasilii home, the pair slowly reestablishes their connection; food again plays a key part. Vasilii first has to court Nadia, bringing forth the only foods he can “provide” on his own: vodka and pickles. As Nadia warms once more to her unfaithful husband, she makes her feeling manifest in a pot of wholesome soup she serves him on the riverside, and then by giving in to his sexual advances. She appears both motherly—she cannot stand to see Vasilii going hungry—and womanly, offering love and sustenance both in

physical form. For Men'shov, these rustic, characteristically Russian meals signified genuine affection and had the potential to spark or rekindle romantic love.

Raisa's exaggerated concerns about diet and her inability to cook appear as extreme outcomes of the "rational" mode of dining celebrated by many Soviet food experts. This paradigm endorsed consuming specific quantities of calories and nutrients (as established by official experts), taking meals on a regular schedule, and prioritizing the maintenance of bodily health and work ability over pleasure and conviviality.<sup>462</sup> The public dining industry would ideally facilitate this mode of eating by providing "rational" meals to the public and eventually "liberating" women from the need to cook at home.<sup>463</sup> Raisa takes this a step too far, depending entirely on others to cook for her and becoming so concerned with her health that she eschews many common—even celebrated—products. If we set her rejection of bread alongside her other esoteric fascinations, Raisa appears particularly alien. Her interests dovetail neatly with those of the New Age movement, which gained popularity in both the USSR and the United States during the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>464</sup> Raisa merges some of the aspirations of socialist modernity—scientific diets and socialized dining—with creeping Westernization. *Love and Doves* thus hints that the path chosen by Soviet officialdom could ultimately lead Russians away from their native culture, leaving them, like Vasili, alienated and alone. The solution was a return to the Russian

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<sup>462</sup> On rational/scientific dining or *ratsional'noe pitanie*, see: Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik," 300-301.

<sup>463</sup> On early efforts to eliminate domestic chores, see Rothstein and Rothstein, "Beginnings of the Soviet Culinary Arts," 178-81. On the Khrushchev period, see Reid, "Khrushchev Kitchen," 313; Lebina, "Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy."

<sup>464</sup> Historian Philip Jenkins describes how New Age religion and counterculture fascinations (including health food and UFO lore) grew in influence and popularity in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s. Jenkins, "Mainstreaming the Sixties," in *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24-46.

hearth and its hearty traditions, as represented by Nadia. Although coarse, earthy, and sometimes unlovely, Nadia ultimately offered the warmth and stability that Vasili needed and desired.

The connection between love and home cooking also manifested itself elsewhere in female characters' frustrated attempts to use food to attain romantic satisfaction. In Georgii Daneliia's *Afonia*, a good-hearted nurse, Katia virtually throws herself at roguish and uncaring Afonia, offering him attention and love, as well as various fruit preserves that, as Katia makes a point of noting, she prepared herself. Yet in the end she has to abandon her professional plans and pursue this sullen wastrel all the way to his native village in order for him to finally return her affections. In another of Daneliia's films, *Autumn Marathon* (*Osennii marafon*, 1979), Alla, the protagonist's sad-eyed mistress, proffers boiled potatoes, plates of cucumbers, and other foods, as she waits in vain for her lover to leave his wife. He never does. In *Ladies Invite Their Partners* (*Damy priglashaiut kavalerov*, dir. I. Kiasashvili, 1980), meanwhile, the heroine's attempt to attract a handsome army officer falls completely flat. At the lavish dinner she serves, he falls in love, instead, with another woman on the strength of her beauty, youth, and fine singing voice, not her ability to turn out a proper cabbage pie. These instances come across as something like a send-up of the belief that a young woman's marriageability hinged on her culinary prowess. The stomach, these filmmakers suggested, might not provide a reliable path to a man's heart. Yet these scenes illustrate the inherent goodness of each of these women, betraying their naive faith that simple, sincere love, expressed through a desire to nourish and a willingness to please, would be enough to earn them personal fulfillment. Such depictions also reinforce the association between traditional dishes and love. These women use common Russian products—homemade jams, simple *pirogi*, and unadorned vegetables—to signal romantic intent.

Other films criticized women who did not make an effort to court love through cooking. These pictures portrayed women who refused to prepare meals for their men as cold, unloving, and callous. Raisa in *Love and Doves* and Lidiia in *Zigzag of Fortune* (see above) both displayed their selfishness by relegating their underappreciated men to the kitchen. Director Vladimir Fetin served forth an even more unsavory female in *A Sweet Woman*, which features Anna, an avaricious social climber who destroys her personal relationships in the pursuit of material wellbeing. She acquires a separate apartment, fashionable clothing, a vacuum cleaner, and a new refrigerator, but she remains coarse and uncultured. As Chernyshova has noted, Anna's relationship to things betrays her unpleasant character and dooms her to a life of loneliness.<sup>465</sup> Her relationship to food, we might add, also says a great deal about Anna's inability to genuinely connect with those around her. While she dines with her first victim, the naive student Larik, she slurps her fruit pudding and complains that he gave her sweets instead of buying her herring, which is her favorite. She then continues munching on a cookie while Larik kisses her, caring more for her own pleasures than the affections of this young man. Anna gets her herring later, single-mindedly gobbling it down while listening indifferently to Larik's mother explain that her husband—grandfather to Anna's son—is dying of a heart condition. Moreover, in spite of her own appetite, Anna never prepares a meal. Even after obtaining a comfortable apartment with a spacious kitchen and a new refrigerator, she shirks her kitchen duties. Anna lays a cold table, thinking only of her own desires, and ultimately failing to make her house a home. Unlike the melancholy heroines of *Afonia*, *Autumn Marathon*, and *Ladies Invite their Partners*, the likes of Raisa (*Love and Doves*), Lidiia (*The Zigzag of Fortune*), and Anna (*A Sweet Woman*) do not make the requisite culinary effort to earn the love and affection they desire. Taken together, these

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<sup>465</sup> Chernyshova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era*, 70-71.

films suggest that pouring one's love out in the kitchen did not guarantee romantic fulfillment, but a failure to even make such an attempt would render a woman not only lonely, but also desperately unsympathetic.

In several of his films, El'dar Riazanov uses food imagery to address similar questions about morality and love. Riazanov also directed some of the only Soviet movies that we might rightly dub "food films," insofar as food-related behaviors and settings play a central operative role in the plot.<sup>466</sup> More broadly, he made his mark on Soviet cinema in part by producing pictures that embodied a shift in the comedic genre, which, in the words of film historian Birgit Beumers, "reduced the physical gags and heightened instead the exposure of the bureaucratic apparatus to laughter."<sup>467</sup> In his hit 1983 tragicomedy *A Train Station for Two* (Vokzal dlia dvoikh), these facets of his work come together, with Riazanov poking fun at the Soviet public dining system by using a lousy provincial restaurant as the backdrop for a budding romance between two dissatisfied individuals.<sup>468</sup> Over the course of the movie, as the relationship between the film's protagonists, Vera and Platon, flourishes, the quality of the food they consume improves. Riazanov thus not only creates a connection between romantic love and physical nourishment, but also suggests that contemporary life, with all of its little corruptions

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<sup>466</sup> James R. Keller defines the "food film subgenre" as "one in which food production, preparation, service, and or consumption play an operative and memorable role in the development of character, structure, or theme." Keller, *Food, Film and Culture: A Genre Study* (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland and Co., 2006), 1.

<sup>467</sup> Beumers, *A History of Russian Cinema*, 171-72.

<sup>468</sup> *A Train Station for Two* won a viewer vote held by *Soviet Screen* (Sovetskii ekran) magazine for the most popular film of 1983. David MacFadyen, *The Sad Comedy of El'dar Riazanov: An Introduction to Russia's Most Popular Filmmaker* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 126. *Train Station* is Riazanov's second film in which the action revolves around a public dining establishment, although in his first such film, *Give Me the Complaints Book* (Daite zhalobnuiu knigu, 1965), food itself plays a minimal role. Rather, the plot focuses on the efforts of a group of dynamic, creative young adults who take it upon themselves to transform a dysfunctional and old-fashioned restaurant into a modern café in which guests can enjoy "cultured recreation" (see chapter 1).

and disappointments, often proved sad and degrading, even (or perhaps especially) for fundamentally good people.

In *A Train Station for Two*, Vera, an experienced waitress, has spent years suffering rude customers and ill-fated romances, most recently with a dashing black marketeer. He first appears on screen with a suitcase full of exotic, overpriced melons, and gradually demonstrates that he can bring Vera ill-gotten goods, but refuses to afford her any love outside of hurried trysts in train compartments. Meanwhile, Platon, the male lead, faces prison time, having taken the blame after his wife killed a man with their car. The viewer later learns that, although his wife would allow Platon to sacrifice his freedom, she does not want to cook him dinner. At the movie's outset, the low quality of the train station restaurant's fare sets the plot in motion, as Platon meets Vera when he causes a commotion over the restaurant's repellant soup and consequently misses his train. Vera, who later tries to make up for her role in this mishap, also finds herself stranded overnight at the station and shares with Platon the leftover delicacies she has snagged from the restaurant. Platon no longer faces the dining room's inedible *borshch* and stringy chicken, but olives and smoked fish, caviar and champagne, all of which Vera has stashed in her purse. Later, after Platon and Vera have warmed to one another, he learns that the restaurant is perfectly capable of producing good food; the staff members simply prefer to shirk their duties unless serving friends. Eventually, Vera herself proves a fine cook and a woman capable of deep affection—that is, once she has been removed from the monotony of her previous existence. When she visits Platon at a Siberian labor camp, she demonstrates her love and her superiority to Platon's selfish wife in a scene set in a cabin reserved for conjugal visits. Silently, and with an air of desperate finality, Vera fills the table with pies large and small, hot soup, fried meat

cutlets, and piles of bread, while Platon seems to slowly thaw as he eats, eventually reciprocating Vera's affections physically (rather than gastronomically).

Through its use of food, *A Train Station for Two* also expresses disgust with the conditions facing common people everyday. While *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* and *Love and Doves* also tackled personal unhappiness, Men'shov pointed an accusing finger at a vaguely defined modernity, unlike Riazanov, who condemned the Soviet system more directly. In *A Train Station for Two*, the existence of a second economy (an undeniable reality of the late Soviet period) offers individuals quality foodstuffs, but ensures that they remain overpriced and thereby benefit only immoral types, like Vera's demanding, uncaring lover. This cad, meanwhile, manages to bamboozle Vera in part through his ability to procure desirable foodstuffs. In Men'shov's universe, Vera's desire for ripe melons and imported shampoo may have condemned her to a life of loneliness. In Riazanov's world, however, this failed romance serves to highlight Vera's lover's immoral nature and the difficult position that women in particular might find themselves in vis-à-vis food in late Soviet Russia. Finally, Vera and Platon achieve romantic satisfaction once they have removed themselves from the mainstream of this society to a much harsher, but more remote location.

Filmic depictions of cooking and eating reveal that food culture, gender roles, and notions of morality were inextricably linked in the late Soviet consciousness. On screen, luxury food items, such as caviar and canned crab, signal shame or greed while also appearing delicious and desirable. A Soviet viewer may have been tempted, along with the figures on the screen, to succumb to the allure of hard-to-get items, while also being told that giving in could either lead to corruption or reveal the fact that they had already become corrupted. The suspicion of luxury items reveals a perhaps fundamental characteristic of late Soviet food culture and its connection

to popular morality. As home cooking took on a new symbolic importance, hard-to-get foodstuffs became associated with illegality and corruption. And yet, Soviet diners and home cooks still relied upon convenience foods and to seek out culinary delicacies, sometimes obtaining them through semilegal means. Late Soviet food culture, then, appears to have been characterized by a peculiar tension, as Soviet citizens continued to depend on modes of feeding that they considered unsatisfactory and morally questionable.

Yet these films also present a category of foods—homemade, characteristically Russian dishes—that generated joy and solidified interpersonal relationships. Such consumption (in the literal, bodily sense) escaped ambiguity, appearing good, appropriate, and wholesome. This conforms to a larger trend of celebrating the national traditions of Russians and other Soviet peoples. In the late Soviet period, as Andrew Jenks puts it, “continuity with the past, rather than a radical break, became a central theme of cultural construction.”<sup>469</sup> Scholars have, of course, noted the centrality of “primordial Russianness” and its cultural trappings in the village prose movement, Russian nationalist thought (which the regime co-opted during this period), and even in late Soviet visual art.<sup>470</sup> Also, as I have argued elsewhere, these ideas also penetrated the culinary sphere, primarily in the form of rhetoric valorizing the “national cuisines” of the Soviet peoples, which came to prominence in the 1970s, as some Soviet citizens rejected elements of earlier efforts to modernize the diet and emancipate women from the kitchen.<sup>471</sup>

Moreover, these films hint at a male fantasy about the potential implications of a return to tradition in the culinary sphere. A woman ideally would take responsibility for the kitchen,

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<sup>469</sup> Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation,” 642.

<sup>470</sup> Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 150-91. Also see introduction.

<sup>471</sup> See chapters 2 and 5.



producing pies, jams, and soups, regardless of her marital status. Even if her homemade preserves might not win a man's heart, a failure to produce them could signify spiritual emptiness and might condemn her to a life of loneliness. Men, for their part, served largely as recipients of physical and emotional nourishment. They could take or leave the love and lovingly prepared dishes women offered or, if they so chose, turn the tables, using food to dominate and domesticate women of their choice. These filmmakers acknowledge the potential social power of food by allowing it to play a critical role in shaping on-screen relationships. They proposed, perhaps unconsciously, that the tendency to favor more "traditional" social forms and home cooking might ultimately offer men greater power and control, even in the domestic sphere, which women customarily controlled. This, of course, runs counter to the connection, well established in food studies scholarship, between social power and responsibility for food, which often affords women greater control over their everyday lives.<sup>472</sup> We should, then, understand these visions not primarily as representative of off-screen social realities, but as evidence of an ongoing search for stability, which fostered an embrace of culinary traditionalism in the late Soviet period.

## Conclusion

In 1923, Lev Trotsky declared, "one cannot speak of [women's] equality . . . if a woman is tied to her family, to cooking, washing and sewing."<sup>473</sup> By this standard, Soviet women never enjoyed full equality; household chores (including kitchen labor) remained "women's work." Departing from the more emancipatory rhetoric of the 1960s, Soviet public discourse on food

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<sup>472</sup> Counihan, "Gendering Food."

<sup>473</sup> As quoted in Rothstein and Rothstein, "Beginnings of the Soviet Culinary Arts," 178.

during the 1970s and early 1980s reinforced a more traditional understanding of a woman's role in the family. Even ongoing efforts to offer "liberation" through public dining or home appliances reinforced the conception of food preparation as a female concern. These "advances" focused on the socialization and modernization of domestic labor, not on getting men to share in this work at home. In the press, on the silver screen, and in many households, a man cooking at home was treated as something exceptional, an unlikely event that most likely took place in the absence of women. At the same time, cookbooks and periodicals continued to privilege male professional authority. In spite of women's growing prominence in the professional food world, men wrote the majority of cookbooks targeting female readers, and artists' renderings almost always cast chefs as male. In the late Soviet mind, a woman's culinary authority remained largely limited to the domestic sphere. Within this space, a Soviet woman both exercised power and shouldered a heavy burden, using food to strengthen personal bonds, enhance her attractiveness, show off her hard-earned skills, and shape her family members' values.

This held true for women of all social classes. The magazines *Krest'ianka* and *Rabotnitsa* explicitly targeted female peasants and workers and such women appeared as the protagonists of most of the films discussed above, as well. But similar expectations about a woman's role in the household appear to have held up among the intelligentsia. This is reflected not only in the recalcitrant insistence on the part of experts (members of the intelligentsia themselves) discussing the "woman question" that women had a "special" role to play as mothers and wives, but also in the fact that this rhetoric also appeared in cookbooks and parenting journals, aimed also at women in white-collar professions. True, women in certain circles, such as the bohemian youth with whom Arbatova ran, may have enjoyed more social freedom to throw off traditional gender roles, but this does not mean that conscious subversion of the accepted domestic order

was common among the intelligentsia. Advice offered in periodicals and cookbooks did vary based on whether the author expected the reader to live in the city or the countryside. But these variations emerged mainly as assumptions about the foods, equipment, and storage space available to the reader. Peasant, worker, intellectual, or otherwise—women tended to be responsible for the kitchen.

This traditionalism found vivid expression in late Soviet cinema, which sometimes condemned Soviet culinary modernity. In the comedies and melodramas of the 1970s, women could have their personalities warped or their chances for happiness dashed if they gave in to the temptations presented by modern delicacies. Yet the effects of good, Russian home cooking could potentially alleviate such damage. Shouldering primary responsibility for food procurement and preparation, female characters had the power to use certain foods to summon up romance or offer comfort. Women who neglected their duties in the kitchen, meanwhile, appeared cold, venal, and unwomanly. The “good khoziaika” earned personal satisfaction by cooking for her family, eschewing convenience foods, and nurturing her husband and children with long-simmered soups and fresh baked goods. Men’s role in late Soviet film, however, functioned to limit the power that women could exercise through food and cooking. It remained, in the final accounting, up to these women’s husbands and lovers to decide whether or not they would accept the gastronomic gifts offered them.

Such linkages between food, gender roles, and social power are not unique to this time or place, but the specific content of the connections discussed in this chapter can help us better understand the culture of late Soviet Russia. Widespread celebration of home cooking encouraged the retrenchment of traditional social forms, yet cooking advice for the “young housewife” still laid heavy emphasis on scientific and technical knowledge, sometimes

encouraging the use of convenience foods and public dining. Calls for women's liberation could be heard alongside admonitions that the "good khoziaika" cook for her family. The fact that women worked the majority of food-related jobs made this discourse even more ambiguous. Moving food preparation out of the home would mean shifting this task from woman to woman, from a home cook who ought to behave like a professional to a professional who excelled because she was also a home cook. The predominance of male authority in food writing further muddled the waters. It suggested that women ought to draw their lessons from male experts, while executing tasks that society deemed best suited to women. All of this indicates that no single accepted understanding of the relationship between gender roles and food preparation existed in late Soviet public culture. Cooking might have been considered "women's work," but its forms and meanings were varied and open to contestation. The increasingly conflicted and contradictory nature of late Soviet food discourse points once more to normalization. This was not a "socialist realist" or "totalitarian" approach to cuisine and domesticity, but a complex network of ideas about women and their place in society that revolved—much like food discourses elsewhere in the industrial and post-industrial world—around paradoxes, disagreements, and collisions between ideals and realities.

## CHAPTER 4

### GETTING TO KNOW “MR. AND MRS. RUSSIA”: RUSSIAN COOKBOOKS IN THE POSTWAR UNITED STATES

By the late 1940s, Princess Alexandra Kropotkin (1891-1966) had grown weary of political debates on the subject of Russia. In the United States, merely mentioning Russia would start a “red-hot argument” among “those who admire the Russian government and those who disapprove of it or fail to understand it.” The daughter of famed anarchist Prince Petr Kropotkin, Alexandra had grown up in Britain, Russia, and the US, steeped in discussions about tsarist rule and the future of Russia. She witnessed the Russian Civil War firsthand, and watched her father grow disgusted with the Bolshevik leadership. Now, in the postwar US, Princess Kropotkin saw a familiar pattern taking shape. Once more, the “noise and anger of the ideological clash” made people forget about average Russians. Kropotkin looked to food for a solution, using her cookbook, *How to Cook and Eat in Russian*, to “win American friends” for “Mr. and Mrs. Russia.” Published in 1947, as the USSR suffered a severe famine and Cold War tensions between the Soviet and American governments mounted, this collection of recipes encouraged readers to look beyond questions of governance and international relations to see the Russian people and their rich culture.<sup>474</sup> Kropotkin insisted that her audience could “learn a great deal more about [the Russians] from their home life, their family habits, their cooking and eating traditions than . . . from the words and acts of their government officials.” “Politics don’t count,” she asserted, “when eating is concerned.”<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Ganson, *Soviet Famine of 1946-47*.

<sup>475</sup> Alexandra Kropotkin, *How to Cook and Eat in Russian*... (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1947), v-vi. Born in

But could any discussion of Russia or Russians truly be separate from politics, in an era when the great power rivalry between the US and the USSR remained at the forefront of the American popular consciousness? Kropotkin's intentions aside, her cookbook and other English-language works on Russian cooking published in the US between 1945 and 1991 reveal that, when it comes to eating, politics *do* count. Delving into the political nature of American writing on Russian food, this chapter furnishes a case study of how Russian-cum-Soviet cuisine took shape outside the socialist world during these decades. First, Russian cookbooks published in the US shed light on how some members of the Russian diaspora fashioned their public personae during the Cold War, often casting themselves as cultural ambassadors, dissidents, or both. Second, these sources provide a valuable tool for understanding the intersection of the food cultures of Imperial Russia, Soviet Russia, and the postwar US. American food writers grappled with the difficulties of selling Russian recipes in an age when hunger and discord had tarnished the glitter of the tsarist table. Third, by looking at American discussions about Russian cuisine in the context of a larger project focused on Soviet food culture, we find telling similarities between the culinary discourses of these two allegedly very different societies. Finally, the texts exploited in this chapter reveal that Soviet recipes and ways of thinking about food penetrated the United States during the second half of the twentieth century via both Soviet cookbooks and the works of American authors, among them émigrés who claimed to revile Soviet cookery. The US by no means represented the only foreign country that housed a community of Russian exiles, nor was it the only place outside Soviet borders where food writers concerned themselves with Russian cuisine. But, by dint of being the USSR's Cold War archrival and one of Soviet-era émigrés' preferred destinations, America provides a productive setting for exploring the international

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England, Kropotkin spent most of her adult life in the United States, where she wrote cooking advice columns and translated Russian literature into English.

reach of late Soviet food culture.

Writing Russian cuisine in Cold War America meant not only providing recipes, but also shaping perceptions of Russian history, geography, culture, and national character. For Russian-born writers, the cookbook could express nostalgia, celebrate the longevity of Russian culture in exile, or, ideally, improve Americans' understanding of life behind the Iron Curtain. Their American-born colleagues—some of whom had ancestral ties to the former Russian Empire—engaged in much the same project, generally seeking to lead their readers to a more positive perception of Russians, Russia, and sometimes even the Soviet Union. In the hands of Soviet food experts, cookbooks intended for export broadcasted the notion that the Soviet peoples lived better than ever under socialism. Regardless of a given text's provenance, the conditions of the Cold War provided the logic for writing about Russian food for an American audience.

In both the US and the USSR, talking about food during this period frequently meant connecting the flavors of the past with the palate of the present, and thereby creating a sense of continuity and stability. The cultural climate in the postwar US proved welcoming to works on ethnic and foreign foods, as Americans developed a profound interest in such cuisines that has continued to this day.<sup>476</sup> This represented, at least in part, a reaction to upheaval. Unsettled by the Cold War and, later, the Civil Rights movement and the rise of the counterculture, Americans craved the elusive timelessness of “traditional” culture. Also, thanks to postwar prosperity, many Americans now had the means to experiment with gastronomy.<sup>477</sup> In many ways, this process mirrored cultural developments in the USSR, where interest in national cuisines flourished,

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<sup>476</sup> Harvey A. Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 213-26; Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 175-201.

<sup>477</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 217-18.

living standards rose, and Soviet society embraced a “search for origins” in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In the US, perpetuating specifically Russian culinary traditions meant dealing with thorny historical and political issues. Intentionally or not, Soviet and Western food writers often raised questions about the Soviet present: Was the USSR a Russian state, a multiethnic empire, or something else? Could Russian customs live on in the Soviet state? Where did Russian cuisine end and Soviet cuisine begin?

Russian-American cookbooks, a valuable trove of source material virtually untouched by historians, form the core of this chapter’s source base. Here, the term “Russian-American cookbooks” refers to texts focused on Russian cuisine and published for American readers. Their authors include Russian émigrés of the pre- and postrevolutionary periods, the Russian-American children and grandchildren of Russian exiles, and non-Russians educated or otherwise immersed in Russian culture. Whether or not they had firsthand experience of Russia (most did) the individuals writing Russian food in the postwar US represented several different generations and a diverse range of life experiences.<sup>478</sup> I have given the most attention to works that include extensive historical narratives and/or personal commentary, in addition to recipes, as these publications provide the most information about the authors and their understandings of Russian cuisine. In order to maintain focus and manageability, church and community cookbooks do not appear here, nor do volumes intended for markets in the UK, the Antipodes, and Canada. Soviet-made English-language texts on Russian cuisine provide the only exception to this rule. Such publications have proven both so rare and also so valuable as sources, that I have included them here, even if they came to the English-speaking world via a British publisher.

Reception of these works is difficult, if not impossible, to gauge, and in most cases we



also know little about their production. Unlike their Soviet counterparts, American publications do not include information on the size of their print runs. Also, until recent decades, cookbooks only rarely featured as the topic of book reviews in newspapers and magazines. I have made use of available reviews for the works discussed here. As for readers, we simply cannot know whether they used these texts and, if so, how. Still, judging by the fact that works on Russian cuisine continued to appear—publishers did not avoid this as an unprofitable or unpopular topic—we can assume that these books found purchasers. Unfortunately, we also know little of these works’ genesis. Some authors have passed away; however, I was able to contact a few authors to learn more about their lives and their cookbooks. Email communications with food writers Anne Volokh and Anya von Bremzen, as well as with translator Lynn Visson inform the following discussion. These methodological challenges aside, the cookbooks themselves have a great deal to tell us about not only these authors’ attitudes, but also the penetration of Soviet culture into the US, changing American perceptions of Russia and the USSR, and the concerns about cultural loss that US-based émigrés shared with Soviet Russians.

This chapter begins with an overview of Americans’ experience with Russian and other foreign foods prior to the Second World War. Before 1945, Russian cuisine remained largely unfamiliar to most Americans, yet what reputation it had proved positive, as most sources cast it as exquisite and opulent, an edible encapsulation of Imperial Russia. Next, this chapter turns to Russian-American cookbooks from the 1940s and 1960s, which sought to define and defend Russian cuisine. Some authors sought to delineate the limits of Russian cuisine by separating “Russian” from “foreign” dishes, while others concentrated on casting prerevolutionary Russian cuisine as a set of customs seriously endangered by the Soviet state. Third, this chapter looks at cookbooks that address culinary customs in the Soviet Union between the mid-1960s and the

early 1990s. Shaped by the climate of US-Soviet détente, such works reflected both an expanding interest on the part of American home cooks in Russia and its cuisines, and also the growing opportunities that would-be food writers had to travel to the USSR and experience its food culture firsthand. This chapter concludes by treating English-language translations of Soviet cookbooks. These volumes introduced American readers to the USSR's officially sanctioned approaches to food and the content of contemporary Soviet food publications, complementing Russian-American cookbooks that also sometimes stealthily drew on Soviet-era cooking texts.

Russian-American cookbooks display differing approaches to Russia as a historic and geographic entity. Some food writers considered the Russian Revolution of 1917 a barrier between the old, real Russia and the new Soviet state, which effectively stamped out historical Russian customs on their native soil. In this view, Russia existed now in its most lively form in exile or in memory. Russian cuisine thus appeared as the product of a bygone era, a fragile remnant of a lost culture that required careful stewardship. Other authors, however, saw a great deal more continuity across the revolutionary divide and chose to address Soviet-era cuisine as a phenomenon that grew out of older customs and also enriched them through contact with non-Russian cuisines. Even those who remained concerned with exclusively "Russian" customs could not immunize themselves from contemporary influence. While many authors writing Russian cuisine in Cold War America attempted to distance themselves from Soviet culture, the realities and recipes of the USSR continued to make their way into their discourse throughout the postwar era.

### **America, Ethnic Cuisine, and Eating *à la Russe***

More than one scholar has identified American food culture's "constant innovation" and

vast diversity as its fundamental characteristics.<sup>479</sup> Where would American cuisine be today without the foreign influences that provided everything from hot dogs and apple pie to jambalaya and fajitas? Yet, Americans have not always welcomed unfamiliar foods. As historian Harvey Levenstein demonstrates, during the middle of the twentieth century, the ideal American meal comprised a meat, a starchy baked good and/or vegetable, and perhaps another vegetable or two, all prepared plainly.<sup>480</sup> Between the 1930s and the 1950s, the growth of cooking advice literature, advances in food processing and packaging, and ever more complex nutritional advice all had an intensely homogenizing influence on American tables. Geographic differences and class lines began vanishing into a sea of iceberg lettuce, meatloaf, and tomato soup.<sup>481</sup> Diverse customs still thrived in immigrant neighborhoods nationwide, and regional favorites—such as Kentucky burgoo and New England boiled supper—clung to life, but mainstream American food culture regarded foreign dishes with suspicion.

At midcentury, Americans were not wholly unaware of or unreceptive to all foreign dishes. Most notably, they had a longstanding familiarity with French cuisine. Anglo-American and American cookbooks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries included French recipes and sometimes used “typical” French extravagance as a foil for dour, English-style practicality.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Food studies scholar Andrew F. Smith calls “constant innovation” the “hallmark” of the American diet. Smith, preface to *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*, vol. 1, ed. Andrew F. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), xxii. Historian Donna Gabaccia refers more colorfully to the “American penchant to experiment with food, to combine and mix the foods of many cultural traditions into blended gumbos or stews, and to create ‘smorgasbords.’” Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 3.

<sup>480</sup> Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 121.

<sup>481</sup> This culinary standard, rooted in the meat-heavy fare of the American Midwest, solidified at least by the 1930s. Food-processing innovations after the Second World War did little to change it. Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 35-39, 90-91, 117.

<sup>482</sup> Sandra Sherman, *Invention of the Modern Cookbook* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010), 90, 96, 168-71, 230-37; Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 59-60, 87-88. *Perfection Salad* was first published in 1986.

French food dominated much of American fine dining before the First World War and, after losing some of its appeal in the interwar period, regained this position in the 1950s and 1960s. During the Great Depression and the Second World War, Italian cuisine also made inroads. Spaghetti with tomato sauce provided a cheap, filling meal suitable to the lean years of the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>483</sup> Chinese food, which required relatively small quantities of meat, also offered exciting ways of making-do with wartime rations, and Americans had known cheap Cantonese-American restaurant dishes for decades.<sup>484</sup> Still, for most, steak, pie, and various starches represented “the best eating the world [had] ever seen.” Less familiar foods—such as tacos, moussaka, and kimchi—appeared dirty, noisome, and unhealthy.<sup>485</sup>

One might expect to find Russian cuisine languishing here in poor repute, since the bouts of famine and drought that periodically plagued the country were by no means a secret to Americans. By the early twentieth century, assumptions about the grinding poverty of Russian peasant life had thoroughly penetrated public discourse. Even the popular fashion magazine *Vogue* had remarked in a fluffy 1909 travel essay on the plight of the “poor Russian peasant, with his love of drink and his mad fanaticism,” who had “little chance” to do anything but endure grueling labor until the very moment of death.<sup>486</sup> The Russian Civil War brought grave news of hunger in Russia. Between 1921 and 1923, Americans followed stories about the efforts of the

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<sup>483</sup> Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 28-30, 45, 137-43. Japanese and New American cuisines began to dislodge French cuisine from its pedestal only in the 1980s and 1990s. Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 247.

<sup>484</sup> Janet Theophano, “Home Cooking: Boston Baked Beans and Sizzling Rice Soup as Recipes for Pride and Prejudice,” *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 146-47; Coe, *Chop Suey*, 216-17.

<sup>485</sup> As Levenstein notes, many first-generation Americans rejected their parents’ food in an effort to assimilate. Children attending public school appear to have felt this difference most acutely, and some begged their parents to eat “American” dishes instead of their native fare. Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 28-29, 124-25.

<sup>486</sup> “A Little Journey to Russia, Part I,” *Vogue*, July 1909, 38-39.

American Relief Administration to feed war-torn Russia.<sup>487</sup> Less than a decade later, Russian suffering once more made the front pages of American newspapers, as the *New York Times* and other publications ran stories about the famine of 1932-33.<sup>488</sup> The press kept up this theme after the Second World War. As Soviet-American relations began to deteriorate in the late 1940s and early 1950s, America's Russia-watchers returned to famine, speculating about the Soviet grain crisis of 1946-47 and recalling the ARA's "mission to Russia," sometimes even hinting that the Soviet Union owed its very existence to American generosity.<sup>489</sup>

Yet, in the few sources on Russian cuisine available to Americans at this time, Russian gastronomy came off quite well, being associated primarily with imperial splendor and glamorous exiles. The first English-language text dedicated to Russian cooking, Princess Alexandre Gagarine's *Borzoï Cook Book*, appeared in 1923.<sup>490</sup> *The Borzoï Cookbook* and its successors sought to capture the glitter of a bygone era, rather than to address contemporary goings-on in the new Soviet Russia.<sup>491</sup> Gagarine's text foregrounded the French-influenced cuisine that dominated upper-class Russian tables in the final years of the Old Regime. Gagarine

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<sup>487</sup> According to historian Bertrand M. Patenaude, Americans readily accepted the view that the US had played the role of Russia's "savior" via the ARA. Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 726.

<sup>488</sup> See, for example, "Reds Faced by Famine," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 1932; "Russia's Wheat Under Own Need," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 October 1932; Lawrence Sullivan, "1933 Wheat Crop Off, Russia Faces Famine," *Washington Post*, 10 February 1933.

<sup>489</sup> See, for example, Drew Middleton, "Moscow Hints Lag in Main Granaries," *New York Times*, 25 November 1946; Harry Schwartz, "Soviets Make or Break on 1947 Harvest," *Washington Post*, 29 June 1947; "In 1923 a Hungry Russia Had High Praise for US," *New York Times*, 18 January 1952; Henry C. Wolfe, "Mission to Russia: Our Assistance in Alleviating the Famine of 1921 Recalled," *New York Times*, 13 July 1959; George F. Kennan, "Our Aid to Russia: A Forgotten Chapter," *New York Times*, 19 July 1959; Henry C. Wolfe, "The Time We Went to Lenin's Aid," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 May 1968.

<sup>490</sup> Alexandre Gagarine, *The Borzoï Cook Book* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923). The title refers to the Borzoï dog breed, also known as a Russian wolfhound, which was the emblem of the Alfred A. Knopf publishing house.

<sup>491</sup> See, for example, Nina Nikolaevna Selivanova, *Dining and Wining in Old Russia* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1933); Marie Alexandre Markevitch, *The Epicure in Imperial Russia* (San Francisco: Colt Press, 1941).

paired many foods with *bechamél*, a classical French white sauce, while evoking the French locales of Orly, Normandy, and Provence with such dishes as fish *à la Orly* (fried fish with tomato sauce), perch *à la Normande* (poached perch with mushrooms, lemon, eel liver, oysters, and crayfish) and mushrooms *à la Provencale* (mushrooms with garlic and parsley).<sup>492</sup>

Nina Nikolaevna Selivanova's 1933 *Dining and Wining in Old Russia* took a similar approach. A translator, author, and former noblewoman, Selivanova relied on a combination of personal experience, classical literature, and historical texts to recreate her lost world in print. Loving descriptions of meals and dining habits consumed the vast majority of this work, and recipes appeared almost as an afterthought. Selivanova's description of the monthly dinner taken by the St. Petersburg Guard Regiments and their families extended over four pages, in which she doted on the table settings and flowers, the "warmth and fragrance" of the *zakuski* (appetizers), and the wide array of available wines. Selivanova evinced little knowledge of the rest of Russian society. Discussing commoners briefly, she touched on urban taverns, where men did business over "steaming tea," plates of meat baked with sauerkraut, and vodka, which Selivanova calls "the only solace of the Russian lower classes." Later, she also notes the peasants' meager Lenten diet, describing such dishes as "grated or mashed radishes with *kvass* and salt" as peasant "favorites." Selivanova understood her former home as an epicurean playground, not a place of famine, hardship, and deprivation. This nostalgic creation was embodied in the book's first sentence: "The Russia of the Tsars is gone forever; gone is its colorful life, so full of light and shadow; gone the customs so in keeping with the country and the people; gone the art of good

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<sup>492</sup> Gagarine, *Borzoï Cookbook*, 71-72, 77, 172-73. Gagarine blanketed everything from crêpes to fish to vegetables with French *bechamél* sauce. See, for example, pancakes with *bechamél*, pike *à la bechamél*, carrot and *bechamél* piroshki [*sic*], veal with *bechamél*, and asparagus *à la bechamél*. *Ibid.*, 47-48, 69, 108, 123-24, 168-69.

living!”<sup>493</sup>

The Russian restaurants that popped up in America’s immigrant havens tended to bathe diners in a similar ambience. New York City’s legendary Russian Tea Room (est. 1927) served caviar and bliny in a setting that evoked the displacement and the elegance of a Russian exile’s former world. On his first visit in the mid-1950s, English theater critic and Russian Tea Room devotee Clive Barnes was impressed by “the blood-red leather of the banquettes and chairs, the daisy-pink napery, [and] the magnificent confusion of pictures, flowers, and samovars.”<sup>494</sup> Both before and after the Second World War, the Russian Tea Room and other of New York’s Russian eateries—e.g., Balalaika, Casino Rus, Krechma, and the Russian Bear—created a feeling of Old World glamour, enhanced by the presence of Russian dancers, artists, writers, and musicians, and American luminaries, including Jacqueline Kennedy. For Russian exiles, these restaurants and cafes provided a sense of community and a hub for socialization.<sup>495</sup> For non-Russians, restaurants fulfilled a fantasy of prerevolutionary Russian life, as full of good food, cold vodka, and high culture.

These resources for information about Russian cuisine—restaurants in major cities and a handful of cookbooks—reached few Americans. Still, some recipes and foodstuffs characteristic of Russian eating made it into the broader repertoire by other means. French cooking served as one vehicle for Russian dishes to arrive on American tables. Much of this French influence dates

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<sup>493</sup> Selivanova, *Dining and Wining*, 41-45, 55, 81, 5.

<sup>494</sup> Barnes does not give the exact date of his first visit, but it was likely between 1955 and 1958. It was during Sidney Kaye’s tenure as owner, which began in 1955 and Barnes describes glimpsing ballerina Maria Tallchief, “reigning goddess of the New York City Ballet,” on that visit. Tallchief left the NYC Ballet in 1958. Clive Barnes, introduction to *The Russian Tea Room Cookbook* by Faith Stewart-Gordon and Nika Hazelton (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1981), 13.

<sup>495</sup> Lynn Visson, “Borsch on Broadway: Russian Food in Postwar New York City,” paper presented at the symposium Food for Thought: Culture and Cuisine in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1800-present, Austin, Texas, 7-8 February 2014. Cited here with the author’s permission.

from the nineteenth century, when elite Russians employed French and Swiss chefs, many of whom later returned to Europe with Franco-Russian tastes. These decades saw the invention of dishes now shared by French and Russian cuisines, including veal Orloff (a gratin of veal, mushrooms, and onions) and salad Olivier, or *salade russe* (a salad of game bird breast, potatoes, and other vegetables).<sup>496</sup> Long before Gagarine's *Borzoï Cookbook* made its debut, chef François Tanty supplied readers of his 1893 *La Cuisine Française* with recipes for shchi (*tchy à la russe*), Russian-style sturgeon (*esturgeon à la russe*), Russian beef rissoles, or *bitki* (*bitocks à la russe*), and Russian fruit-juice pudding (*kissel à la russe*).<sup>497</sup> Decades later, James Beard and Alexander Watt offered dishes of Russian origin in *Paris Cuisine* (1952). Coming from the kitchens of Parisian Russian restaurants, these recipes bore the marks of French cuisine, as in the case of *okroshka*, a cold summer soup of vegetables and meat or fish, which required cream, champagne, and dry white wine in place of the customary Russian kvas.<sup>498</sup>

The luscious cakes known as charlottes provide another example of this Franco-Russian overlap. French chef Antoine Carême had first prepared the classic *charlotte russe*—made by lining a charlotte mold with ladyfingers and filling it with sweetened whipped cream—for Tsar Alexander I in 1814 or 1815.<sup>499</sup> This dessert took various guises in different chefs' hands.

Sometimes the ladyfinger mold had a filling of cream and fruit preserves. Other chefs—French,

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<sup>496</sup> Lynn Visson, "Kasha vs. Cachet Blanc: The Gastronomic Dialectics of Russian Literature," in *Russianness: Studies on a Nation's Identity*, ed. Robert L. Belknap (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990), 60-73. Also see Toomre, introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking*, 21-22; Darra Goldstein, "Gastronomic Reforms under Peter the Great: Towards a Cultural History of Russian Food," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48 (2000): 481-510.

<sup>497</sup> François Tanty, *La Cuisine Française. French Cooking for Every Home. Adapted to American Requirements* (Chicago: Baldwin, Ross & Co., 1893), 16, 49-50, 81, 156.

<sup>498</sup> James A. Beard and Alexander Watt, *Paris Cuisine* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1952), 161. The recipe for *okroshka* Beard and Watt include comes from the Korniloff restaurant in Paris. Other Russian specialties featured in this volume come from two other Russian-run restaurants in Paris, Chez Georges and Dominique. *Ibid.*, 80-82, 121-25.

<sup>499</sup> Visson, "Kasha vs. Cachet Blanc," 63.



Russian, and American—preferred the apple charlotte, made by lining a charlotte pan with bread (white or black) soaked in melted butter, and adding a filling of apples or apple puree.<sup>500</sup> These variations aside, charlotte russe's name and essential components would have provided a note of Gallic familiarity for an American home cook making her first foray into Russian cookery.<sup>501</sup>

The affinity between Russian and Jewish foodways also aided Russian foods in flying under Americans' culinary radars. Many dishes that Russians consider their own appeared also in Jewish cookbooks published in the United States. The 1919 edition of the *International Jewish Cookbook*, for instance, instructed readers in preparing Russian rissoles (*bitki* or, in French, *bitocks*) and Russian salad (a.k.a., salad Olivier), as well as Russian-style radish preserves, teacakes, and boiled beef.<sup>502</sup> More than eighty years later, food writer and historian Joan Nathan shared dishes of Russian and Eastern European origin in her *Jewish Cooking in America* (1994). These include cold summer borscht, meat-stuffed potato pancakes (potato *kotlety*), and Russian sour cream cake. Nathan highlights the continued relevance of Eastern European cultural heritage to American Jewish foodways, while also revealing the ways in which later waves of

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<sup>500</sup> Tanty provided a recipe for classic charlotte russe, made with only ladyfingers, heavy cream, and sugar in *La Cuisine Française*, 157. Already in 1846, another American work on French cooking had provided two recipes, one for *charlotte russe aux pommes* (Russian charlotte with apples) and another for plain Russian charlotte. Charlotte russe aux pommes used apple puree and fruit jam instead of whipped cream. See *French Domestic Cookery* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1846), 205, 220. Also see Xavier Raskin, *The French Chef in Private American Families: A Book of Recipes* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1922), 496-98. Famed cookbook author and television personality Julia Child made a baked charlotte, for which she gave the recipe in *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. See Simone Beck, Louisette Bertholle, and Julia Child, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 623-24. Charlotte also appeared as the subject of episode of Child's popular cooking show, *The French Chef*, in 1965. "The French Chef Episode 104: Apple Charlotte," 16 September 1965, Julia Child Papers, Folder: "The French Chef," Series 1: 104-5, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>501</sup> For examples of charlotte recipes in Russian-American cookbooks, see Gagarine, *Borzoï Cook Book*, 177, 190-91, 193-94; Kropotkin, *How to Cook and Eat in Russian*, 218; Petrovskaya, *Kyra's Secrets*, 176-78; Blanksteen, *Nothing Beats Borscht*, 39; Von Bremzen and Welchman, *Please to the Table*, 597-82. These include both the classic cream-filled ladyfinger charlotte and various versions of baked charlotte, most often made with bread and apples.

<sup>502</sup> Florence Kreisler Greenbaum, *The International Jewish Cook Book: 1600 Recipes According to the Jewish Dietary Laws with the Rules for Kashering: The Favorite Recipes of America, Austria, Germany, Russia, France, Poland, Roumania, Etc., Etc.*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1919), 83, 158, 395, 225, 80.

immigration enriched these customs. Along with borshch and blintzes, Nathan includes Georgian spinach salad with pomegranates, Bukharan chicken pilau, or pilaf (known as *plov* among Russian-speakers), and mamaliga (or *mamalyga*), a polenta-like dish common in Molodova.<sup>503</sup> Much as Russian cuisine had, by the late twentieth century, taken on dishes from across the Soviet Union, so too had American Jewish cuisine.

The association of dishes and ingredients common throughout Russia and Central and Eastern Europe with Jewish culture reflects the role that the Ashkenazim played in introducing these foods to Americans.<sup>504</sup> Jews living in these areas consumed diets more or less identical to those of their non-Jewish neighbors. Historian John Cooper explains that for poorer Jews “the main components of the diet were black bread, followed by gruels and cheap vegetables, and herrings.”<sup>505</sup> The same could be said of non-Jewish Russians, who similarly lived on black bread, grain porridges, vegetables, and small quantities of fish and meat.<sup>506</sup> Between 1881 and 1921, more than 700,000 Jews from these regions entered the US, making them the predominate group among American Jews. Some fled anti-Semitic violence in the Russian Empire; others sought to escape war and revolution after 1914.<sup>507</sup> Another wave of Jewish immigrants came to America

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<sup>503</sup> Joan Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 117, 201, 325-26, 269, 230, 301.

<sup>504</sup> As Deutsch and Saks write “The predominance of the Ashkenazi flavors of Eastern Europe in our vision of American Jewish food traditions—blintzes, kugel, brisket, tzimmes, matzah ball soup, bagels and lox—is largely attributable to the predominance of the immigration of these Jews” over Jews from other regions: “Spain, Italy, Persia . . . Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, [and] Ethiopia.” Jonathan Deutsch and Rachel D. Saks, *Jewish American Food Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 35.

<sup>505</sup> John Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied: A Social History of Jewish Food* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993), 145.

<sup>506</sup> On the Russian diet from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century, see Smith and Christian, *Bread and Salt*, 5-26.

<sup>507</sup> Edith Rogovin Frankel, *Old Lives and New: Soviet Immigrants in Israel and America* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2012), 125. Joan Nathan suggests an even higher number, supposing that as many as 2,500,000 Jews arrived in the US between 1881 and 1921. Nathan, *Jewish Cooking in America*, 16. According to Buwalda, more than two million Jews fled the Russian Empire between 1881 and 1914, only a portion of which moved to North America.

from Eastern Europe in the wake of the Second World War.<sup>508</sup> As of 1957, the United States had become home to the world's largest Jewish population.<sup>509</sup> Most of these people were of Ashkenazi heritage, and they brought with them Russian and European food customs.

Generally speaking, beet soup, chopped liver, and brined fish—foods common from the Rhine River to the Ural Mountains—all read “Jewish” to American consumers. As historian Gil Marks explains, these foods became Jewish by being “enmeshed in Jewish life, culture, and identity,” not because they were things “the Jews really invented or could claim to be exclusively theirs.”<sup>510</sup> This is not to diminish the Jewishness of these foods. Rather, it is to highlight that, regardless of the diversity of Jewish foodways in the US and worldwide, the Ashkenazim and their Russo-European heritage predominate in America.<sup>511</sup> While the phrase “Jewish food” might call up *tagliatelli frisinale* (pasta with roast chicken, raisins, and pine nuts) in Italy, *sambousak bi jibn* (cheese pies) in Syria, and *poisson en sauce épicée* (fish in peppery tomato sauce) in North Africa, it often signifies borshch, herring, and rye bread in the US.<sup>512</sup> Further, the American Jewish community has marked as Jewish even items not considered necessarily “Jewish” in their region of origin—say, borshch in Ukraine or Russia—by helping introduce Americans to foods typical of Russian and other Central and Eastern European cuisines.

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Petrus Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone: Jewish Emigration from the Soviet Union, 1967-1990* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), xv.

<sup>508</sup> Frankel, *Old Lives and New*, 125-26.

<sup>509</sup> Deutsch and Saks, *Jewish American Food Culture*, xviii.

<sup>510</sup> Gil Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), online.

<sup>511</sup> Deutsch and Saks, *Jewish American Food Culture*, 35.

<sup>512</sup> These and other Jewish recipes from around the world appear in Claudia Roden, *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand to New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 476, 282, 336. Roden, an Egyptian Jew, was educated in Paris and then relocated to London. She now writes about Jewish and other world cuisines for British and American readers.

A broad shift in American culture after World War II allowed Russian cuisine to make greater inroads, even if it never achieved the high profile of such cuisines as French, Italian, Mexican, or Japanese. For a number of reasons, Americans in the postwar period became ever more interested in foreign foods and the cuisines of the United States' various ethnic groups. First, new prepared and fast foods rendered unfamiliar fare more palatable and accessible. For example, in the 1950s and after, the La Choy and Chun King brands sold Chinese-style food products (e.g., soy sauce and canned water chestnuts) as simultaneously homey and exotic. In the 1970s, the new Taco Bell chain toned down Mexican food's spice and hinted to consumers that tacos and burritos were "safe" and "clean."<sup>513</sup> As food historians have noted, this process sometimes meant disassociating ethnic foods from the minorities that consumed them, especially if they represented, in marketers' minds, an immigrant "threat."<sup>514</sup>

While some experimented with sanitized "ethnic" food products, many middle and upper class Americans sought out more exotic gastronomic experiences.<sup>515</sup> Encouraged in the 1960s and 1970s by rising incomes, plummeting airfares, and more adventurous food critics, newly affluent consumers traveled widely and sought out everything from *poulet rôti* to sushi.<sup>516</sup> This quest dovetailed with a growing concern for personal fulfillment that swept the US in these decades. Fascination with ethnic cuisines represented part of a culture that culinary historian

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<sup>513</sup> Katherine J. Parkin, *Food is Love: Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 113-20; Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 234.

<sup>514</sup> Parkin, *Food is Love*, 119; Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 202. Also see Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 215-16.

<sup>515</sup> In Shapiro's words, "the national enthusiasm for food and cookery [constituted] a more general expression of unashamed hedonism on the part of a middle class [that was] pleased with itself." Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*, 219. Levenstein also notes that a preoccupation with self-actualization and self-discovery fueled an intense interest in exotic and "authentic" cuisines among those Americans who could afford travel and experimentation. Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 215-17.

<sup>516</sup> Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 217-18.

Laura Shapiro calls “upwardly mobile eating.”<sup>517</sup> Consuming and preparing “real” Andalusian gazpacho or Swiss fondue allowed these kitchen cosmopolitans to set themselves apart from the parochial *hoi polloi* with their casseroles and canned spaghetti. Foreign cuisines also seemed to offer “lighter” fare more suited to the health-conscious, fat-phobic age. Sensual pleasure reigned, but corpulence was distinctly unfashionable.<sup>518</sup>

In the 1960s and after, projects of self-definition related to ethnicity and race further fueled the pursuit of culinary “authenticity.” As historian Matthew Frye Jacobson observes, these changes began with the Civil Rights movement, which made whites aware of and uncomfortable with their “skin privilege,” as well as with Black Nationalism and multiculturalism, which “had provided a new language for an identity that was not simply ‘American.’” It now became common for Americans of European heritage to use ethnicity to conceptualize their identity, thinking of themselves in hyphenated terms: Italian-American, Greek-American, Russian-American, and so on. This encompassed not only “a change in personal feeling,” but also a broad “shift in public language.” While Americans sought to “revive” their ancestral traditions, the US’s cultural and business industries encouraged them with tour packages and language lessons, as well as films and television programs that bespoke a people’s historical roots.<sup>519</sup>

Ethnic foods were an important feature of this larger cultural reverie. No longer a primarily oral tradition carried on by female home cooks, ethnic cuisines became in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s an important part of public dining and print culture. Food festivals and cookbooks allowed the “new ethnics” to imagine themselves participating in a revival of lost

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<sup>517</sup> Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*, 219.

<sup>518</sup> On sensuality and fatphobia, see Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 218, 240-45.

<sup>519</sup> Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 2, 6.

cultural traditions and the reestablishment of bygone communities.<sup>520</sup> Ethnic cuisines not only marked one as a cosmopolitan sophisticate, but also as an inheritor of a particular set of cultural traditions. Thanks in part to these cultural and social forces, Russian food enjoyed dramatically more interest from the 1960s forward. As the discussion below reveals, some food writers made the most of this cultural climate by disseminating information about Russian cuisine.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a growing number of food writers took up the task of promoting Russian cooking to an English-speaking audience. These works took some cues from their prewar predecessors, most noticeably in their preoccupation with preserving the traditions of Imperial Russia. But even if Russian cuisine continued to call up visions of expensive dainties and crystal carafes, it gradually also took on additional meanings, in part because culinary goings on within Soviet Russia found their way into American food writing. This meant an influx of influences from the non-Russian peoples of the USSR, as well as more intense efforts to foster in Americans an understanding that the Russian people ought not be judged according to the deeds of the Soviet state.

### **Defining and Defending Russian Cuisine**

Since Russia had undergone such massive social and cultural upheavals in the first decades of the twentieth century, cookbook authors writing after the Second World War faced special complications in defining Russian cuisine. Most elected to pay attention to the Russia that had existed before 1917. As early as the 1940s, these authors set up an opposition between prerevolutionary customs and the practices of the Soviet era. Some Russian-American cookbooks also steered discussions of history and cuisine into criticisms of the Soviet system,

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<sup>520</sup> Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 175-201.

arguing that contemporary Russian fare paled by comparison with the grand cuisine of the Imperial era. Cookbooks provided a necessary means of preserving the latter, rather than letting it slowly die out, a victim of state socialism. Yet prerevolutionary cuisine presented challenges of its own. Cookbook authors sometimes found themselves making the case for including once-foreign dishes on the grounds that they had come to represent something truly Russian. Food practices in Soviet Russia also often provided an important counterpoint for their discussions of “authentic” Russian cuisine, almost making their celebrations of this older way of life dependent upon the sorry conditions of the postrevolutionary era. While trying to essentialize “real” Russian cuisine, then, these food writers easily became entangled with both the Soviet present and the multiethnic character of Russian food customs. Ultimately, their goal was to distance Russian cuisine—as it existed in the prerevolutionary era or in émigré communities—from the realities of life in the USSR. Many Russian-American cookbooks thus encouraged their readers to adopt a favorable attitude toward Russians and their food, while either ignoring the USSR or looking on it with suspicion and disdain.

Wanda Frolov’s *Katish: Our Russian Cook* (1947) represented the first attempt to bring a taste of Russia to postwar American readers. Originally appearing as a serial in *Gourmet* magazine during the final months of the Second World War, *Katish* suited the atmosphere of the moment, when the US and the USSR existed in a relationship of mutual support and suspicion. A combination of short stories and recipes, the narrative revolved around one Ekaterina Pavlovna Belaev (a.k.a., Katish), a cheerful war widow that Frolov created as a composite based on her experiences with Russian émigrés in Southern California. “Katish’s” recipes came from individuals throughout this community.<sup>521</sup> Frolov thus crafted a favorable impression of Russians

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<sup>521</sup> *Gourmet* magazine originally published Frolov’s *Katish* as a serial between January and September 1945. The

by using Katish as an example of their positive national characteristics. Embodying Russians' expansive hospitality, Katish proved more than happy to lay on feasts for her Russian friends, care for the gardener's dirty children, and to invite a motley crew, including even hobos, to enjoy an evening of poker and pirozhki. Further, her cooking reflected an past way of life, as it favored treats enjoyed by the one-time upper and merchant classes—beef Stroganoff, chicken Kiev, Pozharskii cutlets, and rum-soaked desserts—as well as timeless and classless favorites, such as borshch, kasha with mushrooms, and fruit kissel.<sup>522</sup> Frolov celebrated Russians and their cuisine without actually challenging her readers to travel to present-day Russia in their minds. Katish had fled the cataclysm that brought the present regime to power; as a refugee and war widow, Katish did not represent the current order. Yet her kindness reflected well on the Russian “character,” while her kitchen's abundance invoked an imaginary past in which Russians could generously share their gastronomic bounty with the world.<sup>523</sup>

In *How to Cook and Eat in Russian* Kropotkin claimed to provide recipes for only “the most characteristic Russian specialties,” which had “not changed at all from the old days to the

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stories appeared under a Russian-ish pseudonym. Wanda V. Ivanoff, “Katish,” *Gourmet*, January 1945, 10-11, 32, 34, 36-38; “Katish, Part II,” *Gourmet*, February 1945, 14-15, 35-38, 40-42; “Katish, Part III,” *Gourmet*, March 1945, 14-15, 32, 34, 38-41; “Katish, Part IV,” *Gourmet*, April 1945, 14-15, 51-52, 54-55, 57; “Katish, Part V,” *Gourmet*, May 1945, 14-15, 38, 40, 41-42, 44, 46, 48-50; “Katish, Part VI,” *Gourmet*, June 1945, 14-15, 30, 32-34; “Katish, Part VII,” *Gourmet*, July 1945, 14-15, 52, 54-57; “Katish, Part VIII,” *Gourmet*, August 1945, 14-15, 46, 48, 50-52; “Katish, Part IX,” *Gourmet*, September 1945, 16-17, 70-75, 78-79. The dust jacket of the 1947 edition includes a note regarding the “truth or fiction of Katish.” Frolov writes, “The characters are all based on real people, and the various episodes did occur, but to different people of my acquaintance. I suppose Katish was more or less suggested to me by a Russian cook who once worked for friends of mine.” Wanda L. Frolov, *Katish: Our Russian Cook* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1947). All other citations refer to the 2001 reprint: Frolov, *Katish: Our Russian Cook* (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

<sup>522</sup> Frolov, *Katish*, 52-53, 11-12, 14, 46, 68, 141-42, 148. These dishes also appear in later cookbooks focusing on immigrant cooking. See, for example, Margaret H. Koehler, *Recipes from the Russians of San Francisco* (Riverside, CT: Chatham Press, 1974), 53, 69, 41-43, 48, 77, 93; Visson, *Complete Russian Cookbook*, 185-86, 199, 283, 78-87, 91-92, 250, 313. Koehler includes chicken Kiev, but not Pozharskii cutlets. Visson includes Pozharskii cutlets made with veal, as well as several styles of chicken cutlets, but no chicken Kiev.

<sup>523</sup> On Katish's “biography,” see Frolov, *Katish*, 4-6, 52.



new.” Regardless of their “violent” political disagreements, all Russians loved black bread, cabbage soup, cabbage pie, baked buckwheat, croquettes of game, *ukha* (clear fish soup), and their “foamy little *pastilla* candies which taste like fresh fruit.” Kropotkin admonished readers to do things the Russian way. “Real Russian” zakuski, or hors d’oeuvres, should not be decorated “with parsley or any other green stuff.” While suggesting that one could serve common anchovy fillets in place of harder-to-clean *kil’ki* (Norwegian anchovies), she warned that the substitution would result in the dish not tasting “truly Russian.” Kropotkin omitted cream soups and French sauces, as their foreign origin rendered them “not sufficiently representative of native Russian cooking.” Finally, since many varieties of Russian freshwater fish could prove hard to obtain in the US, she turned to Francesca La Monte, Assistant Curator of Ichthyology at the American Museum of Natural History, for help identifying the closest North American equivalents. Yellow pike, butterfish, and porgies took the place of Russian white-fleshed fishes, while shrimp stood in for Russians’ beloved crayfish.<sup>524</sup>

Though by no means a partisan of the old order, Kropotkin longed for the Russia she had known as a girl, which now existed only in exile communities. So, before launching into reminiscences about tea parties she had attended in Petrograd, she opined,

Among Russians who have gone away to dwell in other countries, it is easy enough to arouse mild attacks of homesick longing for Russian life and Russian flavors. But to launch the expatriate Russian soul on a really unbridled jag of nostalgia, try mentioning our . . . evening tea. There is the magic phrase that reawakens all our dearest memories of home!<sup>525</sup>

Kropotkin’s work thus represented not only an exercise in cultural preservation, but also a means

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<sup>524</sup> Kropotkin, *How to Cook and Eat in Russian*, 2-3, 41, 55, 70, 211, 126-27, 130-32. Crayfish are native in North America, as well, but were only available at the time in certain regions parts of the American Midwest and South, not in the Northeast, where Kropotkin had settled. *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

of indulging in personal history and collective nostalgia.

A symptom of the intensely anti-Soviet atmosphere of the early 1950s, no major works on Russian cuisine appeared for more than a decade after the publication of *How to Cook and Eat in Russian* and *Katish*.<sup>526</sup> In 1961, as tensions eased between the US and the USSR, *Kyra's Secrets of Russian Cooking* ushered in a new wave of Russian-American cookbooks. Author Kyra Petrovskaya came to the US in 1946 as the bride of an American diplomat. By the dawn of the 1960s, she already dazzled American readers with her memoir, *Kyra* (1959), which described her life in Soviet high society, on the Moscow stage, and as a Red Army sharpshooter during the Second World War.<sup>527</sup> In her cookbook, Petrovskaya fed Americans' curiosity about the USSR by interweaving recipes, historical tidbits, and tales of glamour and hardship under Soviet rule. This approach proved sufficiently successful to earn *Kyra's Secrets* reprints in the UK in the 1960s and in the US in 1992.<sup>528</sup>

Concerned to present “traditional Russian dishes only,” Petrovskaya purported to leave out even “wonderful recipes” if they had been adopted from the French, Germans, or British. Petrovskaya's chapter on “Things Made of Dough” thus included only Russian pies (*pirozhki*, *pirogi*, and *kulebiaka*), bliny, filled dumplings, rolls savory and sweet, Easter kulich, and rum baba. Still, this final item reveals that the author did admit some foreign influences. Contra the

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<sup>526</sup> During this period, the Russian Tea Room in New York City may have released various editions of its pamphlet-like *Russian Dishes and What They are Made Of* (first offered “compliments of the Russian Tea Room” in the 1930s), though no copies from this period appear to exist in US libraries. A smattering of church and community cookbooks was published in English in the US between 1948 and 1960: Anne Pishtey and Others, *Favorite Russian Recipes* (Yonkers, NY: N.p., 1953); All Saints Russian Orthodox Church, *Na Zdorovya... To Your Health!* (Hartford, CT: The Sisterhood, 1950); Christ the Savior Cathedral, *American Carpatho-Russian Cook Book* (Johnstown, PA: Colquhoun Mothers and Daughters Club, 1960).

<sup>527</sup> “About the Author,” Kyra Petrovskaya Wayne, <http://www.kyrapetrovskawayne.com/>. Also see Kyra Petrovskaya Wayne, *Kyra* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959).

<sup>528</sup> Kyra Petrovskaya, *Secrets of Russian Cooking* (London: Heinemann, 1962); Petrovskaya, *Russian Cookbook* (New York: Dover, 1992).

belief that this dessert hailed from France, she claims, “the majority of Russians claim that this exotic dish is thoroughly Russian, pointing to its name—Baba, which in peasant-Russian means Woman.”<sup>529</sup> Petrovskaya made a similar suggestion in her discussion of salad Olivier. Created, as Petrovskaya notes, by Frenchman Lucien Olivier, chef at St. Petersburg’s Hermitage Restaurant, salad Olivier had been a Russian favorite since the turn of the century. Petrovskaya muses that Russians are comfortable treating this dish Russian although a Frenchman created it because “we, the Russians, are known for expropriating someone else’s ideas.”<sup>530</sup>

Nina Nicolaeff took a similar approach in her 1969 cookbook, *The Art of Russian Cooking*, co-authored by writer Nancy Phelan. Nicolaeff, who left Moscow for Australia in the 1950s, positioned herself as an expert on the “Russian national spirit,” which she believed remained unchanged even in exile, sustained as it was by eating, drinking, and hospitality. Nicolaeff and Phelan drew on early modern and prerevolutionary cookbooks to address customs that had prevailed in Russia for centuries. According to these authors, the dishes they discussed had become truly Russian, regardless of the foreign influences long felt in the Russian kitchen. The Russian people could make anything from Caucasian pilafs to European soups their own by adding “typical native ingredients.” A dish that originated outside Russian borders might “taste unmistakably Russian” thanks to the inclusion of “dill or sour cream or the combination of sour cream and mushrooms.”<sup>531</sup> A dish became Russian when Russians adopted and adapted it, adding the spirit and flavors of their homeland. More generally, if Russians perceived a dish as

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<sup>529</sup> Petrovskaya, *Kyra’s Secrets*, 3, 141-72. The rum baba originated in eighteenth-century Poland, where King Stanislaus’s *patissier* invented the treat and named it after Ali Baba of *One Thousand and One Nights*. The rum baba is associated with France because its inventor later moved to Paris and opened a pastry shop specializing in the sticky-sweet cakes. James MacGuire, “Babas and Savarins,” *The Art of Eating* 91 (2013): 22.

<sup>530</sup> Kushkova, “At the Center of the Table,” 47-48; Petrovskaya, *Kyra’s Secrets*, 17.

<sup>531</sup> Nicolaeff and Phelan, *Art of Russian Cooking*, 13, 19, 147. This book appeared in several editions. The 1969 edition was the first intended for an American readership.

Russian, then it was. Practice and belief provided the litmus tests for authenticity.

Following in Frolov's footsteps, other food writers of the 1970s and 1980s turned to immigrant foodways, recording the recipes of Russian émigrés and their descendants. Margaret H. Koehler's *Recipes from the Russians of San Francisco* (1974) provides a conventional example, documenting the customs of an entire community, in this case the cuisine of San Francisco's Russian émigrés.<sup>532</sup> Literary translator Lynn Visson's *Complete Russian Cookbook* (1982) records the recipes of Russians living in New York City and neighboring areas, while supplementing these with information from older works on Russian cuisine.<sup>533</sup> While some of Visson's informants hailed from the USSR, most belonged to the older generation of Revolution-era immigrants, whose knowledge comprised "a unique and fairly complete representation of nineteenth-century Russian cooking."<sup>534</sup> Revolving around the culture of Russians who came to the US in the early twentieth century, these cookbooks largely featured dishes popular in late Imperial Russia. As in Frolov's text, rich desserts, beef Stroganoff, and fussy chicken cutlets remained favorites. Dishes that originated among the non-Russian populations of the empire also found a place here. For instance, Visson and Frolov offered Ukrainian vareniki and Caucasian shashlyk, while Koehler shared a recipe for Tatar *beleshi*, or *beliashi*, which she described as "Russian hamburgers."<sup>535</sup> Still, these authors did not pretend at comprehensive coverage of the

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<sup>532</sup> Koehler was a journalist specializing in cuisine, antiques, history, and travel. She also wrote *Recipes from the Portuguese of Provincetown* (Riverside, CT: Chatham Press, 1973).

<sup>533</sup> Visson used both American and Soviet publications as references to support her work. The latter included the *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food* and N. I. Kovalev's *Russkaia kulinariia*. The former, which she found "much more useful," included Kropotkin's *How to Cook and Eat in Russian*, Barbara Norman's *Russian Cookbook*, Frolov's *Katish*, and several publications intended for a British readership. Lynn Visson to the author, 23 April 2014.

<sup>534</sup> Visson, *Complete Russian Cookbook*, 20.

<sup>535</sup> Frolov, *Katish*, 119, 137. Visson describes shashlyk as a "Georgian dish" that "has become part of Russian cuisine." Visson, *Complete Russian Cookbook*, 199. For her recipe for vareniki see *Ibid.*, 142-43. On *bilishi* (in

USSR's cuisines, or even those of the former Russian Empire. Instead, they included only dishes that had, in their view, become Russian through use.

Koehler, like Frolov before her, hinted that Russian cuisine had long been under threat in its homeland and now abided in a robust form only outside the borders of the former Empire. Highlighting culinary and cultural continuity by stating, "As they did in Old Russia, festivities today still center around church holidays," Koehler did not have Soviet Russia in mind when she wrote the word, "today." Rather, she discussed activities in Russian San Francisco, where Easter meant tables laden with festive fare and churches overflowing with worshippers.<sup>536</sup> Frolov similarly reveled in the beauty of Los Angeles's Orthodox cathedral and the opulence of the Russian Easter spread *Katish* had laid on for Frolov's family and her own émigré friends.<sup>537</sup> Neither author openly addresses the suppression of religious practice under Soviet rule, instead allowing their exclusive focus on émigré practices to suggest that such celebrations no longer took place in Russia itself.

Food writers who had lived in the Soviet Union provided similar commentary. Nina Nicolaeff noted that Russian émigrés continued to prepare *kulich* and *paskha*, "the main features of the Easter table," even "during the years when church festivals were no longer celebrated in their native land." With recipes for these dishes lacking in Soviet cooking texts, "the older exile housewives had passed the recipes on to the younger generation and they are still made all over the world by Russians at Easter."<sup>538</sup> Petrovskaya stated bluntly that in the USSR "there are no

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Koehler's spelling), see Koehler, *Recipes from the Russians of San Francisco*, 9, 62.

<sup>536</sup> Koehler, *Recipes from the Russians of San Francisco*, 14-18.

<sup>537</sup> Frolov, *Katish*, 103-4.

<sup>538</sup> Nicolaeff and Phelan, *Art of Russian Cooking*, 213-14.

religious holidays,” but noted that Russians did prepare at home some foods associated with these festivals, such as the bliny customarily enjoyed during Butter Week (*Maslenitsa*, the feast that precedes Great Lent and Easter).<sup>539</sup> Neither author said outright that holiday foods had vanished from the USSR, but they both hinted that their preparation would not be considered ideal Soviet behavior.

Visson, the child of Russian émigrés, went the furthest with her critique, suggesting that classical Russian cuisine now existed almost exclusively outside of Russia. Extinction threatened the “superb dishes” she knew growing up, as the generation of Revolution-era émigrés died out.<sup>540</sup> Back in their homeland, shortages and “agricultural problems” prevented home cooks from preparing many dishes long enjoyed by Russians, such as those requiring fresh vegetables. The official Soviet approach to cuisine also had drawbacks, as food officials and cookbook authors viewed cooking “primarily as a science of health . . . rather than as an art.” Visson saw a woefully narrow selection of Russian dishes in Soviet cookbooks and she feared that “the rigidly planned and inefficiently run Soviet restaurant industry [provided] little opportunity for a rebirth of the old Russian cuisine.”<sup>541</sup> Her book would attempt to preserve classical Russian cooking, promoting a renaissance that these customs were unlikely to enjoy in its homeland.

Soviet émigré Anne Volokh (*née* Anna Glauberman-Izarova) also set herself up as a fierce defender of Russia’s culinary heritage.<sup>542</sup> After moving to Los Angeles from Kiev in 1975,

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<sup>539</sup> Petrovskaya, *Kyra’s Secrets*, 152.

<sup>540</sup> Visson, *Complete Russian Cookbook*, 20. Visson came up with the idea for this project in the 1970s and began collecting recipes from her mother’s friends in 1979. Lynn Visson to the author, 23 April 2014.

<sup>541</sup> Visson, *Complete Russian Cookbook*, 227, 18-19.

<sup>542</sup> Anne Volokh and Mavis Manus, *The Art of Russian Cuisine* (New York: Collier Books, 1983). Since the ideas, voice, and research are all Volokh’s alone, the text is discussed as her creation. Mavis Manus provided English language assistance with writing and editing the volume. Her role was largely auxiliary.

Volokh came to feel that “classic Russian cuisine [was] virtually unknown in the United States.”<sup>543</sup> Americans knew only of vodka, caviar, beef Stroganoff, chicken Kiev, and borshch, not the great variety of dishes that had once comprised the grand cuisine of prerevolutionary Russia. Worse still, in the USSR Russian cuisine lived on “only in a lamentably reduced form.” In her 1983 cookbook, *The Art of Russian Cuisine*, Volokh took it upon herself to “rescue from near oblivion what might easily become only a memory.”<sup>544</sup>

Having worked between 1968 and 1974 as a food journalist in the USSR, Volokh had extensive experience of the world of Soviet dining, but she also felt like an outsider within Soviet culture. According to Volokh, she and her family lived in “inner emigration,” cherishing the values of prerevolutionary Russia. Her ancestors “lost everything” in the Russian Revolution and her immediate family refused to give up on retaining an air of old-fashioned elegance. Common Soviet fare thus left her cold. Volokh “looked down [her] nose” at other popular food writers, notably V. V. Pokhlebkina, who she felt took a “primitiv-ish approach to cooking” by, for example, frying *kotlety* in vegetable oil instead of butter, as was done “in good homes.” She and her household likewise regarded *The Book of Delicious and Healthy Food* as a “feeble attempt to replace” Molokhovets’s *A Gift to Young Housewives*.<sup>545</sup>

Unsurprisingly, *The Art of Russian Cuisine* celebrated Imperial Russia’s elite dining customs. Volokh topped expensive ingredients with even more expensive ingredients, dressing oysters, sturgeon, and veal with fine beluga caviar.<sup>546</sup> Many of Volokh’s recipes represent

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<sup>543</sup> Anne Volokh to the author, 26 May 2012; Catherine Seipp, “Media Circus: Queen of the Dish Rags,” *Salon*, 5 December 1997, online, [http://www.salon.com/1997/12/05/media\\_39/](http://www.salon.com/1997/12/05/media_39/); Volokh and Manus, *Art of Russian Cuisine*, 2.

<sup>544</sup> Volokh and Manus, *Art of Russian Cuisine*, 2.

<sup>545</sup> Anne Volokh to the author, 10 June 2012; Volokh to the author, 3 October 2012.

<sup>546</sup> See recipes for oysters with caviar, poached sturgeon with crayfish tails and caviar, and braised veal with caviar

adaptations from *A Gift to Young Housewives*. For instance, Volokh's "spring chicken cooked to taste like grouse" differs from Molokhovets's only by requiring bacon strips instead of salt pork (*shpik*).<sup>547</sup> Volokh also reveled in prerevolutionary food lore, such as the origins of dishes named for Russian nobles: beef Stroganoff, Bagration soup (rich barley, spinach, and asparagus soup with quenelles), veal Prince Orlov (a.k.a., Veal Orloff), and pheasant Golitsyn (stuffed, roast game birds). Comfortable with their Franco-Russian nature, Volokh unashamedly acknowledged poaching these recipes from major French cookbooks: *Larousse Gastronomique* and Auguste Escoffier's *Le Guide Culinaire*.<sup>548</sup>

Volokh condemned Soviet food culture by comparing the Imperial past to the Soviet present. Writing of her years as a food journalist, Volokh sighed, "I rarely allowed myself to describe the Epicurean delights of bygone days—they were simply too far beyond the practical reach of my readers." She explained culinary adaptations in terms of shortages. For instance, Volokh stated that she used chicken in her croquettes Pozharskii because the traditional game birds—pilloried after 1917 as evidence of bourgeois decadence—could not be had in the USSR.<sup>549</sup> Even positive gastronomic experiences felt hollow. Visiting Moscow's Slavic Bazaar restaurant in the 1960s, Volokh ate their "excellent" sterlet soup "with the same feeling of poignancy one might experience at the farewell performance of a great actor." As Volokh writes,

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sauce in Volokh and Manus, *Art of Russian Cuisine*, 18-19, 226-27, 282-83.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 316; Elena Molokhovets, *Podarok molodym khoziaikam, ili Sredstvo k umen'sheniiu raskhodov v domashnem khoziaistv*, 4th ed. (Moscow: Polikom, 1991), 350. This is a reprint of the 1901 edition.

<sup>548</sup> Volokh and Manus, *Art of Russian Cuisine*, 266-27, 88-89, 278-80, 350-51.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 2, 342, 239. Over the years, English speakers have given a wide array of names to the dish known most often in Russian as *pozhar'skie kotlety*. Some call them croquettes pojarski, others Pozharsky Cutlets, and so on. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I will use the spelling Pozharskii, even when the authors I am discussing spell it in some other manner. While making this change of spelling, I have retained the other components of the name a given author bestows on the dish, e.g., cutlets, croquettes, patties, etc.



“With sterlet disappearing from the Volga so rapidly, it is only a question of time before the dish becomes more myth than reality.”<sup>550</sup> As Volokh saw it, Russians’ taste had not changed, but the means of satisfying it had. Bolshevik ideology, poor provisioning, and environmental degradation—all Soviet-era developments—had degraded Russian cuisine. This aligned neatly with the view expressed by Volokh and several of her colleagues that Russia itself—now in its Soviet guise—no longer represented the true home of Russian cuisine. These authors longed for customs that they believed had been extinguished in their homeland and lived on only in exile.

### **Embracing the (New) Empire**

Although many Russian-American cookbooks concentrated on specifically Russian cuisine and declined to openly acknowledge Soviet influence, some authors, in the late 1960s and after, began to embrace the cuisines of the USSR, in all of their geographic, ethnic, and cultural diversity. These texts served as an antidote to common depictions of the Soviet Union as a land devoid of gastronomic pleasure. Lynn Visson, Anne Volokh, and others had few kind words for culinary goings on in the land of the Soviets. American journalists, meanwhile, gleefully reported on supply shortages and the “dreary” meals served in Soviet restaurants.<sup>551</sup> Increasingly, however, food writers in the US began to take Soviet cuisine seriously and even to suggest that Russian customs might very well be living on in their homeland. This new approach grew out of changes in both the US and the USSR.

A multiethnic perspective on Russian cuisine first emerged in the late 1960s, with the publication of Barbara Norman’s *The Russian Cookbook* (1967) and Helen and George

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>551</sup> See, for example, “Russia Can’t Supply Steak to Embassies,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10 February 1964; “Supply Uncertainties Hamper Menus: Russ Restaurants Short on Taste Appeal,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 1978.

Papashvily's *Russian Cooking* (1969), part of the Time-Life Foods of the World series. Both Norman and the Papashvilys treated "Russia" as a by-word for "Soviet Union." Their titles read "Russian," but the books' contents proved comprehensively Soviet. Norman's volume revolved around the "ten cuisines of Russia": the Slavic cuisines of "Little Russia," Belarus, and "Great Russia"; the Baltic cuisines of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; the Caucasian cuisines of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan; and the cuisine of "Turkestan" (Central Asia).<sup>552</sup> Each chapter included recipes from every one of these ten cuisines, almost always using the dish's native name and specifying its region of origin. Familiar Russian ukha and Siberian pel'meni appear alongside exotic Lithuanian *viritinai* (mushroom- or meat-stuffed dumplings), Armenian *targhana* (yogurt soup), and Azerbaijani *bozartma* (chicken fricassee). Resolutely contemporary, this culinary map followed the borders of the Soviet Union, including Western Ukraine and the Baltics, regions only recently absorbed by the Soviet state.

Norman's academic background may have played a decisive role in shaping her perspective. Norman earned a bachelor's degree in Russian Studies from Stanford University before going on to work at the US State Department in the late 1950s.<sup>553</sup> Russian Studies as a field had emerged only after World War II, when United States officials came face-to-face with the fact that they had no pool of experts to tap for knowledge on their Cold War enemy. To encourage the participation of humanists and social scientists in foreign policy planning, the US government and various private foundations funneled funds into research on the Soviet Bloc.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>552</sup> Barbara Norman, *The Russian Cookbook: Recipes from Armenia, Azerbaidzhan, Belorussia, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Turkestan and the Ukraine* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 5.

<sup>553</sup> This information is provided on the dust jacket of Norman, *Russian Cookbook*. Working as a translator for most of her professional life, Norman kept a fairly low profile. Little information about her life and education is available. Norman died in 2011.

<sup>554</sup> As David C. Engerman notes, before World War II, "there was no field of Russian Studies, just a handful of scholars, varying widely in interest, training, and talents, spread thinly across American universities." Engerman,

Norman was among the first generation of American university students to benefit from the funding of Russian Studies during the 1950s and after.<sup>555</sup> *The Russian Cookbook* bears the marks of her formal training, particularly Norman's familiarity with the USSR's structure and diversity.

The Papashvilys similarly addressed major Soviet regions and their cuisines. An ethnic Georgian who fought for the tsar before the Russian Revolution, George Papashvily was acutely aware of the USSR's continued ethnic and culinary complexity. George thus informed the reader that, "Russia, or more correctly the Soviet Union or USSR, is not only an immense country but a diverse one," a home to "some 110 different nationalities, each with a distinct language and apparently a distinct cuisine." He and his wife and co-author Helen also expressed concern about the potential loss of non-Russian cultural traditions through a process of "Russianization." "Modern education and mass communications," George observed, "tend to lessen regional differences." Speaking specifically of Lithuania, Helen fretted that "a Russification of the kitchen is taking place, partly as a result of communal dining halls in factories, where the dishes reflect the standardized training of Soviet cooking schools." They believed, however, that Russian cuisine had "suffered the most influence and change in its eating habits," as many non-native dishes had "become standard Russian fare." The Papashvilys noted with an air of foreboding that "the days when borshch, kasha, cabbage and beets formed the basic diet of Russia are gone."<sup>556</sup>

The Papashvilys emphasized the historical roots of Russian customs, describing Easter,

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*Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2. Engerman offers a brief outline of funding sources for Russian Studies in *Ibid.*, 3-6. Also see Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

<sup>555</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*.

<sup>556</sup> Helen Papashvily and George Papashvily, *Russian Cooking*, rev. ed. (New York: Time Life Books, 1975), 6-7, 111. Originally published in 1969.

for example, as the holiday “most deeply rooted in the Slavic past.” Yet they immediately made an unexpected rhetorical turn, highlighting the fact that these traditions lived on openly in the USSR. On Easter the Soviet Union’s “churches are full, and even people who have abandoned the rituals and beliefs of Eastern Orthodoxy keep the day—from habit, from nostalgia, or as a gesture of affection and respect for parents and grandparents.” Their discussion of Lent went so far as to make the Soviet present appear preferable to the Imperial past. Once, peasants had “appeased their hunger” with tough, dried fish and sunflower seeds, while the rich supped on “pineapples, strawberries, almond ‘milk,’ fish disguised as meat—and, not infrequently, meat disguised as fish.” But today the average Russian observed the fast only by choice, and then not very strictly. Religious observance continued and it no longer demanded ritual deprivation. Speaking more generally, the Papashvilys observed that Russians now enjoyed a more and better food than ever before.<sup>557</sup> Importantly, this volume also included lavish color illustrations, unlike anything that had appeared in any previous Russian-American cookbook. Opening *Russian Cooking*, the reader encountered not only generous remarks about Soviet life, but also glossy images of chic restaurants and sumptuous meals from across the USSR (see figures 8 and 9). The Papashvilys made the gastronomic joys of the USSR accessible and tangible to American home cooks.

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 39-40, 49, 71.



**Figure 8** Russian bliny with sour cream, caviar, smoked fish, and drawn butter. Papashvily and Papashvily, *Russian Cooking*.



**Figure 9** The Pearl of the Sea (*Juras Perle*) Restaurant near Riga, Latvian SSR. Papashvily and Papashvily, *Russian Cooking*.

Improved relations between the United States and the Soviet Union played a role in facilitating this shift in perspective. Stalin's death in 1953 opened up new opportunities for

tensions to ease. In the second half of the 1950s, American tourists began traveling to the USSR, new educational exchanges opened up, and both sides held exhibitions in the other's country.<sup>558</sup> Cultural intercourse continued throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, in spite of such dramatic incidents as the Cuban Missile Crisis. A growing number of young academics could now, like Barbara Norman, gain firsthand experience of Soviet life, while food writers, including Helen Papashvily, enjoyed the possibility of traveling to the USSR. True, the vast majority of Americans did not see the Soviet exhibition in New York, nor did they travel to the USSR. But these initiatives created space for the American and Soviet peoples to indulge in curiosity about the ideological "other." This became ever more the case in the Brezhnev years, when new US-Soviet academic, sport, performing arts, and other exchanges were established, and when the flood of news about summits, meetings, and treaties that accompanied détente in the 1970s further heightened Americans' interest in Soviet life.<sup>559</sup> In particular, the Pepsi-Stolichnaya deal of 1972, which allowed the Soviet-made vodka to be marketed and sold in the US, may have increased their receptivity to works on Russian cuisine.<sup>560</sup> Moreover, this more relaxed cultural atmosphere made it permissible for the likes of Norman and the Papashvilys to adopt a more favorable view of culinary life behind the Iron Curtain.

Visson and Fisher's *Moscow Gourmet* (1974) appears symptomatic of the relationship

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<sup>558</sup> For a brief overview of Soviet cultural diplomacy in the Khrushchev years, see Nigel Gould-Davies, "The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 27, 2 (April 2003): 200-212.

<sup>559</sup> See Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*, though Richmond devotes much more attention to Western influence on the USSR than Soviet influence in the US. Also see Robert F. Byrnes, *Soviet-American Academic Exchanges, 1958-1975* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976).

<sup>560</sup> For recent works addressing détente, see, for the Soviet side, Vladislav M. Zubok, *Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 192-264. For the American side, see Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). On the Pepsi-Stolichnaya deal, see Michael V. Paulauskas, "Moscow on the Potomac: The Soviet Embassy and Détente, 1969-1979" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012), 373-74.

between American gastronomic curiosity and superpower détente. A unique English-language dining guide to the Soviet capital, this work provided a rare glimpse into Moscow's culinary scene and surely proved useful to many Americans traveling to the USSR. Visson and Fisher did not pull any punches when they described deplorable meals or abusive waitstaff, calling, for instance, the food at the Dnieper Restaurant "unacceptable." They included a lengthy discourse on the challenges of eating out in the USSR, instructing their readers in sneaking past uncooperative door men and enduring the "great wait" that often ensues between courses.<sup>561</sup>

Yet many of their assessments were positive. Visson and Fisher had high praise for a number of restaurants, including the opulent Aragvi Restaurant and the humble Russian Tea Café.<sup>562</sup> They demonstrated, contra popular wisdom, that one *could* get a good meal in the notoriously unfriendly and unpalatable Soviet capital. Russia-watchers hailed this book as a necessary and "refreshing" addition to travel writing on Russia. Historian S. Frederick Starr praised it for helping "[to dispel] the widespread impression that a title such as 'The Moscow Gourmet' is a contradiction in terms."<sup>563</sup> The *Chicago Tribune*'s Moscow correspondent, James O. Jackson, recommended the book for those who wanted "to escape Intourist and see the real Moscow."<sup>564</sup> Moreover, Visson (then Lynn Fisher) and Wesley Fisher conducted their fieldwork for this guide while on an academic exchange program as Columbia University graduate

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<sup>561</sup> Fisher and Fisher, *Moscow Gourmet*, 53, 28-31, 36-37.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66, 104-5.

<sup>563</sup> S. Frederick Starr, Review of *The Moscow Gourmet* by Lynn Fisher and Wesley Fisher, *New York Times*, 19 January 1975.

<sup>564</sup> James O. Jackson, "How to Escape Intourist and See the Real Moscow: In Places Intourist Won't Recommend," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 May 1976.

students; Visson specialized in Russian literature and Fisher in Soviet Studies and sociology.<sup>565</sup>

Not only had improvements in US-Soviet relations made it possible for a growing number of Americans to travel to the USSR, but the establishment of educational exchanges—another symptom of the warmer climate—permitted the creation of *The Moscow Gourmet*.

The effects of this period of relative openness could be felt even in the early 1980s, after détente had definitively come to an end. Darra Goldstein's *À la Russe: A Cookbook of Russian Hospitality* (1983) stands as a testament to this, combining a clear-eyed awareness of the challenges facing Soviet home cooks with genuinely fond words for the contemporary Russian and non-Russian cuisines of the USSR. Writing of her brief time working as an interpreter in the Soviet Union, she recalled,

People from Odessa to Alma-Ata generously opened their homes to me, and my hosts were always eager to share their treasured recipes. From them, I learned how the culinary art had evolved from the nineteenth-century extravaganzas described in literature to the monumental *zakuska* buffets of today. Each new family I met asserted that *theirs* was the best kvass, *theirs* the best [stuffed cabbage rolls]. And when I think of the friends behind each recipe, each does seem like the best to me.<sup>566</sup>

While Kropotkin, Petrovskaya, and Volokh longed for long-lost prerevolutionary Russia, Goldstein praised the tastes and pleasures of Russia's Soviet successor.

Though concerned explicitly with Russian cuisine—*À la Russe* abounds with references to Russian culture, the “Russian people,” and so forth—Goldstein's perspective appears decidedly contemporary, embracing Soviet Russia, the USSR in general, and the good things one could find to eat there. Goldstein listed the Soviet republics, noting also that each housed an ethnic group “attempting to preserve its own culinary heritage in the face of ever-more

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<sup>565</sup> Theodore Shabad, “Moscow's Food: A Tantalizing Guide,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1974. Unfortunately, in our communications about her *Complete Russian Cookbook*, Visson was unwilling to discuss her work with her now ex-husband on *Moscow Gourmet*.

<sup>566</sup> Goldstein, *À la Russe*, viii.



centralized (and less efficient) food distribution.” Further, each republic provided a unique service to all the Soviet people. Ukraine served as the “bread basket,” Moldavia the “corn bushel.” The Baltics provided fish and Belarus the produce of “skillful butchers,” while the Caucasian and Central Asian republics brought forth all manner of “exotic” treats from spicy stews and fragrant pilafs to colorful dried fruits and aromatic teas.<sup>567</sup>

Goldstein’s friendly view of Soviet-era cooking stemmed in part from her experience as a scholar of Russian literature. Goldstein completed her PhD in Slavic Languages and Literatures at Stanford University in 1983, the same year she published *À la Russe* and, accordingly, she took many culinary cues from Russia’s *belles lettres*. In her cookbook’s introduction, Goldstein recalled being “struck by the number of references to food in obscure tales as well as in the classics.” She continued, “The opulence of the aristocratic table thrilled and enchanted me, while the descriptions of thick soups and chewy breads . . . invariably sent me running to the kitchen for a snack.”<sup>568</sup> Fictional meals, as well as real-life experience—cooking with her Belarusian grandmother and visiting Leningrad as a student—galvanized Goldstein’s interest, which she parlayed not only into popular cookbooks, but also into pioneering scholarly works on gender and food in fiction, post-Soviet Russian food culture, and the history of Russian cuisine.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 227-33.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>569</sup> In addition to those articles cited elsewhere in this dissertation, Goldstein, “The Play’s The Thing: Dining in the New Russia,” in *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, ed. Carolyn Korsmeyer (Oxford: Berg, 2005): 359-71; Goldstein, “Women under Siege: Leningrad, 1941-1942,” in *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*, ed. Barbara Haber and Arlene Avakian (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005): 143-60. *À la Russe* has been published in several editions. Renamed *A Taste of Russia*, it appeared in more than five editions during the 1980s and 1990s, and has most recently been released in a special thirtieth-anniversary edition. Goldstein is also the author of other cookbooks including *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993). Goldstein is the founding editor of *Gastronomica*, a quarterly publication that combines food studies scholarship with creative works and news of happenings in world food culture. On *Gastronomica*, see “About,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies*, <http://www.gastronomica.org/>.

Importantly, Goldstein's *À la Russe* presaged groundbreaking academic work on Russian and Soviet food culture. More than a decade before historians Sheila Fitzpatrick, Elena Osokina, Tamara Kondrat'eva, and others began discussing *blat* and hierarchies of consumption, Goldstein addressed these topics in her cookbook.<sup>570</sup> She notes that Soviet citizens must navigate a "hierarchy of privileged positions and special stores" in order to gather necessary goods. "The system," Goldstein explains, "is a complicated one, but the point is that some people are able to eat much better than others. And the reason is not simply a matter of money, as in Western society, but rather of influence or pull, or *blat*, as it is called in Russian." In the stores themselves, "most of the food exchange goes on *under* the counter, not across it. Even the vocabulary is expressive of this fact of Russian life. Most products cannot simply be 'bought' (*kupit*'), but they *can* be 'obtained' (*dostat*')." Goldstein concludes that, "while it is possible to eat well in the Soviet Union today, one must not forget the extremes of inconvenience, connivance and expense people are often driven to for items as basic as a few oranges, sausages or even a liter of milk."<sup>571</sup> While such statements carry an implicit critique of the Soviet system, they also express admiration for Soviet home cooks, particularly as, in these sometimes-grim conditions, they brought forth the delicious meals that Goldstein sought to share with her readers.

This approach to Russian food customs, which prioritized Soviet-era practice and the multiethnic aspect of Soviet cuisine, reached its apotheosis in *Please to the Table* (1990) a cookbook by Anya von Bremzen and John Welchman. Much like Norman's *Russian Cookbook* and the Papashvilys' *Russian Cooking*, *Please to the Table*'s cover proclaimed the book "Russian," while its contents proved vastly more diverse. Von Bremzen, who left Moscow for

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<sup>570</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 3 and 62-65; Osokina, *Ierarkhiia potrebleniia*; Osokina, *Za fasadom*; Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit*'.

<sup>571</sup> Goldstein, *À la Russe*, viii-ix.

Philadelphia as an adolescent in 1974, and Welchman, a literary scholar, included in their book dishes from Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic Republics, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. To gather these recipes, they conferred with Russian émigrés in the US and Europe, and also traveled to numerous locations, including Moscow, Leningrad, Armenia, and Georgia to observe food habits. They also relied on published sources, including *The Book of Delicious and Healthy Food*, Molokhovets's *A Gift to Young Housewives*, and Pokhlebkin's *National Cuisines of Our Peoples*. These resources allowed Von Bremzen and Welchman to emphasize the “almost giddy diversity of Soviet cooking” and to “redeem the sad reputation of the cuisines of the USSR.” As they insisted, “the essence of Soviet food will never be found in an uneven struggle with a greasy plate of chicken Kiev or an order of tough Stroganoff.”<sup>572</sup> In short, richness and diversity—not poor restaurant service and low quality meat—defined Russian cuisine.

*Please to the Table* lived up to this promise. Its pages feature plenty of classical Russian recipes. Fish soup *à la Souvoroff* (a fish soup with potatoes and tomatoes), charlotte russe and other Imperial-era specialties represent Franco-Russian grand cuisine. Some Tsarist treats even offer a bridge to the Soviet present. Von Bremzen and Welchman sing the praises of chicken croquettes Pozharskii, which originated at the Pozharskii Tavern in the small town of Torzhok. They claim that poet A. S. Pushkin “immortalized” the dish in a letter insisting that a friend try the succulent treats, at that time made of veal. Today, the authors note, since “Pushkin’s status in the Soviet Union tops even the veneration reserved for Shakespeare in Britain . . . the tavern in Torzhok is flooded by droves of Pushkin devotees.” Peasant fare had its day in the sun, as well, with recipes for cheap and hearty dishes including kasha and wild mushroom casserole and

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<sup>572</sup> Von Bremzen and Welchman, *Please to the Table*, xiii, xv.

classic Russian cabbage soup (*shchi*).<sup>573</sup>

Yet Russia appears as just one of several interconnected regions, and sometimes a bad neighbor at that. Von Bremzen and Welchman thus defend the reputation of Ukrainian fare, which had diminished as a result of Ukrainian dishes becoming standardized Russian or Soviet fare, writing,

In fact, a dish such as chicken Kiev, which is so strongly associated with the Ukraine, is not typically Ukrainian at all. It's actually an early twentieth-century invention designed to upgrade a 'provincial' food to Russo-Gallic gourmet standards. Likewise, the immensely popular Ukrainian borscht became a Soviet 'national' dish, constantly undergoing cunning revisions and local adaptations and losing in the process many of its essential characteristics such as fat and garlic. Both dishes nowadays supposedly represent Ukrainian fare in every city-center restaurant in the USSR (as well as in every 'Russian' restaurant in the West); but they actually offer a faint, even misleading, impression of their real roots in the Ukraine.<sup>574</sup>

Meanwhile, Von Bremzen and Welchman's recipes for Georgian *lobio* (a cold, tart salad of red beans) and *khachapuri* (cheese bread) include carefully crafted substitutions for ingredients unavailable to most American home cooks: sour *tkemali* plum sauce and salty *suluguni* cheese.<sup>575</sup> Von Bremzen and Welchman also depart significantly from most Russian-American cookbooks by including Soviet Jews in the ethnic panoply. They feature recipes for the chicken and rice pilaf of Central Asia's Bukharan Jews and an apple and noodle kugel (casserole) enjoyed by Lithuanian Jews. Von Bremzen and Welchman also serve up recipes for holiday dishes often ignored in Soviet publications, including the Passover seder's gefilte fish and *haroset* (a mixture of fruit and nuts).<sup>576</sup> Throughout, Von Bremzen and Welchman demonstrate a commitment to

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<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 80-82, 580-81, 228, 59-61, 387-88.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 456-57.

<sup>575</sup> In place of tkemali plum paste, the authors call for a sauce made from prunes, balsamic vinegar, and tamarind concentrate. Suluguni can be replaced with a combination of mozzarella, Bulgarian feta, and cottage cheeses, butter, egg, and salt. Ibid., 294-95 and 445.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 416 and 524-28. Also see Nakhimovsky, "Russian Jews Reclaim their Foodways."

understanding the Soviet Republics as distinctive entities, rather than as extensions of Russia.

The cultural and social environment in which Von Bremzen spent her formative years shaped the perspective on food she and Welchman developed in *Please to the Table*.<sup>577</sup> Rather than living in a milieu that yearned for yesteryear, Von Bremzen grew up poor in bustling late Soviet Moscow. While the young Von Bremzen pored over the descriptions of luxurious meals found in Giliarovskii's *Moscow and Muscovites*, the food she experienced firsthand was resolutely Soviet. Her *kulebiaka* boasted a stuffing of ground meat or cabbage, not salmon and jellied sturgeon spine; only in adulthood did she sample Guriev-style farina pudding (*gur'evskaia kasha*), laden with caramelized milk skins, nuts, and candied fruit. Von Bremzen claims to have gagged on the fancy caviar and expensive veal cutlets she faced when attending an elite kindergarten. Instead, she loved her mother's meager cuisine and adored helping trim rotten bits off of the purplish stew meat found in local shops.<sup>578</sup> A child of the late 1960s, Von Bremzen developed a taste for Soviet-style exotic. She gathered collectable sets of color recipe cards depicting the national cuisines of the Soviet Union.<sup>579</sup> Her grandmother took her to food markets, where Von Bremzen "would sometimes spend whole days . . . transfixed by a veritable babble of ethnic languages and the barter of exotic fruits and vegetables." Later, she hailed Pokhlebkin as "the closest the Soviet Union ever had to a culinary cult figure" and praising the "rare rhetorical and historical edge" he brought to "the art of Russian food writing."<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> Von Bremzen's co-author, John Welchman, does not receive equal attention here because the creative energies that went into *Please to the Table* were primarily Von Bremzen's. Welchman had mainly aided with research and editing—he found Von Bremzen's non-native English "wonky." Von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*, 243.

<sup>578</sup> Von Bremzen, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*, 15-18, 23-24, 169-71, 160-61.

<sup>579</sup> Anya von Bremzen to the author, 27 May 2012.

<sup>580</sup> Von Bremzen and Welchman, *Please to the Table*, xiii, xix.

This is not to suggest that this paradigm—what we might call the *détente* approach—offers a qualitatively better way of writing about Russian cuisine than that of writers like Volokh or Petrovskaya. Rather, it reveals that changes in both Soviet and American society fueled the diversification of works on Russian/Soviet cuisine published in the United States. Improved relations between the US and the USSR created opportunities for the study of Russian language and culture, which in turn transformed the production of food writing on Russia. Warmer diplomatic relations afforded more Americans the opportunity to see the USSR themselves, while those who remained at home felt more freedom to feed their interest in the “Reds.” Gorbachev’s entry onto the political scene renewed not only diplomatic and cultural exchange, but also popular fascination with the USSR. Meanwhile, an influx of *émigrés* who had experienced the relatively comfortable late Soviet period, allowed for a softening of tone. While some might remain deeply critical of the fate Russian traditions suffered after 1917, others, such as Von Bremzen, could celebrate the great culinary diversity of their vast homeland. “The cuisine presented under the heading “Russian” grew markedly more varied. By the time the USSR collapsed, American readers could choose from a wide array of Russian cookbooks, which represented the Imperial cuisine, the peasant favorites Russians still adored, tasty Soviet-era innovations, and the dishes of non-Russian peoples from across the Soviet Union.

### **Soviet Cuisine and “Russian Delight”**

Émigrés and Americans did not hold a monopoly on Russia-related food writing in the United States. Soviet experts also weighed in via English-language cooking texts produced originally by Soviet publishing houses, bringing Soviet-style cooking and ideas from the

mainstream of Soviet culinary thought to American readers. *Russian Cooking* (1974) represented the first of these attempts to introduce the Anglophone world to the Soviet gastronomic viewpoint. This book alleged to be a translation of the Soviet volume *Culinary Recipes* (Kulinarnye retsepty), a condensed version of the legendary *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food* (hereafter, *Delicious and Healthy*).<sup>581</sup> With more than two million copies in print by 1968, *Culinary Recipes* had found its way into countless Soviet homes.<sup>582</sup> It thus offered recipes readily available to Soviet citizens. Of course, back in the USSR, home cooks did not always have access to the means to produce these dishes—some had to use cramped, communal kitchens and many faced periodic shortages of certain goods. Yet the unnamed authors and editors of *Russian Cooking* would not let on that Soviet citizens dealt with such inconveniences and hardships.<sup>583</sup> Instead the text provides recipes for everything from fruit salad to roast suckling pig, thereby suggesting that contemporary Russians enjoyed a diverse and wholesome diet.<sup>584</sup>

*Russian Cooking* enriched the collection of dishes found in the original *Culinary Recipes* with selections from other Soviet works. N. I. Kovalev's *Russian Cuisine* (Russkaia kulinariia, 1972) provided a substantial amount of material. The vast majority of the recipes in the English text's chapter on pel'meni came from Kovalev's volume. Rather than offering only one recipe for pel'meni with a classic Siberian beef and pork filling, as in *Culinary Recipes*, *Russian*

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<sup>581</sup> The first edition of *Russian Cooking* provided the Russian title, *Kulinarnye retsepty*, on the reverse of the English-language title page. F. Siegel, trans. *Russian Cooking* (Moscow: Mir, 1974).

<sup>582</sup> *Kulinarnye retsepty iz Knigi o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (Moscow: Gostorgizdat, 1955). This book appeared in numerous reprints with large print runs. For example, between the years 1964 and 1968, more than a million and a half copies were printed. On publication and print run information, see note 77 above.

<sup>583</sup> The only individual listed as a contributor to the 1974 edition of *Russian Cooking* is F. Siegel, the book's translator. No additional information about the editors, authors, or translator is provided in the text. Archival sources held at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) offer little illumination. Most of the Mir Publishing files dating the 1970s were lost, and what remains sheds no light on the process of the book's creation.

<sup>584</sup> Siegel, *Russian Cooking*, 13 and 100.

*Cooking* includes Kovalev's more extensive selection of dumplings. One might choose a filling of cabbage and pork, mushrooms and rice, mushrooms and egg, fish and fatback, or—"Old Russian" style—heart, lung, and mushrooms.<sup>585</sup> In fact, *Russian Cooking* drew on Kovalev for more than his recipes, sometimes repeating explanatory portions of his text almost word-for-word. The introduction to the Soups chapter in *Russian Cooking* thus began,

It is doubtful whether any kitchen in the world can claim a variety of soups as large as that known in Russian cooking. Through the centuries the assortment of traditional Russian soups has undergone little change and in the dinner menu the term 'first course' still means soup. The word itself appeared in the Russian vocabulary in the time of Peter the Great when it was used in reference to foreign liquid dishes. Russian dishes of this type were called *pokhlebka*.<sup>586</sup>

By comparison, Kovalev's text states,

Not one of the cuisines of any of the peoples of the world has such a rich assortment of soups [*pervoe bliudo*] as Russian [cuisine]. . . . The repertoire of Russian soups developed long ago and has been preserved for centuries, undergoing little change. Soups retain their place in the dinner menu, vested in the term 'first course.' . . . Initially Russian cuisine's liquid dishes were called *pokhlebki*. The word 'soup' [*sup*] appeared only in the age of Peter I. At first that word referred to foreign liquid dishes, but later it extended to national *pokhlebki*.<sup>587</sup>

Clearly, this represents something more than a simple coincidence.

Kovalev's *Russian Cuisine* furnished the creators of *Russian Cooking* with a means of both expanding the book's array of recipes and providing an argument for historical continuity across the divide of 1917. Kovalev's dumpling recipes, as noted above, offer much greater variety than the Russian-language version of *Culinary Recipes*, which recommends as first order of battle that the reader simply purchase the frozen pel'meni produced by the Soviet food

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid., 113-115.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>587</sup> Kovalev, *Russkaia kulinariia*, 47. This remained true of the 1978 reprint of *Russian Cooking*, as well. See, for example, Ibid., 3 and A. Krashenennikova, ed., *Russian Cooking*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Mir, 1978), 7. In the second edition, Siegel is no longer listed as translator, but the text is largely unchanged from the first edition.



industry.<sup>588</sup> Eschewing these suggestions, *Russian Cooking* tacitly acknowledges the fact that frozen pel'meni appeared in few stores outside of the Soviet Union. Appropriating Kovalev's explanatory text, *Russian Cooking* also includes historical background that the original *Culinary Recipes* lacked. Lists of ingredients and terse instructions could not evoke images of a family cheerfully gathered around a bubbling samovar, sharing their news, and displaying their legendary Russian hospitality to anyone who might knock on the door.<sup>589</sup> Kovalev's text does just this and its incorporation into *Russian Cooking* made the cuisine found in the latter volume seem a part of longstanding cultural traditions. So, while émigré cookbook authors fretted about cultural loss, the authors of *Russian Cooking* used Kovalev's words to argue that culinary traditions thrived in contemporary Russia.

*Russian Cooking* delivers not only dishes commonly associated with Russian cuisine—mushrooms in sour cream, beef with kasha—but also those that Russians had adopted from other peoples. For example, the authors borrow from A. S. Piruzian's *Armenian Cuisine* (1960) recipes for *mantapur* (Armenian-style meat-filled dumplings) and Ararat plov (rice pilaf with fruits and almonds).<sup>590</sup> *Russian Cooking* neither plays up ethnic diversity nor overlooks the myriad influences that had enriched Russian cuisine over the centuries. The first (1974) edition begins by stating, "Russian cookery today has come to include the favorite recipes of other nationalities inhabiting the USSR." However, all additional information focuses on Slavic, mainly Russian, customs. The second (1978) edition concentrates more exclusively on Russian cuisine, even

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<sup>588</sup> *Kulinarnye retsepty*, 160 and 60.

<sup>589</sup> The authors of *Russian Cooking* state, "Around the tea table family affairs were settled, opinions aired, trade negotiations carried on and contracts concluded. Thus, asking one to sit down to tea became a traditional sign of hospitality." Siegel, *Russian Cooking*, 167. This reads as a translation of Kovalev's statement, "За чаем решались семейные дела, происходил обмен мнениями, заключались деловые договоры. До сих пор угощение чаем считается символом гостеприимства." Kovalev, *Russkaia kulinariia*, 196.

<sup>590</sup> *Russian Cooking*, 116, 104; Piruzian, *Armianskaia kulinariia*, 54-55, 133.

playing down Kovalev's nods to the other cultures of the Soviet Union, by cutting from his text references to Georgian and Uzbek cuisines. The inclusion of such dishes as *chikhirtma* (Georgian mutton soup) and *chebureki* (Caucasian fried meat pies) tells the reader more about the continual expansion and diversification of *Russian* cuisine than about the multinational character of a *Soviet* cuisine made up of numerous national foodways.<sup>591</sup>

*Russian Cooking* did not prove the most useful text for American readers. The letters that Mir Publishing, which specialized in translated works for an international audience, received regarding this volume highlight some of the challenges that American home cooks encountered in trying out *Russian Cooking*. A. Stark of Wisconsin, who received the book as a gift from his Soviet pen pal, called it "excellent," but complained that four of the illustrations did not include references to pages or recipes, making it difficult to identify or reproduce these dishes.<sup>592</sup>

Californian Grace Kirschenbaum noted that some of the words proved unfamiliar, even though she had studied the Russian language.<sup>593</sup> A resident of Cortland, Illinois, requested a recipe for black bread—not included in *Russian Cooking*—from the Mir editors, who responded only to say that they could offer no guidance.<sup>594</sup> Mr. R. Bruce Draper of Nashville, Tennessee, brought up a more serious problem—the fact that *Russian Cooking* called for bottled sauces produced by the Soviet food industry.<sup>595</sup> Indeed, this presented the reader with a mystery, as the book described these sauces in the barest terms: "Yuzhny, Ostry, Lyubitelsky and Kubansky sauces are commercial sauces obtainable in the USSR. Yuzhny is spicy; Ostry is tart and spicy;

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<sup>591</sup> Siegel, *Russian Cooking*, 7, 41, 115.

<sup>592</sup> GARF, f. R-9614, op. 1, d. 694, l. 264.

<sup>593</sup> GARF, f. R-9614, op. 1, d. 698, l. 174.

<sup>594</sup> GARF, f. R-9614, op. 1, d. 702, l. 10-11.

<sup>595</sup> GARF, f. R-9614, op. 1, d. 696, ll. 63-64.

Lyubitelsky is sweet and spicy; Kubansky is sweet-sour.”<sup>596</sup> The publishers responded to Draper simply by suggesting he try to find a Russian-language cookbook called *Sauces and Condiments* (Sousy i prianosti).<sup>597</sup> They could provide no suggestions on replacements. The introduction to the 1978 edition claimed to have taken “into consideration all the remarks and suggestions made by our readers,” yet the revised text showed few changes. The unhelpful explanation of Soviet-made sauces remained intact, as did translation failures, such as the use of the Georgian (and commonly used in Russian) word *kindza* in place of the English cilantro or coriander.<sup>598</sup>

A decade after the first appearance of *Russian Cooking*, the English-speaking world greeted another Soviet cookbook, *Russian Delight* (1984), a translation of Pokhlebkin’s *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* (1978).<sup>599</sup> Published by London-based Pan Books, this text eventually made its way to some American readers, ending up in a handful of US libraries, although it received no attention in the American press. *Russian Delight* covered most of the cuisines found in the original text: Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Moldavian, Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, Tajik, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian. Translator Theresa Prout eliminated two chapters on regional cuisines, which contained few or no recipes. The reader would have to look elsewhere for information on Jewish, Karelian, Yakut, and North Caucasian cuisines. This largely conformed to the other choices Prout made in revising the work, as she trimmed the lengthy introduction and historical essays, but retained

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<sup>596</sup> Siegel, *Russian Cooking*, 182.

<sup>597</sup> GARF, f. R-9614, op. 1, d. 696, l. 63.

<sup>598</sup> Krashenennikova, *Russian Cuisine*, 7, 15.

<sup>599</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, *Russian Delight: A Cookbook of the Soviet Peoples*, trans. Theresa Prout (London: Pan Books, 1984).

most of the recipes.<sup>600</sup> Gone were Pokhlebkin's kind words for the brotherhood of the Soviet peoples, his suggestions that national cultures "flowered" under communism.<sup>601</sup> In their place, Prout provided her own interpretation, which focused on the ethnic and regional diversity of the Soviet Union and lamented the homogenization of Soviet culture. In her words,

The Soviet government practices a policy of 'Russification,' No Soviet national cuisine in the last quarter of the twentieth century can have escaped the influence of this conscious dispersal of Russian and Slavic populations and culture among the other nationalities. . . . Each republic or autonomous region has within it members of other national groups. . . . Traditional cooking has, therefore, lost some of its identity.<sup>602</sup>

Prout's worry about Russification more closely mirrored the concerns of Western observers than it did the original thrust of Pokhlebkin's text. The Papashvilys had addressed Russification when speaking specifically about Lithuanian cooking, as noted above. Pokhlebkin himself acknowledged that ethnic and cultural mixing had altered all of these cuisines, but he did not speak of Russification.<sup>603</sup> This would probably have gone over poorly with publishing house officials, appearing as a criticism of the development of national cultures under socialism, an idea vital to Brezhnev-era nationalities rhetoric.<sup>604</sup> As demonstrated in chapter 5, even after the Soviet collapse, Pokhlebkin avoided this topic. He turned instead to defending Russian cuisine from international influence—especially from the encroachment of "cosmopolitan" American "trash" food. Prout's intervention thus brought *Russian Delight* into closer alignment with Western writing on Russian cuisine than with Mir's *Russian Cooking*.

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<sup>600</sup> Linguist Ronald Feldstein lamented Prout's changes, stating that she had "removed most of the interesting historical detail" from Pokhlebkin's original work. Feldstein, "Introduction to William Pokhlebkin."

<sup>601</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 3.

<sup>602</sup> Theresa Prout, translator's note in *Russian Delight*, viii.

<sup>603</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 12, 275.

<sup>604</sup> See chapter 2.

Through their treatment of food and nationality, these texts ushered English-speaking readers into the ideological and culinary worlds of the USSR. *Russian Cooking* suggested that Russian culture and cuisine held the privileged position in the Soviet Union. Dishes from across the USSR appeared on its pages, particularly popular dishes from the Caucasus and Central Asia, including zesty Georgian stews and lush Armenian and Uzbek pilafs. Yet the banner of Russian cuisine hung over these recipes, which appeared as dishes prepared and enjoyed in Russia by Russians. The book's 1974 introduction hinted that Russians sometimes claimed these dishes for their own cuisine outright, stating, "Favorite Georgian, Armenian, Kazakh, Uzbek and Ukrainian dishes have won such wide popularity that their origin is sometimes disputed." These foods took a backseat to "traditional Russian" fare, which dominated the volume.<sup>605</sup>

*Russian Delight* delivered the Brezhnev-era vision of the USSR as an edible empire, with numerous distinctive culinary cultures. Russians and other Slavic peoples hold pride of place, appearing first and taking up the greatest number of pages, but other groups do receive extensive and dedicated attention. Instead of scattering a few non-Russian dishes throughout the text, *Russian Delight* dedicates individual chapters to each nationality and describes the ingredients, cooking vessels, and preparation methods most important to each cuisine. Prioritizing diversity, this text argues that the Soviet Union overflowed with delicious dishes made from its abundant crops and livestock. Georgia boasted "hot summers," "mild winters," and "fertile valleys," while Lithuania's forests provided game meats, fresh berries, and wild honey.<sup>606</sup> However, the translator undermined that image to an extent, noting the supply problems that persisted throughout the USSR. Prout thus wrote, "Meat is hard to get in the big cities, very expensive and

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<sup>605</sup> Siegel, *Russian Cooking*, 7.

<sup>606</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Russian Delight*, 120 and 213.

of poor quality,” going on to describe “tough” Soviet chickens, which had “very little meat on them.” Yet she also described the great variety of dairy products available to Soviet consumers, an array that outstripped what many a British or American reader could then find.<sup>607</sup>

To an extent, these visions of food and nationality aligned with one another. Both put Russians and other Slavs in first place. Yet they diverged meaningfully in their handling of other peoples and their cuisines, with *Russian Cooking* allowing Russian cuisine to consume dishes from across the USSR, while *Russian Delight* created a gastronomic panorama. Taken together, these texts could tell English-speakers a great deal about Soviet food discourse, as they reflected the overlapping visions of Soviet cuisine that predominated in the 1970s and 1980s. One imagined a cosmopolitan, pan-Soviet cuisine, rooted primarily in Slavic customs, but encompassing certain dishes and raw ingredients from throughout the Soviet space. The other divided the USSR up into culinary zones that aligned tidily with the country’s political map.

Soviet-made cookbooks did not provide the sole means for Soviet recipes and culinary ideas to make their way into American kitchens. Russian-American cookbooks—even some by authors who ostensibly repudiated all things Soviet—also served as a device for communicating Soviet gastronomic thought to American home cooks. Some authors expressed an open willingness to draw on Soviet culinary culture. In preparing *Nothing Beets Borscht*, a small-run 1974 cookbook, author Jane Blanksteen gathered a number of her recipes from Soviet sources to which she had access while visiting Leningrad as a Yale undergraduate. For instance, her recipe for carrot patties (*kotlety*) comes straight from *Delicious and Healthy*.<sup>608</sup> Similarly, discussing how she acquired her recipe for *solianka*—a tart and salty meat soup—Blanksteen explained

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<sup>607</sup> Prout, translator’s note in *Russian Delight*, ix-x.

<sup>608</sup> Blanksteen, *Nothing Beets Borscht*, 102;

that, when visiting extended family in Leningrad, they gave her “as a parting gift . . . a little set of recipe cards” which included a “very good” version of this dish.<sup>609</sup> Further, Soviet public dining enlightened her to the joys of *syrniki* (farmer’s cheese patties), which she had purchased at Kulinariia stores, and *krupenik* (buckwheat cakes), the recipe for which she acquired from the Intourist Restaurant in Moscow.<sup>610</sup> Von Bremzen and Welchman also acknowledged their debt to Soviet food expertise. In addition to drawing on Pokhlebkin’s “outstanding” *National Cuisines of Our Peoples*, the pair used *Delicious and Healthy*. This text “furnishes a serviceable account of the traditional Russian staples, and also includes a few ethnic recipes.” Still, Von Bremzen and Welchman aimed for an improvement over the standards of Soviet cooking advice, even if they drew some influence from it. Diverging from Soviet practice, *Please to the Table* would not put forth “pseudo-scientific” information or rely on “the habits of measuring ‘by the eye,’ seasoning ‘to taste,’ and pouring out liquids ‘by the knuckle,” which confounded their early efforts to pin down recipes.<sup>611</sup>

Yet Soviet influences had long been creeping into American works on Russian cuisine, via works by émigrés who claimed to embrace the “Russian” while rejecting the “Soviet.” Kyra Petrovskaya fed America a healthy dose of Soviet-style cooking, albeit sneakily. Through her personal anecdotes, Petrovskaya attempted to set herself and Russian national character in general apart from the government and culture then reigning in Soviet Russia. Yet, in these very passages, Petrovskaya revealed that she had occupied a privileged position in Soviet society. For

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<sup>609</sup> Blanksteen, *Nothing Beets Borscht*, 102, 46-47; *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (1952), 208. In the 1970s, Planeta (Planet) Publishing created millions of copies of recipe card sets such as the collection mentioned by Blanksteen. Each set was dedicated to one of the cuisines of the Soviet peoples.

<sup>610</sup> Blanksteen, *Nothing Beets Borscht*, 102, 26.

<sup>611</sup> Von Bremzen and Welchman, *Please to the Table*, xx-xxi.

instance, she offered her experience at a hated summer youth camp as evidence of the state's unfairness, while also revealing that she had enjoyed training in music and dance. She claims the children and teens "were ordered to work in the fields barefoot, bare-headed, without any tools whatsoever." Why did they not rebel? Because, in Petrovskaya's words, "we were taught to obey and—we obeyed."<sup>612</sup> Only the traditionally Russian cabbage soup served at the end of the day made up for the damage that she and her urban comrades suffered in the fields. "Exhausted, with cut feed and bleeding hands which prevented us from playing the piano or violin or from dancing 'en pointes' for some time, we were rewarded somewhat by this terrific soup, which we consumed in enormous quantities."<sup>613</sup>

Elsewhere, Petrovskaya praised herself for overcoming "disgust" at the sight of peasants eating from a communal pot and therefore being able to enjoy their delicious borshch with them. Being "city-bred," only her Slavic nature (any "true Slav" loved borshch) allowed her to engage in this unsanitary practice.<sup>614</sup> In spite of her grandparents being "former people," the young Petrovskaya felt the perks of belonging to an elite social stratum. Born just before the Revolution, young Kyra went to school during the Stalin years, attending the exclusive Leningrad Academic Capella. She studied music, theater, and foreign languages and later performed with the Moscow Satire Theater. She even carried on a friendship for a time with Stalin's son, Vasilii.<sup>615</sup> After serving in the Second World War, Petrovskaya moved in

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<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>613</sup> Petrovskaya, *Kyra's Secrets*, 36.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>615</sup> Petrovskaya mentions this in passing in *Kyra's Secrets*, 99. A more lengthy description of their friendship appears in her memoir: Wayne, *Kyra*, 292-305, 315-18. In Petrovskaya's telling, she never truly liked Vasilii Stalin, but maintained his acquaintance because she feared offending him and believed that he would be a useful connection. On the latter point, she turned out to be correct, as Vasilii helped her and her American boyfriend gain marriage permissions and hold their wedding in a church. Ibid., 331-36.



diplomatic circles. In 1946, she married her American diplomat in “a big church wedding,” before leaving the USSR for good.<sup>616</sup>

Petrovskaya’s cookbook itself had deeper roots in the Soviet system than she would have liked to admit. Many of Petrovskaya’s recipes come directly from *Delicious and Healthy*. Her very first entry, an appetizer of cold herring, offers the same instructions for preparing the fish as found in that infamous text. Petrovskaya wrote, “If the herring is too salty . . . you must soak it for a couple of hours in plain water or a weak solution of tea. If you prefer to clean the herring first, then you can soak the fillets in cold milk. It will give them some extra tenderness.”<sup>617</sup>

*Delicious and Healthy* stated, “Before preparing the herring, if it is very salty, it must be soaked in water or in a weak solution of tea for three to four hours. Herring cleaned of their skin and bones (fillets) may be soaked in cold milk: this gives the herring a tender flavor.”<sup>618</sup>

Striking parallels in ingredients, preparation, and instruction emerge in each of Petrovskaya’s chapters. She borrowed from *Delicious and Healthy* recipes for sauces and salads, as well as for dishes including marinated fish, lamb with fresh green beans, carrot *kotlety* (patties), and rum baba. Some of these additions give *Kyra’s Secrets* a Soviet flair. Canned corn with baked apples and croutons represents a dish that would have been utterly alien on prerevolutionary dining tables, as corn had remained a rarity in Russia until the Stalin era.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> “About the Author,” Kyra Petrovskaya Wayne, <http://www.kyrapetrovskayawayne.com/index.html>.

<sup>617</sup> Petrovskaya, *Kyra’s Secrets*, 12.

<sup>618</sup> *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (1952), 54.

<sup>619</sup> Petrovskaya, *Kyra’s Secrets*, 48-50, 79-80, 118, 170-72, 115-116. Throughout the Soviet period, few people actually cooked with corn, a reality that the Khrushchev leadership attempted to change during the Corn Campaign of the late 1950s and early 1960s. According to Pokhlebkin, Khrushchev-era efforts to encourage corn cookery largely failed and Russians continued to ignore corn or make unappealing dishes with it until the 1990s. Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 295-96. Natalia B. Lebina similarly notes that the state tried to promote corn in part by making it into everything from cereals to candies to wine, yet corn remained unpopular. Lebina, “Plius destalinizatsiia vsei edy.”

Even Petrovskaya's recipes for Easter cake (kulich or "koolich")—a symbol of those traditions she felt to be threatened by Soviet power—adhere closely to those found in *Delicious and Healthy*.<sup>620</sup> One of Kyra's biggest secrets was the fact that she provided her American readers with recipes approved and promoted by the Stalin regime. After all *Delicious and Healthy* had enjoyed Stalin's personal support as the pet project of Anastas Mikoyan, a close colleague of Stalin's and head of the food industry in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>621</sup>

In spite of her affection for Imperial customs, Anne Volokh's Soviet roots also showed. Importantly, she included in *The Art of Russian Cuisine* such dishes as navy-style macaroni (boiled noodles with onion and ground beef), a Soviet-era cafeteria staple that some Russians today consider a national culinary disgrace.<sup>622</sup> Still, she did retain an ironic stance while recommending dishes that rose to prominence after 1917. Of "cabbage schnitzels" (or cabbage *kotlety*), Volokh writes, "Russians cannot hear the words *cabbage schnitzel* without a slightly contemptuous smile at the social pretensions of cabbage. The elevation of the cabbage patty to the rank of a schnitzel took place in the 1930s as part of a 'positive approach' to the chronic shortage of meat." She illustrates her point by recalling a scene in Il'f and Petrov's comic novel *The Twelve Chairs*, in which one character hysterically declares that Lev Tolstoy could not have

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However, there were several regions of the USSR that had long cultivated and cooked with corn. Ukrainians and Moldavians had grown corn since the eighteenth century; the latter commonly made a polenta-like cornmeal mush called *mamalyga*. Georgians had also long used cornmeal, often to make the small, savory loaves known as *mchadi*. Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 64, 102, 120.

<sup>620</sup> Petrovskaya, *Kyra's Secrets*, 168-70; *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (1952), 287-88.

<sup>621</sup> On Mikoyan, Stalin, and *The Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*, see Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*; Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik."

<sup>622</sup> Volokh and Manus, *Art of Russian Cuisine*, 406. In an obituary for V. V. Pokhlebkin, renowned chef Aleksei Zimin used "rancid *shchi* and Navy-style macaroni" as examples of dishes that food-loving Russians would not admit the existence of to foreigners. Zimin, "Kul'tura Pokhlebkina," *Ekspert*, 24 April 2000. In 2007, writer Igor Klekh similarly cited *makarony po-flotski* as evidence of the limitations of "Soviet know-how" in the kitchen. The relevant portion of Klekh's *Kniga edy* was published in *Nezavisimaia gazeta*: Klekh, "Skazhi mne, chto ty esh', i ia skazhu tebe, kto ty," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 11 October 2007.

written his great works if he had not broken momentarily with his vegetarianism. Volokh concludes, “all of this notwithstanding, the cabbage patties are very good” either as a side or a main course.<sup>623</sup> Still, she does not go so far as to provide the standard recipe found in *Delicious and Healthy*. That work instructs the reader to stew the cabbage in milk, combine it with farina and egg yolks, and batter it with egg whites and crumbled bread rusks.<sup>624</sup> Volokh instead poaches her cabbage in rich stock and then coats the cabbage with egg and fine bread crumbs before pan-frying or, alternatively, baking the patties in sour cream. Finally, Volokh embraces certain Caucasian dishes, long known in Russia but exceptionally popular in the Soviet era, including Georgian chicken *chakhokhbili* (a piquant chicken-and-tomato stew) and Armenian-style lamb kebabs.<sup>625</sup> In spite of her “elegant,” detached upbringing and preoccupation with prerevolutionary foodways, Volokh did not leave the USSR untouched by Soviet culture.

## Conclusion

“If there is truth to the old cliché about the way to a man’s heart being through his stomach,” Koehler mused in 1974, “perhaps there is even more validity to the thought that through understanding the customs and cuisine of a people one also comes to understand the people themselves.”<sup>626</sup> Koehler had not just any people in mind, but Russians. Voicing the belief that food provides the ultimate medium for crosscultural understanding, Koehler echoes Kropotkin’s dream of using food to “win American friends” for Russians.<sup>627</sup> Goldstein similarly

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<sup>623</sup> Volokh and Manus, *Art of Russian Cuisine*, 367.

<sup>624</sup> *Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche* (1952), 208.

<sup>625</sup> Volokh and Manus, *Art of Russian Cuisine*, 367-68, 319-20, 293.

<sup>626</sup> Koehler, *Recipes from the Russians of San Francisco*, 114.

<sup>627</sup> Kropotkin, *How to Cook and Eat in Russian*, v.

reflected in the preface to the second edition of *À la Russe* (retitled *A Taste of Russia*, 1999) that she had originally hoped to “help Americans move beyond sword-rattling rhetoric to discover Russia’s wonderful culture through its food.”<sup>628</sup> Each of the cookbooks discussed here aimed to somehow bring to Americans a greater understanding of Russians, their culture, and—on rare occasions—their way of coexisting with other peoples in the USSR.

Russian-American cookbooks may even have succeeded to some extent in perpetuating friendly feelings toward Russians. Throughout the postwar period, these cookbooks received positive press attention. In the mid-1940s, Frolov’s “Katish” stories charmed *Gourmet* readers, who clamored for a collected volume. H. T. Summers of Long Island enthused, “this Katish gal now—well she has really moved right into our hearts, bag and baggage.”<sup>629</sup> Journalists eagerly devoured Kropotkin’s *How to Cook and Eat in Russian*, praising her ability to “liven the dulllest of dinner tables” and the fact that “even the rankest amateur” could replicate her recipes.<sup>630</sup> The *New York Times* carried on a veritable love affair with Kropotkin, reprinting numerous of her recipes between 1953 and 1963.<sup>631</sup> Over the following years, Norman’s *Russian Cookbook*, Visson’s *Complete Russian Cookbook*, and Von Bremzen and Welchman’s *Please to the Table*,

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<sup>628</sup> Darra Goldstein, *A Taste of Russia* (Montpelier, VT: Russian Life Books, 1999), v.

<sup>629</sup> “Sugar and Spice,” *Gourmet*, August 1945, 2; “Sugar and Spice,” *Gourmet*, September 1945, 2.

<sup>630</sup> Charlotte Adams, “Breaded Pork Chops... Russian Style,” *Washington Post*, 13 April 1947; Morrison Wood, “You’ll be Singing the Song of the Volga Boatmen After You Try These Dishes,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 March 1947.

<sup>631</sup> Jane Nickerson, “Cake for Russian Easter,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1953; “Russian Christmas Today Turns Attention to Two Kasha, Liver Recipes,” *New York Times*, 7 January 1954; Jane Nickerson, “Okroshka, a Favorite of Russian Cuisine, is Soup for Summer,” *New York Times*, 21 July 1954; “Pre-Revolution Dishes Still Served in Russia,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1959; Craig Claiborne, “An Easter Triumph,” *New York Times*, 15 April 1962; Craig Claiborne, “Beef, Translated from the Russian,” *New York Times*, 1 September 1963. Claiborne, the *New York Times*’s inestimable food critic, provided an introduction for the book’s second edition in 1964, revealing that he had relied on Kropotkin as his primary source on Russian cuisine for years. See Craig Claiborne, Introduction to *Best of Russian Cooking* by Kropotkin.

all received considerable praise. Reviewers described Norman as a “most erudite cookbook writer,” who took a “culinary tack little known” in America and provided “unusual recipes.”<sup>632</sup> *Vogue*’s editor called Visson’s work a “unique and wonderful document.”<sup>633</sup> Other notices similarly homed in on the romantic cachet surrounding these one-time refugees, while reprinting recipes for veal cutlets or cherry jam cookies.<sup>634</sup> *Please to the Table*, meanwhile, won a coveted James Beard Award in 1991.<sup>635</sup>

Cookbooks thus served as something of an antidote to Americans’ negative impressions of Russians, if not of the Soviet Union more generally. From the 1940s through the late 1980s, most Americans, as sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh and his colleagues assert, not only “saw the Soviet Union as an oppressive regime” but also proved “critical of Russians as people.”<sup>636</sup> Sentiments toward the USSR shifted over the decades, with polls showing a general decline in the number of respondents who had a wholly negative impression of the Soviet Union, most notably during the years of détente. Still, those with “favorable” views of the US’s archrival remained a relatively small minority of less than 20 percent.<sup>637</sup> A segment of America became possessed by genuine Russophobia, seeing “the Russkies” as “the unlucky outcasts of Western

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<sup>632</sup> Poppy Cannon, “Unusual Russian Dishes,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 7 November 1967; Marian Manners, “Give the Cook a Book,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 December 1967.

<sup>633</sup> This passage appeared in the editor’s introduction to an excerpt from *Complete Russian Cookbook* printed in *Vogue* magazine. Lynn Visson, “A Tempting, Rich Sampling of Treasured Russian Recipes,” *Vogue*, January 1983, 105, 108.

<sup>634</sup> Roy Andreies de Groot, “Classic Veal Cutlets Pozharski Bring Back the Best of Czarist Russian Cuisine,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 January 1983; Florence Fabricant, “Mixing Memoirs with Lore of Cooking,” *New York Times*, 19 October 1983. Visson remembers her book being “well received.” Visson to the author, 23 April 2014.

<sup>635</sup> “Dishing Up Two Views of the Year’s Best Cookbooks,” *Washington Post*, 8 May 1991.

<sup>636</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, Eric Shiraev, and Eero Carroll, *The Soviet Union: Internal and External Perspectives on Soviet Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 77.

<sup>637</sup> Tom W. Smith, “The Polls: American Attitudes Toward the Soviet Union and Communism,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47, 2 (Summer 1983): 280.

civilization: strong and vicious yet obedient and loyal to their diabolic Communist regime.”

Others had mixed feelings about Russia and Russians, often expressing interest, but evincing little knowledge of or engagement with the topic.<sup>638</sup> Still other Americans longed for the “liberation” of the Russians and other peoples living under the yoke of Communist despots.<sup>639</sup>

Cookbook authors wrote largely for these latter two groups. From the 1920s through the 1940s, these texts glamorized the Imperial past, a vanished and exotic “other” that invited Americans to look more favorably on Russians and their culture. Attempts to set the Russian people apart from the Soviet state persisted into the second half of the twentieth century. Still, it proved increasingly difficult to ignore Soviet Russia. Some Russian-American cookbooks therefore served as vehicles for implicit and explicit criticisms of Soviet power and its effects. Frolov and Koehler’s exclusive focus on Russian immigrants gave the impression that Russia itself might be a thing of the past. Visson and Volokh treated Russian cuisine as a displaced person, arguing that this cuisine had to be nurtured in exile, as it could not go on living in its homeland. The Papashvilys also expressed anxiety about the fate of Russian traditions, drowning in multiethnic sea of Soviet food culture. Petrovskaya used her cookbook to condemn the injustices of Soviet life.

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<sup>638</sup> Shlapentokh, Shiraev, and Carroll, *Soviet Union*, 111, 81-85.

<sup>639</sup> According to Fogelson, the American habit of demonizing the “despotic,” “medieval,” or “tyrannical” governments of Russia can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, it became popular among US policy makers, social activists, and the commentariat to vilify the tsarist regime and its various modes of oppression, especially the Siberian exile system. George Kennan’s *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891) popularized a bifurcated vision of Russia, in which one loathed the political system, but separated it from those who suffered under or fought against it. This perception persisted throughout much of the twentieth century. Coupled with the notion that America had a special role in bringing other parts of the world into line with its own values, this idea fueled numerous campaigns to “free” or “liberate” Russia between the 1890s and the 1990s. Such efforts went into abeyance for a time after Stalin’s death, but were reinvigorated in the mid-1970s in part as a result of a crisis of American confidence that demanded the reestablishment of a special moral and political mission for the US. David S. Fogelson, *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire”: The Crusade for a “Free Russia” since 1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Also see Donald E. Davis and Eugene P. Trani, *Distorted Mirrors: Americans and Their Relations with Russia and China in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 13-175.

Still, American writings on Russian cuisine could not remain sealed off from Soviet-era food culture. Readers of *Russian Cooking* came into contact with one of the dominant official conceptions of Soviet cuisine as a new, expanded version of Russian cuisine, which had absorbed dishes from across the USSR. Meanwhile, *Russian Delight* treated Soviet cuisine as a mosaic of ethnic customs. Offering an array of recipes available also to Soviet home cooks, these works attempted—rather dishonestly—to tell English-speaking readers that Soviet citizens enjoyed rich and varied diets. They thus competed with those Russian-American cookbooks that treated the Soviet Union as a gastronomic wasteland. Yet even works by authors who complained bitterly of Soviet life sometimes included recipes that represented Soviet-era cooking. Petrovskaya and Volokh, committed to anti-Soviet personae, cribbed recipes from Soviet cookbooks and retained affection for certain characteristically Soviet dishes.

By the late 1960s, Soviet Russia had gained some legitimacy in the eyes of American food writers and possibly home cooks as well. Increased opportunities for travel, study abroad, and contact with Soviet citizens helped bring this about, in no small part by providing food writers with direct experience of Soviet cookery. It would be difficult to draw concrete causal connections between the broader turn-about in international relations and culinary developments in the US. Yet it does appear that the relatively warm climate of the period encompassing *détente* and the years immediately preceding it occasioned a marked change in how American food writers approached Russian—and Soviet—cuisine. Rather than waxing nostalgically about prerevolutionary splendor or sidestepping contemporary Russia altogether, authors including Norman and the Papashvilys celebrated the USSR's culinary gems and reveled in its ethnic diversity. Even while ostensibly maintaining a narrow focus on Russian cuisine, Goldstein also had kind words for the Russian and non-Russian foods of the Soviet Union. Although they

acknowledged endemic problems with food supply and quality in Soviet cities, these authors did not regard these issues as evidence that Russia cuisine had died or was dying. Most notably, Von Bremzen and Welchman drew on their experiences in the USSR to insist not only that Von Bremzen's homeland offered some truly exceptional gastronomic experiences, but also to hint that Soviet cuisine added up to something richer and more wonderful than Russian cuisine alone.

All postwar Russian-American cookbooks posed similar questions, while positing very different answers, about the relationship between Russia and the Soviet Union, and the fate of Russian traditions in the late twentieth century. Those who insinuated that Soviet power threatened Russian cuisine with extinction Russia positioned themselves in opposition to the Soviet Union. Cartographically speaking, Russia might be part of Soviet Union, but Russia's heart could not continue to beat forever in that iron cage. In this view, Russia now existed wherever Russians lived, wherever they kept their historical traditions alive. Other authors treated Soviet Russia as the successor to prerevolutionary Russia. In texts that took a multicultural perspective, Old Russian dishes could commingle with Soviet-era favorites and the specialties of non-Russian peoples. This perspective treated Russia as just one part of a larger empire.

This "détente approach" to Soviet cuisine never fully dominated American discourse on Russian cookery. After all, Volokh's *Art of Russian Cuisine*, which rang the death knell for Russian cuisine in Russia, appeared the same year as Goldstein's *À la Russe*, which praised cookery in Russia past and present. Yet the rise of a more forgiving view of Soviet-era culinary culture demonstrates the extent to which Soviet influence penetrated discourse on Russian food in the United States between 1945 and 1991. Not only did it become commonplace for cookbook authors to crib recipes from Soviet cookbooks, but it became wholly acceptable to treat



“Russian” cuisine much as late Soviet cookbook authors treated “Soviet” cuisine: as a set of diverse ethnic cuisines, each belonging to a homeland within the USSR, which enriched one another while remaining distinct.

Finally, the fact that this and other perspectives on Russian food culture continued to compete throughout this period points to the fundamentally political nature of food discourse. In the United States, one could not talk about Russian cuisine without engaging on some level with Russia’s complicated twentieth century. In the end, this implies that Princess Kropotkin’s wish for Russian food to be an apolitical topic never came true. But she may have been happy to know that, in the decades after she published her own cookbook, Russians and Americans alike continued to use food writing as a tool for smoothing relations between American home cooks and “Mr. and Mrs. Russia.”

## CHAPTER 5

### V.V. POKHLEBKIN AND LATE SOVIET GASTRONOMIC HISTORICISM, 1968-88

In 1968, Vil'iam Vasil'evich Pokhlebkin introduced himself as a culinary expert by informing the Soviet people, a nation of tea-drinkers, that they did not know how to make a simple cup of tea. Although tea is the world's "most widespread beverage," Pokhlebkin declared, "only an extremely insignificant number of people know how to properly drink tea."<sup>640</sup> With this pronouncement—and a lengthy discourse on tea and its proper modes of consumption—Pokhlebkin set the stage for a thirty-two year career teaching the Russian public how to savor everything from basic porridges and soups to elaborate pies and forgotten prerevolutionary staples. During the 1970s, Pokhlebkin gained popularity among a Soviet public that both enjoyed a higher standard of living than earlier generations and turned inward, toward forms of socializing that centered on interpersonal relationships and long evenings of conversation over food and drink.<sup>641</sup> Pokhlebkin eventually produced over 100 written works on cuisine, firmly establishing himself as a culinary legend in the Russian-speaking world by the time of his death in 2000. Today, he continues to hold a prominent place in the domain of Russian gastronomy with his books in ongoing circulation and experts bowing to or sparring with his theories.

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<sup>640</sup> V.V. Pokhlebkin, *Chai, ego tipy, svoistva i upotreblenie* (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1968), 5.

<sup>641</sup> Alexei Yurchak argues that, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s, for many Soviet citizens "belonging to a tight milieu of *svoi*, which involved constant *obshchenie*, was more meaningful and valuable than other forms of interaction, sociality, goals, and achievements, including those of a professional career." This mode of socializing included endless "around the table drinking-eating-talking." Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 149. See also Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 153-63.

In the late Soviet period, Pokhlebkina aimed to rearrange the hierarchy of authority in the Soviet kitchen by elevating historical knowledge and practice above the advice of medical and nutritional scientists. Pokhlebkina's cookbooks and culinary prose thus articulate a viewpoint I describe as *gastronomic historicism*: the privileging of historical custom as the ultimate authority in food-related matters, including a reliance on historical information as a means of explaining dietary and culinary principles. Pokhlebkina embraced the best of the past in order to transform the present, while seeing the best of the present as confirmation of the wisdom of the past. He sought to renew and enrich the popular culinary sphere through cultural renovation and historical preservation, granting Soviet citizens a means of escaping mainstream food culture. Pokhlebkina considered common mealtime practices unhealthy, monotonous, and culturally degrading. He had himself experienced the endemic problems of the Soviet food supply—shortages and poor quality goods—and the low standards that haunted public dining. Pokhlebkina also perceived a growing tendency for urbanites in Soviet Russia to depend on the products and wisdom of the modern food industry, of which he remained deeply suspicious.

The development of gastronomic historicism in the USSR supports the notion of a “historical turn” in late Soviet culture.<sup>642</sup> As I argue in chapter 2, this culinary historical turn meant developing a respect for seemingly longstanding food customs and the wisdom that brought them into being. Food experts and home cooks paid increasing attention to the “national cuisines” of the Soviet peoples, promoting the dishes of the USSR’s titular nationalities as both representative of age-old customs and also wholly appropriate for the modern table. Rather than a unified, pan-Soviet cuisine, these individuals embraced a more variegated vision of Soviet

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<sup>642</sup> Kozlov, “Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture,” 578. Andrew Jenks treats the Palekh artists’ community as an encapsulation of the Brezhnev-era turn to primordial Russian identity (rather than class affiliation) as the foundation of Soviet Russian identity. Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation.”

gastronomy, comprising the distinctive and timeless culinary practices of various ethnic groups residing within Soviet borders. As time passed, the literature on national cuisines grew more intensely interested in the historical origins of culinary traditions, describing not only the accomplishments a specific people had achieved allegedly thanks to the coming of communist rule, but also discussing the historical, climatic, and political conditions that shaped their cuisine.

Pokhlebkina's treatment of national food cultures both followed and, to an extent, diverged from this broader trend. Unlike other food experts involved in promoting national cuisines, Pokhlebkina rejected the notion that certain dishes should be cast off as vestiges of the past. He also went further than his contemporaries in questioning modern innovations, such as low-fat diets and factory-made foods. Pokhlebkina used historical knowledge to criticize the culinary status quo and express anxiety over the deleterious effects of modernization. In this, he expressed sentiments similar to those of the village prose writers and other Russian nationalist intellectuals who, in Brudny's words, denounced existing social, political, and economic "arrangements . . . as detrimental to the nation and its well-being, with the alternative presented as restoring the nation's vitality."<sup>643</sup> Though in this period, Pokhlebkina did not focus on Russia to the exclusion of other peoples living in the Soviet Union, nor did he ally himself with any of the dissident causes, nationalist or otherwise, which persisted in both underground and semi-public forms throughout this period.

Instead, during the 1970s, Pokhlebkina articulated his critiques of the present in the language of socialist fraternity, celebrating not only Russian cuisine, but also the gastronomic contributions of other Soviet peoples. His work aligned in many of its attitudes and assumptions with the Russian nationalist movement, yet Pokhlebkina also echoed official ideology,

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<sup>643</sup> Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 6.

particularly the “friendship of the peoples” line, which the Brezhnev regime peddled unionwide.<sup>644</sup> In a sense, Pokhlebkin found a means of uniting this socialist friendship with the sometimes nationalistically-inclined rhetoric of the “historical turn” by separating, codifying, and praising the cuisines *and the histories* of each of the Soviet peoples in turn, while allowing Russians to retain a position of privilege, as the central focus of (and therefore the leading nationality in) his vision of the Soviet gastronomic universe. To an extent, then, Pokhlebkin drew on the widespread affinity in the RSFSR for a “supposedly primordial Russianness,” which, historian Andrew Jenks argues, functioned for the state as the “main building block of identity . . . in the late Soviet era.”<sup>645</sup> More broadly, Pokhlebkin’s understanding of Soviet nationalities represents what Nicholas Riasanovsky has described as the “Soviet solution” (vis-à-vis Marxist ideology) to the nationalities problem, that is, the conclusion that “a transformed unitary society” could be achieved “best not by mixing different peoples in different stages of development but by having each nationality evolve to its own highest level, from which each could consciously and freely join others in a new higher synthesis.”<sup>646</sup> Yet Pokhlebkin’s concern for Russia grew more acute as the USSR began to disintegrate. In the late 1980s and 1990s he abandoned, at least in part, this commitment to interethnic harmony and asserted on his nationalist commitments. As the following chapter demonstrates, during the late 1980s and 1990s, Pokhlebkin’s food writing expressed a more strident Russian nationalism.

To get inside of Pokhlebkin’s culinary thought, I explore his life and work through a range of sources produced by and about this legendary food writer. I begin with a brief

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<sup>644</sup> On the relationship between Soviet culinary discourse and nationalities policy, see chapter 2.

<sup>645</sup> Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation,” 654.

<sup>646</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 221-22. See also Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 5-10.

biography, in order to offer personal and professional context for his ideas. Here I make use of writings about Pokhlebkina (primarily reviews of his books and press articles about his life and death), two recent made-for-television documentaries, the memoirs of his colleague, Elena Mushkina, and information acquired from my communications with his son, Avgust Pokhlebkina. Unfortunately, Pokhlebkina's personal papers and library, located in his former apartment in Podol'sk, Russia, at present remain uncatalogued and unavailable to researchers. Next, I examine central themes that emerge in Pokhlebkina's six major Soviet-era books on food and drink, supplementing these texts with over twenty-five of his articles for the Soviet press. Finally, relying on these same sources, I address the limitations of Pokhlebkina's efforts at social critique. In the following chapter, I treat Pokhlebkina's post-Soviet writings and responses to his body of work, while also placing his thought in a broader context by discussing post-Soviet cookbooks, the writings of Western food experts whose attitudes complement Pokhlebkina's, and scholarly literature on European and American food cultures.

Investigating Pokhlebkina's prescriptions for Soviet cuisine both enriches our understanding of late Soviet culture and also allows us to move beyond the visions of the Brezhnev era that currently dominate historical scholarship. This chapter outlines Pokhlebkina's ongoing efforts to solve what he saw as the chief problems of contemporary culinary life: ingrained and unfair food prejudices, a dearth of real culinary knowledge, and limited access to good-quality ingredients. It also examines the core of Pokhlebkina's gastronomic historicism, highlighting his desire to reconnect the peoples of the Soviet Union—his fellow Russians in particular—with their cultural roots, while simultaneously granting them access to a handpicked selection of techniques and dishes from the cuisines of the world. Pokhlebkina's ideas and their popularity suggest that the period from the late 1960s through the 1980s could be more aptly

characterized neither as a time when Soviet Russia suffered from cultural or political “stagnation,” nor as an era when hidden currents of dynamism bubbled, hidden, under the surface of public life, but as a moment when state and society both performed a search for stability.<sup>647</sup> This phenomenon, one might argue, encompassed both elements of “stagnation” and of “dynamism.” Yet it ultimately amounted to much more; it represented one of the chief characteristics of late Soviet culture and it laid the groundwork for the preoccupations and anxieties of the late 1980s, the 1990s, and beyond.

### **V. V. Pokhlebkina, Historian and Gastronome**

V. V. Pokhlebkina, born in Moscow in 1923, developed an interest in food early in life. As he recounts in one popular Soviet-era cookbook, *The Secrets of Good Cooking* (Tainy khoroshei kukhni, 1979), as a child he longed to play in the kitchen, although the adults around him refused to allow the youngster to explore such “girly” interests. Pushed toward “manly” pursuits, he found the opportunity to develop his culinary skills only during his service in the Great Patriotic War.<sup>648</sup> Pokhlebkina, on account of a severe concussion, spent most the war stationed in eastern Siberia working in food service and, in his son’s words, “waiting for the Japanese to invade.”<sup>649</sup> By his own account, Pokhlebkina proved an excellent and talented chef, demonstrating his ability to make a far wider variety of dishes than other regimental cooks. He claims to have experimented with various ethnic cuisines, serving the soldiers items such as *mamalyga*

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<sup>647</sup> On the stagnation paradigm and recent challenges to it, see introduction.

<sup>648</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 12-19.

<sup>649</sup> Avgust Pokhlebkina (son of Vil’iam Vasil’evich Pokhlebkina), in discussion with author, Moscow, 27 May 2012.

(Moldavian cornmeal porridge, similar to Italian polenta) and supplementing Spartan military rations with local and wild ingredients.<sup>650</sup>

After the war, Vil'iam Vasil'evich, the child of well-placed former revolutionaries and a relatively privileged member of Soviet society, trained as a historian and international relations specialist at the newly opened Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO), receiving a Candidate of Sciences degree in 1953. Having initially focused on Yugoslavia, Pokhlebkina shifted to his other area of specialization—Scandinavia and Russo-Scandinavian relations—following Stalin's split with Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito.<sup>651</sup> Pokhlebkina soon became a recognized authority in his field, founding the journal *Scandinavian Collection* (Skandinavskii sbornik) in the mid-1950s and, by the end of the 1960s, having seventy-five publications on history and international relations to his name.<sup>652</sup>

Following the completion of his candidate's degree, Pokhlebkina began to encounter professional difficulties, which ultimately pushed him into a career as an independent researcher and food writer. According to his son and other observers, Pokhlebkina grew openly dissatisfied with Soviet academia's status quo, especially the demand that scholars work primarily at their assigned desks at their respective institutes. He criticized his colleagues and superiors for nonproductivity and timeserving, and for preventing historians such as himself from working full-time in libraries and archives.<sup>653</sup> In the early 1960s, shortly after having been denied his doctoral degree, possibly on account of ongoing conflicts with his superiors, Pokhlebkina left the

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<sup>650</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 11-19. Linguist Ronald Feldstein agrees that the "certain boy" described in this section of *The Secrets of Good Cooking* is Pokhlebkina himself. Feldstein, "Introduction to William Pokhlebkina."

<sup>651</sup> Pokhlebkina, discussion.

<sup>652</sup> *Bibliografiia proizvedenii V.V. Pokhlebkina i otzyvov na nikh v otechestvennoi i zarubezhnoi presse, 1948-1999 gg.* (Moscow: N.p., 1999), 4-13.

<sup>653</sup> Pokhlebkina, discussion; Feldstein, "Introduction to William Pokhlebkina."



Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences and also lost control of *Scandinavian Collection*.<sup>654</sup> Historian Iurii Poliakov, who witnessed the incident that led to Pokhlebkina's ejection from the institute, reported that Pokhlebkina slapped the institute's director, Mikhail Khvostov, after he reprimanded Pokhlebkina for not fulfilling a work plan.<sup>655</sup> Other accounts hold that Pokhlebkina publicly berated Khvostov for hampering the researchers' productivity.<sup>656</sup> Avgust Pokhlebkina confirmed that his father ended up on his superiors' bad side for refusing to remain in his office and for accusing his colleagues of working "incorrectly."<sup>657</sup> This conflict and the loss of his academic position put Pokhlebkina in dire professional and financial straits, spurring his family's move to the small, more affordable city of Podol'sk, just outside of Moscow, where he turned his attention seriously to his longtime passion: food, drink, and culinary history.<sup>658</sup>

As the stories of his ejection from the Academy of Sciences suggest, Vil'iam Vasil'evich could be quite stubborn, arrogant, and quick to take offense.<sup>659</sup> In one of our conversations, his son described him as "very, very sure of himself" and, indeed, colleagues and acquaintances often regarded Pokhlebkina as a know-it-all and an intellectual braggart.<sup>660</sup> In her memoir, Elena Mushkina, Pokhlebkina's editor at *Nedelia* (The Week, a weekly supplement to *Izvestiia*, for

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<sup>654</sup> Avgust Pokhlebkina, interview by the author, Podol'sk, 15 July 2012.

<sup>655</sup> Iurii Poliakov, "Liudi nashei nauki. Mysli i suzheniia istorika," *Svobodnaia mysl'* XXI 2 (February 2002): 89-91.

<sup>656</sup> *Smert' kulinara: Vil'iam Pokhlebkina*, dir. Mikhail Rogovoi (2005), online video, Telekanal Rossiia, [http://russia.tv/video/show/video\\_id/90793/brand\\_id/4747](http://russia.tv/video/show/video_id/90793/brand_id/4747).

<sup>657</sup> Pokhlebkina, discussion.

<sup>658</sup> Elena Mushkina recalls Pokhlebkina in the early 1970s, stating that "often [his] lunch consisted solely of tea." Mushkina, *Taina kurlandskogo piroga* (Moscow: Severnyi palomnik, 2008), 298.

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>660</sup> Pokhlebkina, discussion.

which Pokhlebkin wrote recipe columns), described his willingness to interrupt the guide during a group tour of a Moldavian winery, offering witty asides and showing off his knowledge of winemaking. She also recalled Pokhlebkin's insistence that his colleagues at *Nedelia* record the cooking advice he offered them, demanding, "Why aren't you writing this down? Get your notebooks!"<sup>661</sup> Indeed, patience appears to have not been among the historian's virtues. When I asked Avgust if Vil'iam Vasil'evich had taught him how to cook, he recalled, "[My father's] temper would not allow [him] to just patiently wait until I acquired certain skills. It was much easier for us to divide the work, with me doing chores . . . I did wash a lot of dishes, I did crack a lot of nuts, peeled a lot of potatoes, and other subordinate operations. But the creativity was all [his]."<sup>662</sup> Perhaps Soviet diplomat Rostislav Sergeev has put it most succinctly, describing Pokhlebkin in a 2011 television interview as "an inconvenient person."<sup>663</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Pokhlebkin demonstrated an intense dedication to procuring for himself only good-quality, enjoyable food and drink. As Mushkina remembers, he refused to dine with his companions on a *Nedelia* staff trip, instead bringing his own meal along and consuming it separately. Once he had been coaxed down from the upper bunk of their train compartment, Pokhlebkin began to tease his colleagues about their food choices, telling them they would have done well to bring soup, calling out "tutti-frutti" as they ate their apples, and suggesting that they needed their sugar and candies to make up for having suffered such an unpleasant meal. After arrival, he once more declined to dine with the others, instead buying produce at the local

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<sup>661</sup> Mushkina, *Taina kurlianskogo piroga*, 302-4. *Nedelia*, the Sunday supplement to *Izvestiia*, primarily featured human interest stories, advice columns, short fiction, and other light reading.

<sup>662</sup> Pokhlebkin, interview.

<sup>663</sup> Sergeev appeared in a 2011 television special dedicated to Pokhlebkin's murder. Alexei Pivovarov, "Smert' po retseptu," *Delo temnoe s Beniaminom Smekovym*, dir. Andrei Lazarev (2011), online video, Alexey Pivovarov, <http://alexeypivovarov.ru/smert-po-receptu/>.

markets and preparing his meals himself.<sup>664</sup> Pokhlebkina sometimes happily risked social censure in order to obtain a meal that would meet his standards.

In general, Pokhlebkina had little concern for matters not connected with his intellectual pursuits, including food and drink. He thus announced proudly to one group of visitors to his home that his wallpaper was torn, his toilet broken, and that he had no telephone or television, declaring, “Design does not influence the quality of [my] dishes.”<sup>665</sup> Avgust Pokhlebkina has similarly stated that his father “cut [back] severely” on all expenses aside from books and food.<sup>666</sup> Vil’iam Vasil’evich also showed little regard for his own personal appearance, showing up at the offices of *Nedelia* to present his first columns in a worn-out suit and crooked tie, and later being nearly ejected from the building of another publisher because the guards took him for an indigent.<sup>667</sup> Appropriately for an individual so invested in his work, Pokhlebkina populated his inner circle with people whose professional concerns aligned with his. As his son recalled, “Unless your interests were somehow related to his, you wouldn’t get him.” Pokhlebkina devoted the vast majority of his time not to socializing, but to research and writing. Most of this took place in his Podol’sk apartment or in the woods nearby, where he would select a low stump for a desk and, on occasion, startle curious passersby who took the sounds of his typing for some unfamiliar birdcall.<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>664</sup> Mushkina, *Taina kurliandskogo piroga*, 300-302.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>666</sup> Pokhlebkina, interview.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid.; Mushkina, *Taina kurliandskogo piroga*, 298.

<sup>668</sup> Pokhlebkina, interview.

Pokhlebkina's personality and work habits, while ensuring a measure of social isolation, paid great dividends in terms of recognition for his writings on cuisine.<sup>669</sup> While the Soviet press published few reviews of cookbooks, Pokhlebkina managed to garner some attention, mainly for his comprehensive guide to home cookery, *The Secrets of Good Cooking*. The monthly parenting journal *Sem'ia i shkola* (Family and School) reviewed the book's second edition in 1981, commending Pokhlebkina's ability to turn old culinary wisdom into something fresh and new, suggesting that these *Secrets* would delight adults and children alike.<sup>670</sup> Similarly, in 1982, the book review journal *V mire knig* (In the World of Books) praised Pokhlebkina's knowledge of and passion for cooking.<sup>671</sup> Pokhlebkina, of course, faced frustrations as a food writer, since his editors forbade him to publish articles on foods absent from Soviet stores or, during the anti-alcohol campaigns of the perestroika era, any writings about alcoholic beverages.<sup>672</sup> Yet, according to his son, by the early-1980s publishers could no longer doubt the salability of Pokhlebkina's cookbooks and gave him a relatively "free hand" in terms of style and content. Pokhlebkina had achieved such success and recognition during the 1970s and 1980s that he came to worry little about editors seriously altering his texts; in the world of Soviet cookbooks, he had become the "goose that lays the golden egg."<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> In the following chapter (chapter 6), I discuss an oft-repeated tale about Pokhlebkina, which holds that he was temporarily banned from publishing because too many dissidents enjoyed his book on tea (*Chai, ego tipy, svoistva, upotreblenie*, 1968). As I demonstrate, this story emerged in the post-Soviet period and appears to be largely, if not entirely, false. It therefore is best discussed in the context of Pokhlebkina's post-Soviet legacy, rather than his Soviet era works.

<sup>670</sup> V. Gubatova, "Kukhnia bez tain," *Sem'ia i shkola*, April 1981, 63.

<sup>671</sup> "Volshebniiaia kukhnia Pokhlebkina," *V mire knig* 4 (1982): 65. Avgust Pokhlebkina has also noted the popularity of this volume. When discussing the present status of his father's works, Avgust stated simply, "For the current editions there are no miracles or anything that would replicate the success of *Tainy khoroshei kukhni* when it was first published." Pokhlebkina, interview.

<sup>672</sup> Gromova, *Smert' kulinar*; Mushkina, *Taina kurliandskogo piroga*, 306.

<sup>673</sup> Pokhlebkina, interview.

## Recapturing Culinary Wisdom

Until the Brezhnev years, dominant Soviet food paradigms focused largely on the future, emphasizing what could be, rather than tackling contemporary conditions or considering the past. During the 1920s, food “futurists” admonished readers to eat a modern, rational diet based in part on various “healthy” food surrogates. Traditional modes of eating still had their proponents, but most menus bore the mark of new dietary standards, demanding more fat and sugar and a broader range of proteins than would be found in a typical Russian peasant diet.<sup>674</sup> Along with the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-37) and its propaganda trumpeting the dawn of a “better” life came a wave of culinary standardization. The Stalin regime, as Edward Geist argues, “developed a single orthodox cuisine and imposed this monopoly upon Soviet culture as a whole.” Here, futurist and traditionalist visions converged in a “socialist realist” food paradigm, uniting “bourgeois luxury with the futurist enthusiasm for a qualitatively new ‘scientific’ way of eating.”<sup>675</sup> Mass-produced luxuries (champagne, chocolates) and the ideal of dining out at chic cafés communicated to the public a promise about a future when even common laborers would live as well as the late Imperial bourgeoisie once had.<sup>676</sup> Stalinist gastronomy reached its apotheosis in *The Book About Delicious and Healthy Food*, which advertised the successes and products of Soviet industry and agriculture, while teaching housewives to be “cultured” consumers.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> Rothstein and Rothstein, “Beginnings of the Soviet Culinary Arts.”

<sup>675</sup> Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik,” 295, 301.

<sup>676</sup> Gronow Zhuravlev, “Book of Tasty and Healthy Food,” 27. See also Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne*; Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*.

<sup>677</sup> Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik,” 295-96.

After Stalin's death, publishers made available a vastly wider array of cookbooks: *The Book About Delicious and Healthy Food* appeared in revised editions alongside new texts on general housekeeping, cooking with common ingredients or convenience foods, and enjoying the ethnic cuisines of the Soviet peoples.<sup>678</sup> Many of these publications celebrated modes of cooking and dining rooted in modern nutritional science and technological advances, while touting the accomplishments of Soviet industry and agriculture. Thus, as historian Natalia B. Lebina argues, the Khrushchev period saw an important shift toward Western (especially American) food culture, including the introduction of new "rational" or "progressive" forms of trade and dining—self-service and automatic vending—and the greater use of prepared foods. The "glamour" and "luxury" of the Stalin period faded, as did the hardships of the war and the immediate postwar years: Soviet food experts now favored speed, convenience, accessibility, and conformity.<sup>679</sup> In the imagination of the Khrushchev era, the future was, historian Susan E. Reid contends, to be marked by "sober, rational taste appropriate to a modern, industrial, workers' state."<sup>680</sup> Scientific rationality now reached a new apex, stripped of such Stalin-era fripperies as lace tablecloths and homemade aspics, and reified in the spread of soda water dispensers and heat-and-eat cabbage rolls.<sup>681</sup>

From the mid-1960s through the 1980s, a tension between standardization and diversification increasingly defined Soviet culinary culture. Even as the state demanded that

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<sup>678</sup> For a brief overview of the development of Soviet cookbook publishing, see Gronow and Zhuravlev, "Book of Tasty and Healthy Food."

<sup>679</sup> Lebina, "Plus destalinizatsiia vsei edy."

<sup>680</sup> Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen," 218.

<sup>681</sup> Reid demonstrates that during the Khrushchev era the Soviet central government and consumer goods industry placed new emphasis on making daily life more "rational" and "socialist," beginning with the kitchen. Reid, "Khrushchev Kitchen."

public dining menus and nutritional guidelines adhere to a rigid standard, Soviet citizens were exposed to unprecedented gastronomic diversity through cookbooks, the popular press, and greater travel opportunities.<sup>682</sup> Interest in home cooking grew as residents of Soviet cities enjoyed higher living standards and more leisure time than previous generations. Cookbooks and pamphlets celebrating the national cuisines of the USSR presented the greatest variety of dishes, ingredients, and cooking styles. As discussed in chapter 2, they functioned as propaganda for the “friendship of the peoples,” while offering a tool for the perpetuation of local culture. During the Brezhnev years, many Soviet food experts and home cooks began to turn away from—even if they did not wholly reject—science, technology, and the fictional bright future, as they looked ever more to history and tradition for inspiration and authority in the kitchen. Foremost among these experts, Pokhlebkin desired to recapture the customs of the past, in order to improve popular culinary knowledge, preserve national culture, and ameliorate the negative side effects of modernization and urbanization.

Instructing his readers in the correct modes of employing various foods, Pokhlebkin took a stance that assumed most Soviet home cooks held false beliefs about food, often implying that fundamental knowledge had somehow been erased from the collective consciousness. In his columns for *Nedelia* he often suggested that Soviet citizens needlessly clung to prejudices against certain food items, simply because they did not know how to properly consume them. Pokhlebkin thus argued in a 1971 article that home cooks shunned certain varieties of fish out of

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<sup>682</sup> Catriona Kelly points out that cafeteria and restaurant menus became standardized throughout the Soviet Union. Kelly, “Leningradskaia kukhnia,” 269. Gronow and Zhuravlev emphasize the variety of cuisines and dishes represented in post-Stalin Soviet cookbooks, although they note that the difficulties involved in procuring foodstuffs limited home cooks’ abilities to prepare exotic dishes. Gronow and Zhuravlev, “Book of Tasty and Healthy Food,” 51. On Brezhnev-era food shortages, see Kushkova, “Surviving in the Time of Deficit”; Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems*, 252-65, 307-30. On the influence of foreign and domestic travel on Soviet worldviews in the Brezhnev era, see Raleigh, *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 210-17.

ignorance and in spite of Russia's long tradition of fish cookery. "Unfortunately," Pokhlebkina lamented, "fish occupies little space on our table, which is entirely dominated by meat," although only a century ago Russians enjoyed it throughout most of the year "on account of numerous fasts."<sup>683</sup> In a similar vein, he suggested that his readers felt an undue reticence to use sunflower oil, although proper cooking methods would prevent the unpleasant odors and unpalatable greasiness of which many home cooks and their family members complained.<sup>684</sup> His readers, no doubt, frequently had little choice about their cooking fats, as sunflower oil could often be had much more readily than butter.<sup>685</sup> In this instance, Pokhlebkina sought a rationale for learning to enjoy an unavoidable and sometimes undesirable product.

Pokhlebkina reserved special criticism for typical Soviet holiday meals, semi-annual reminders of a general lack of good food sense. In another 1971 column, he condemned the practice of subjecting guests to the usual unexciting selection of salad Olivier, sliced sausage, pickles, herring, and store-bought desserts. Instead, one should offer a few dishes prepared simply and well, and served in a logical progression (rather than all at once), to ensure that guests would leave feeling sated and refreshed, rather than muddled and over-fed.<sup>686</sup> Desserts, in particular, represented one of Pokhlebkina's greatest holiday bugbears. He insisted that anyone would be better off preparing something at home than purchasing pastries from a store or bakery. He offered simple solutions, such as a black bread and sour apple trifle sweetened, in a

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<sup>683</sup> V.V. Pokhlebkina, "Labardan ili treska," *Nedelia*, 17-23 May 1971, 10.

<sup>684</sup> V.V. Pokhlebkina, "Chudesa na postnom masle," *Nedelia*, 3-9 January 1972, 14-15.

<sup>685</sup> Particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, butter was often in short supply in the USSR. At a conference of trade and public dining workers in 1968, officials noted butter shortages in the RSFSR, throughout Central Asia, and in the North Caucasus. In 1971, Soviet Minister of Trade A.I. Struev complained that butter production continued to fall short of economic plans and consumer needs. RGAE, f. 465, op. 1, d. 663, l. 69; f. 465, op. 1, d. 1007, l. 13.

<sup>686</sup> V.V. Pokhlebkina, "Prazdnichnoe zastol'e," *Nedelia*, 1-7 November 1971, 19.



characteristically Russian manner, with preserves and honey.<sup>687</sup> Attention to detail, a little ambition, and a respect for the traditional flavors and ingredients of the Russian kitchen would, in Pokhlebkin's mind, free Soviet diners from bland, factory-made fare. If typical Soviet meals represented an outgrowth of stagnation—the routine salads, the monotonous plates of tepid sausage, the stale packaged pastries—then Pokhlebkin sought to return creativity, and dynamism to the table, while still rooting his advice in the stable bedrock of national tradition.

Seeking out the cause of this widespread food confusion, Pokhlebkin sometimes pointed his finger at specific developments that he believed had undermined customs and degraded popular culinary culture. In *Tea, Its Types, Properties, and Use* (Chai, ego tipy, svoistva, upotreblenie, 1968), for example, Pokhlebkin accused the late Imperial petty bourgeoisie of slandering this beverage out of spite. Since they could not afford to drink tea in the elite manner (strong and with a generous array of sweets), the *meshchanstvo* spread rumors about tea causing such ailments as “black teeth,” weak vision, and “nervous fits.” Pokhlebkin also leveled veiled criticism at the Soviet state. He argued that the spread of tea consumption in the first decades of the twentieth century led to a decline in standards in tea drinking. Tea came to be prepared incorrectly and people grew accustomed to quaffing a bitter, unwholesome brew. Now, he contended, tea consumers “often drink [tea] . . . simply out of the force of habit. Owing to this fact many see tea just as colored water and cannot receive enjoyment from this drink.”<sup>688</sup>

Similarly, in *All About Spices* (Vse o prianostiakh, 1974), he insisted that the public dining systems of “industrially developed states” regrettably decreased the use of spices in cuisine, as the mass production of meals demanded “standardization” and a reliance on “products that do

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<sup>687</sup> V.V. Pokhlebkin, “Pirogi vozdukhnye,” *Nedelia*, 30 October-5 November 1972, 16-17; “Na liuboi vkus,” *Nedelia*, 30 October-5 November 1978, 22.

<sup>688</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Chai*, 73, 80.

not require labor-intensive preparation.”<sup>689</sup> In both cases, Pokhlebkin hinted that the Soviet food industry played a role in robbing the Russian people of wisdom and enjoyment by failing to perpetuate worthy customs or encouraging the development of poor dining habits.

Looking at the conditions of life under Brezhnev, Pokhlebkin acknowledged that public dining regularly proved unsatisfactory. Many of the cafeterias and canteens that opened in the postwar USSR offered a narrow, standardized repertoire of dishes marked by poor quality ingredients and unloving preparation.<sup>690</sup> Even in top-tier restaurants and stylish caf  s—which could be hard to get into—diners often faced dismal food and service.<sup>691</sup> In *The Secrets of Good Cooking*, Pokhlebkin quietly denounced Soviet public dining, likening it to a new, modern bridge, in contrast to home cooking, which was “our old, but sure, true bridge, which connects us to the culture of the past and with the historical traditions of our Homeland, to the national customs of the people, and with our family, our loved ones.”<sup>692</sup> Pokhlebkin in his press articles sometimes made more explicit jabs at Soviet canteens and cafeterias. Writing in *Nedelia* in 1975, Pokhlebkin encouraged readers to not take seriously the unappealing “gravies” offered in public eateries. Such mixtures of “overcooked flour, fat, and salty bouillon” could “discredit” real sauces altogether by making foods more standardized and less enjoyable; true sauces should improve the texture, flavor, and aroma of the completed dish.<sup>693</sup> Soviet dining halls also took the blame for Russians’ tendency to turn their noses up at some basic and venerable foods, such as

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<sup>689</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, *Vse o priianostiakh. Vidy, svoistva, primeneni  * (Moscow: Pishchevaia promyshlennost’, 1974), 23.

<sup>690</sup> Kelly, “Leningradskaia kukhnia.”

<sup>691</sup> On the uses and quality of public dining establishments in the post-Stalin era, see Glushchenko, *Obshchepit*, 180-92. On Soviet public dining in the Brezhnev era, also see chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>692</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 6.

<sup>693</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Sousy,” *Nedelia*, 24-30 March 1975, 20-21.

rice. Rather than fragrant, fluffy grains or tasty porridges, Soviet diners found themselves faced with consuming unappetizing, incorrectly prepared side-dishes that bore little resemblance to any “traditional” rice dish known at home or abroad.<sup>694</sup> In Pokhlebkin’s mind, the poor technique and lack of care that plagued Soviet public dining dramatically narrowed popular culinary horizons and placed the burden on individuals to seek out gastronomic pleasure at home.

Not only cooks, but also other Soviet food experts could, Pokhlebkin contended, accept some of the responsibility for the unhappy state of food customs. Looking back to the prewar era from the perspective of 1976, Pokhlebkin criticized the nutritionists and food industry representatives who had initially attempted to introduce soy into the Soviet diet prior to the Second World War.<sup>695</sup> These “propagandists” focused on the soybeans themselves, rather than offering “traditional” soy foods that had been refined over many centuries. According to Pokhlebkin, this torpedoed their efforts and left Soviet Russians without the dietary benefits of this “wholesome, natural product.”<sup>696</sup> Of course, all of this leaves aside the fact that soy never became a common feature of the Soviet diet, in any form. More generally, Pokhlebkin suggested that experts’ insistence on viewing foods primarily in terms of their nutritional content—rather than their traditional uses in world cuisines—doomed their efforts to failure. Commenting in 1978 on the history and preparation of salads, Pokhlebkin remarked that his fellow cookbooks authors often took a “purely medical” approach to food. In prioritizing supposed healthfulness over good taste, these authors made statements to the effect that “supper will be especially tasty

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<sup>694</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Ris,” *Nedelia*, 31 May-6 June 1976, 12.

<sup>695</sup> Rothstein and Rothstein contend that efforts in the 1920s to promote the consumption of soy and soy products among Russians failed on account of “consumer resistance,” as workers tended to find soy foods “strange-looking and strange-tasting.” Rothstein and Rothstein, “Beginnings of Soviet Culinary Arts,” 187-88.

<sup>696</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Soia,” *Nedelia*, 27 September-3 October, 1976, 20.

if it begins with a salad of raw vegetables.” Such proclamations could mislead the home cook; flavor hinges on “the composition and assortment of vegetables and dressing,” not on the rawness of the ingredients. Pokhlebkin thus insisted that rather than looking on salads as “vitamins,” one should think of them as tasty fare and demand that they are pleasant to eat.<sup>697</sup> While Pokhlebkin by no means dismissed the importance of nutrition, he suggested that Soviet food experts focused too much on the bare “facts” of nutrition, leaving aside food’s other characteristics: flavor, aroma, and its ability to influence mood and to facilitate conviviality. Their ignorance of culinary customs and good cooking also hamstrung efforts to improve the Soviet diet, as it led to the creation and promotion of unappetizing—sometimes only marginally edible—yet theoretically “healthful” foods.

In his quest to vanquish false beliefs and teach better living through home cooking, Pokhlebkin addressed very real problems facing Soviet citizens. He understood that chronic, low-level supply deficits marred late Soviet consumer culture and often made it necessary for individuals to work with undesirable foodstuffs. While necessities such as bread generally remained available in sufficient quantities, some goods could be hard to acquire, poor quality, or obtainable only in combination with unpopular food items.<sup>698</sup> He openly advised on cooking with seemingly unsatisfactory ingredients in his 1983 book, *Cooking is Fun* (*Zanimatel’naia kulinariia*). In this volume, he claimed that anything short of outright spoilage could be “corrected through the culinary process.” Dirt, damage, cosmetic defects, and even poor quality could be worked around, so long as one knew, for example, to use less-than-fresh vegetables to

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<sup>697</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Salaty,” *Nedelia*, 16-22 January 1978, 22-23.

<sup>698</sup> Kushkova, “Surviving in the Time of Deficit”; Kushkova, “Sovetskoe proshloe skvoz’ vospominaniia o prodovol’svennom defitsite,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* 64, 2 (2009), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2009/2/ku10.html>.

prepare a cooked purée, rather than a salad.<sup>699</sup> Pokhlebkina had previously doled out advice—in articles published in 1973 and 1974—for handling “unfamiliar” and unpopular varieties of fish, using bruised or overripe berries to make the fruity drink *mors*, and brewing *kvas* with scant ingredients.<sup>700</sup> Pokhlebkina also devoted a chapter of *Cooking is Fun*—based on a 1978 article for *Nedelia*—to using electric ranges, which proliferated in newly built apartment buildings. Having grown accustomed to using gas ranges or single-burner stoves, such as the common *kerosinka* or the primus, Soviet home cooks might have found themselves befuddled by this new technology.<sup>701</sup> Pokhlebkina offered his help in spite of his disdain for these stoves, which he regarded as being largely unsuited for any kind of cooking more complex than boiling or reheating.<sup>702</sup> With these discussions, Pokhlebkina winked knowingly at the reader, hinting that he understood the difficulties they faced in procuring specific foodstuffs, obtaining items in the necessary quantities, or working with the limited array of cooking equipment made available by state industry.

Pokhlebkina’s mode of engaging with popular culinary practices not only reflects his own recognition of everyday challenges common in the Soviet kitchen, but also demonstrates that within Soviet food culture individuals could find ways to level criticism at the state and develop means of working around supply problems and unsatisfactory cafeteria food. Pokhlebkina’s work further highlights the shift in the post-Stalin period to providing less fantasy and more reality in

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<sup>699</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Zanimatel’naia kulinariia*, 19-20.

<sup>700</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkina, “Dary Neptuna na nashem stole,” *Nedelia*, 2-8 July 1973, 14-15; “Naptiki,” *Nedelia*, 22-28 June 1974, 12.

<sup>701</sup> On the pervasive presence of single-burner stoves like the primus and the *kerosinka*, see Lebina, *Entsiklopediia banal’nostei*, 186-87, 291; Kelly, “Making a Home on the Neva,” 62-63.

<sup>702</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Zanimatel’naia kulinariia*, 7-10; V.V. Pokhlebkina, “Elektricheskaia kukhnia,” *Nedelia*, 2-8 October 1978, 14-15. Also see Pokhlebkina, *Kukhnia veka*, 413-14.

cooking advice literature. Pokhlebkin, one of the most prominent food writers of this era, set aside the unattainable banquet dishes, mass-produced treats, and imagined dinners of earlier Soviet gastronomy, seeking to instead provide the knowledge and skills home cooks needed to navigate the realities of late Soviet life. By relying on history and tradition as the sources of such wisdom—the tendency to which I now turn—Pokhlebkin both worked to reshape Soviet food culture and also to develop a sense of cultural stability for his Russian readers.

### **National Cuisines and Historical Eating**

Pokhlebkin's project of recapturing culinary wisdom drew on the history and customs of Russians and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the other peoples of the Soviet Union. In his books and press articles, Pokhlebkin recounted the origins and evolutions of a variety of dishes and dining habits. This connected his readers with the past, offering them a means of improving their diets and enriching their daily lives, while also representing the national cultures of the USSR as vibrant and in possession of deep historical roots. Pokhlebkin embraced a primordial vision of ethnicity, which represented national identity as innate and rooted in ties of kinship and culture, but also in need of the correct political circumstances in which to fully develop. As noted above, during the Brezhnev era, many nationalist thinkers and some cultural producers promoted such a view, as they sought to celebrate and strengthen national cultures that, they feared, were threatened by decline on account of urbanization, industrialization, and the erosion of tradition. Pokhlebkin joined this chorus, seeking to define Russian and other Soviet national cultures as distinct and historically conditioned to best serve life in their native region. Historical dining traditions offered, much more than modern innovations, a means of both preserving heritage and improving daily life.

Pokhlebkina codified his vision of Soviet food culture in the 1978 cookbook, *The National Cuisines of Our Peoples*. This volume represented a landmark in Soviet cookbook publishing and specifically in the national cuisines genre.<sup>703</sup> *National Cuisines* provided vastly more information about the customs in question—and fewer explicit nods to official ideology—than typical works in this genre, some of which provided recipes and photographs of completed dishes, some of which bore scant resemblance to foods considered “traditional” in the common sense of the word.<sup>704</sup> In some cases, even the national cuisines publications that attempted to provide breadth and depth, such as *Soviet National and Foreign Cuisines* (Sovetskaiia natsional’naia i zarubezhnaia kukhnia, 1977), written by two Ministry of the Food Industry officials, appear somewhat superficial alongside Pokhlebkina’s more detailed works. They provided brief discourses on cooking practices and common ingredients, but largely neglected the historical development of the cuisines in question.

Described recently as “the first comprehensive Soviet ethnic cookbook,” *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* was second only to *The Book About Delicious and Healthy Food* in

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<sup>703</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, national cuisines cookbooks began appearing in the 1950s, although the genre did not come into its own until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the number and variety of these publications increased considerably. Pokhlebkina’s *Natsional’nye kukhni nashikh narodov* was under consideration for publication as early as 1974, but did not appear until several years later apparently because Pokhlebkina fell ill and could not complete the manuscript on time. GARF, f. R-9659, op. 2, d. 108, l. 6.

<sup>704</sup> For example, the introduction to *Armianskaia kulinariia* (1960) describes “Soviet Armenia” as the “child of the Great October socialist revolution” and lauds the Soviet system for bringing fertility, productivity, and abundance to the ancient and oft-threatened Armenian people. Piruzian, *Armianskaia kulinariia*, 6, 9-18. The popular “Cuisines of Our Peoples” recipe card series published in Moscow by Planeta during the 1970s, provided little in the way of contextual information, offering only recipes and color photographs of finished dishes. See, for example, N. Pakhuridze, ed., *Bliuda russkoi kukhni* (Moscow: Planeta, 1970); N. Pakhuridze, ed., *Bliuda ukrainskoi kukhni* (Moscow: Planeta, 1970). Food expert and cookbook author Anya von Bremzen, who emigrated to the US from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, recently said of her childhood “Cuisines of Our Peoples” postcard sets: “In the Kirgiz [sic] set there’s a recipe that clearly looks like Linzer tartes [sic], given a native name. And it has a filling of black currant—which certainly doesn’t grow in Kyrgyzstan!” Anya von Bremzen to the author, 27 May 2012. Not all of these recipe card collections were published in the USSR’s political center, although those published elsewhere were very similar to the Moscow publications. See, for example, a collection of Tatar recipes published in Kazan’: Iu. Akhmetzianov, ed. *Bliuda tatarskoi kukhni* (Kazan’: Izdatel’stvo Tatarskogo obkoma KPSS, 1978).

terms of Soviet-era publication numbers, with over one million copies being printed between 1978 and 1991.<sup>705</sup> Like other of Pokhlebkin's writings, this book functioned as a kind of gastronomic gateway to the USSR, a window onto the evolution of food customs from across the Soviet Union that could be accessed not only by Soviet citizens, but also by readers around the world. In summer 1977, Food Industry, the publishing house responsible for *National Cuisines of Our Peoples*, sought to promote Pokhlebkin's volume outside of the Soviet Union, selecting it for display at an international book fair, along with *The Book About Delicious and Healthy Food* and approximately forty technical and professional publications. This plan, however, failed on account of the publisher's inability to complete production of Pokhlebkin's book on time.<sup>706</sup> Yet *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* did successfully appear in several foreign languages: Finnish (1983), German (1984 and 1988), English (1984), Portuguese (1989), Hungarian (1989), and Croatian (1989). Other of Pokhlebkin's books and articles also found foreign publication, with *Tea* appearing in Polish (1974), *All About Spices* in five German editions (1977-88), and an article on the history of flatware in ten different Swedish-language periodicals (1979).<sup>707</sup> Yet none of his other Soviet-era works would enjoy the same reach as *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* in terms of either print-runs or foreign publication.

Based on information the author gathered during his travels throughout the USSR collecting recipes, cookbooks, and old cookware, *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* codified Pokhlebkin's vision of Soviet cuisine. He divided the book into eleven chapters, each dedicated

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<sup>705</sup> Gronow and Zhuravlev, "Book of Tasty and Healthy Food," 51; Joyce Toomre, "Food and National Identity in Soviet Armenia," in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Glants and Toomre, 213n39.

<sup>706</sup> Food Industry (Pishchevaia promyshlennost') was one of the chief publishers of cookbooks during the Soviet Period. GARF, f. R-9659, op. 2, d. 120, ll. 54-56; f. R-9659, op. 2, d. 127, l. 5.

<sup>707</sup> *Bibliografiia proizvedenii*, 63-68.



to a cuisine or group of cuisines: Russian; Ukrainian; Belorussian; Moldavian; Caucasian (Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani); Uzbek and Tajik; Turkmen; Kazakh and Kyrgyz; Baltic (Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian); North Caucasian, Volga, Permian, Karelian, and Yakut; Subarctic, Mongolian, and Jewish. Rather than presenting the reader with a unified, pan-Soviet cuisine, Pokhlebkin's volume suggested—like other national cuisines texts of this period—that the individual culinary customs of the diverse Soviet peoples together created a “Soviet” cuisine. Soviet cuisine thus comprised a patchwork of distinctive dishes, preferences, and cooking styles, each conditioned by history, the environment, and political circumstances to suit the specific needs of a given people.

Taking a step further than many of his contemporaries in the Soviet food world, Pokhlebkin charted the political, social, cultural, and economic factors that drove each cuisine's evolution up to the present. Pokhlebkin pointed, for example, to Orthodox Christian fasting traditions in order to explain the slow development of Russian cuisine prior to the eighteenth century, arguing that the division between Lenten and non-Lenten menus slowed the emergence of dishes that combined a variety of ingredients. European influence finally set Russians on the road to creating the dishes recognized today as Russian staples: *kotlety*, meat-filled *pirozhki*, and mayonnaise-rich salads.<sup>708</sup> Similarly, Pokhlebkin elsewhere encouraged his reader to recapture the wisdom of the past and enjoy the simple pleasures of homemade “*pirog* with nothing” or marinated crowberries (small, nearly flavorless purple-black berries).<sup>709</sup> Indeed, the theme of traditional Russian cooking, which encompassed both elite luxuries and peasant staples, ran throughout Pokhlebkin's food writing. His very first press articles celebrated *ukha* (clear fish

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<sup>708</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni nashikh narodov*, 8-12.

<sup>709</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Pirogi”; Pokhlebkin, “Lesnye lakomstva,” *Turist* 8 (1974), 23.

soup) and *kulebiaka* (a savory pie with a yeasted crust and, often, a multi-layered fish filling), setting the stage for his post-Soviet works, which promoted not only common items such as *kvas*, but also “forgotten” dishes, including barley porridge, allegedly a favorite of Peter the Great.<sup>710</sup> For Pokhlebkin, good Russian cooking meant retaining a respect for history, including those customs that predated Russian cuisine’s romance with the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whether these dishes graced the tables of royalty or nourished poor laborers. A food’s connection to history provided sufficient pedigree to render it worthy of preservation.

In Pokhlebkin’s earlier press articles, we also detect a deep respect for historical experience, particularly as he praised culinary customs from throughout the Soviet Union that appeared to him to have stood the test of time. For Pokhlebkin, the *pirog*—a pie of leavened dough enclosing a sweet or savory filling—represents one of the glories of the Russian table, since it “navigated all the vicissitudes of historical fate and happily escaped foreign influences.”<sup>711</sup> Even French-influenced and rather quotidian Chicken Kiev could be elevated through its connection to history, with Pokhlebkin taking the view that the dish originated in St. Petersburg in the 1830s, rather than in Kiev in the twentieth century.<sup>712</sup> Presumably, the later date of origin would have rendered the dish less desirable. Looking beyond the USSR’s Slavic lands in a 1973 article for *Nedelia* extolling the virtues of saltwater fish, Pokhlebkin fantasized that “surprising” but traditional dishes such as Estonian milk-and-fish soup and Turkmen fish with apricots might “become widespread” if Russians would only more boldly embrace a variety

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<sup>710</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Ukha,” *Sovetskii soiuz*, June 1971, 42-43; Pokhlebkin, “Kulebiaka,” *Sovetskii soiuz*, July 1971, 42; Pokhlebkin, “Nekvasnoi patriotizm,” *Ogonek*, June 1996, 44-45; Pokhlebkin, “Perlovka po-tsarski,” *Ogonek*, October 1996, 48-49.

<sup>711</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Pirogi,” *Nedelia*, 16-22 August 1971, 19.

<sup>712</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “O kotletakh,” *Nedelia*, 9-15 February 1976, 14-15.

of seafood dishes.<sup>713</sup> In a 1972 essay, he assured his reader that the “juicy and peculiar” names of Ukrainian dishes belie their simplicity, before going on to offer recipes for typical Ukrainian foods that had already become Soviet favorites: *borshch*, cherry-filled dumplings (*vareniki*), and dried-fruit compote (*uzvar*).<sup>714</sup> Pokhlebkin encouraged his Russian readers to become more knowledgeable about their national past, while also finding new ways of embracing the pleasures of the table. Historical knowledge could, Pokhlebkin seemed to suggest, make simple foods more delicious, satisfying, and enjoyable, as the strange grew familiar and the common became exotic.

Outlining the relationship he perceived between food and history, Pokhlebkin argued throughout his career that in order to properly prepare a given culture’s dishes one had to understand the people’s history and traditions. In his mind, cuisine functioned as a repository of cultural wisdom, a lens through which to see national identity more clearly, and an element of heritage that demands custodial care. And yet, the passage of time also worked to refine and perfect cuisines. Pokhlebkin, looking on one occasion outside Soviet borders, described Chinese cuisine as an “ancient” and sophisticated complex of techniques, ingredients, and dishes, contrasting this with American cuisine, which emerged much more recently and therefore better suits the fast-paced, impatient life of the twentieth century. As a consequence of its recent “formation,” American cooking is “unpalatable, unwholesome, and sometimes unhealthy.”<sup>715</sup> Taking this perspective, Pokhlebkin hinted at his discomfort with the role of modern science in the sphere of food and drink. In *Tea*, for example, he frequently praised Soviet advances, pointing to new achievements in growing and processing tea, and improvements in experts’

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<sup>713</sup> Pokhlebkin, “Dary Neptuna na nashem stole.”

<sup>714</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Ukrainskii obed,” *Nedelia*, 5-11 June 1972, 21.

<sup>715</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Kitaiskaia kukhnia,” *Aziia i Afrika segodnia*, April 1981, 50-52.

understanding of tea's properties. Yet Pokhlebkin simultaneously suggested that the "ancients," specifically the ancient Chinese, had already learned much of what modern scientists later labored to "discover." Although thermodynamics, for example, could explain the necessity of warming the teapot, tradition held fast: The teapot must still be treated according to customs as old as the act of drinking tea itself. Modern science had used its powers to reaffirm what those of past generations already knew, improving on this knowledge mostly by systematizing it.<sup>716</sup>

In his book-length works published later in the Soviet period, Pokhlebkin further committed to this vision of the deep connection between history, tradition, and good eating. In *The Secrets of Good Cooking*, he attacked doctors, nutritional scientists, and their influence on the Russian diet. Presaging arguments he would make in his post-Soviet writings, Pokhlebkin asserted that, while a doctor can describe the nutritional content of raw foods, only the cook, through the application of time-tested techniques, could make sure that the body absorbs these nutrients. Doctors cannot make food smell or taste good, but it is precisely these qualities that ensure that food will be truly healthful, sustaining the individual physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Pokhlebkin admonished his readers to heed advice stemming from culinary expertise and historical knowledge, rather than relying on the nutritional standards and standardized foods they found elsewhere. Aiming to undermine the authority of nutritional science, Pokhlebkin pointed to its tendency to make "zigzags," repeatedly changing position on whether a particular food is healthful or harmful.<sup>717</sup> He thus positioned *On Cooking from A to Z* (O kulinarii ot A do Ia, 1988), his final book-length work of the Soviet period, as a necessary

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<sup>716</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Chai*, 94, 65-73. Pokhlebkin held firm on this topic, insisting that proper care must be taken with brewing tea and handling the necessary equipment even in unusual circumstances, as when on an outdoors expedition. V.V. Pokhlebkin, "Kogda chai khorosh," *Turist* 2 (1980), 32.

<sup>717</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 25-26, 21.

tool for “preserving and strengthening the best national traditions,” which were crucial to the formation of “Soviet daily life.”<sup>718</sup> For Pokhlebkin, history and tradition represented the two forces that could provide a way out of consuming tasteless, low quality, poorly prepared foods. He desired to provide a necessary link for Soviet citizens to the principles and knowledge—in danger of being lost to time—that could provide them with a more joyful, satisfying, and delicious existence.

### **Modernity, “Tradition,” and the Limits of Social Critique**

At first glance, Pokhlebkin’s approach may seem antimodern in its focus on history and “traditional” foods. Yet his vision of a full and satisfying gastronomic life would be attainable only in a modern, literate society. His attitudes could be interpreted as anti-Soviet in their opposition to the modernization and industrialization of the diet. Soviet ideology and social norms, however, do find reflection in Pokhlebkin’s writings. Rather than engaging in a gastronomic rebellion, Pokhlebkin tested the boundaries of the permissible. In some instances, the principles he promoted and practiced even controverted his own rhetoric. Pursuing some of these seeming contradictions further illuminates Pokhlebkin’s engagement with his contemporary world and speaks to the role of food writing as a form of critique in Soviet Russia.

Rather than insisting on a wholesale return to “tradition,” Pokhlebkin offered his readers a means of embracing and revering their own national heritage while also exploring customs found in other regions. He presented these customs alongside one another in *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* and trumpeted the “true flowering” of national cultures under socialism.<sup>719</sup> He also

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<sup>718</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, *O kulinarii ot A do Ia: Slovar'-spravochnik* (Minsk: Polymia, 1988), 7.

<sup>719</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Natsional'nye kukhni*, 3.

propagated information intended to help his readers better understand and prepare dishes from throughout the Soviet Union and the world. Between 1970 and 1982, Pokhlebkin published approximately fifteen articles dealing specifically with Russian dining customs, in addition to a handful of articles on Ukrainian, Georgian, and Central Asian cuisines, topics on which he considered himself the reigning authority. Pokhlebkin did not limit himself to the USSR: He also wrote on Chinese cooking, penned the introduction to a Russian translation of a book on Scottish food, and translated a Finnish cookbook for publication in the Soviet Union.<sup>720</sup> He sought to make these foreign cuisines accessible, rather than accentuating their exoticism. Li Tsin's *The Dishes of Chinese Cuisine* (Bliuda kitaiskoi kukhni, 1981), which Pokhlebkin edited and introduced, offers simple yet unusual dishes adapted for the Soviet kitchen. For example, "Chicken in a Melon" demands nothing more than a small chicken, a large melon (within which the chicken is steamed), two tablespoons of dessert wine, and salt to taste. In the introduction to his translation of Hilikka Uusivirta's *Finnish Cuisine*, Pokhlebkin emphasized that one should focus not on the "most exotic" ingredients found in foreign dishes, but on the items that are the "most widespread in daily life," those that provide the foundation for the cuisine. To Pokhlebkin's mind, one does not find the entry point for another people's foodways in strange-sounding dishes, but in learning new ways of manipulating and combining a set of familiar and attainable ingredients.<sup>721</sup> Pokhlebkin did not encourage parochial eating, but the well-informed consumption of "authentic" dishes from around the world.

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<sup>720</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, introduction to *Bliuda kitaiskoi kukhni* by Tsin, 3-19; Pokhlebkin, "Kitaiskaia kukhnia"; Pokhlebkin, "Shotlandskaia kukhnia i kulinarne obychai shotlandtsev," in Uorren, *Shotlandskaia kukhnia*, 3-6; Hilikka Uusivirta, *Finskaia natsional'naia kukhnia*, trans. and ed. V. V. Pokhlebkin (Moscow: Legkaia i pishchevaia promyshlennost', 1982).

<sup>721</sup> Pokhlebkin, introduction to *Finnskaia kukhnia*, 34, 5.

Pokhlebkina's advocacy of historical traditions sometimes belied his promotion of certain innovations. For example, in encouraging Russians to begin cooking with saltwater fish, Pokhlebkina suggested finding a surrogate for the longstanding Russian custom of eating primarily lake and river fishes. In this case, he aligned with officials in Soviet trade and the food industry, whose efforts to promote seafood as an alternative to meat—an item frequently in shortage—reached new heights in the 1970s.<sup>722</sup> Unlike these officials, however, Pokhlebkina promoted *only* the home preparation of dishes found various national cuisines, rather than the consumption of pre-prepared and factory-made fish products in a cafeteria setting.<sup>723</sup> Pokhlebkina also urged the use of accessible, affordable sugar (rather than traditional honey) to make preserves, and experimentation with salting a variety of fruits and vegetables, rather than sticking to the customary preserved cucumbers, cabbage, and mushrooms of old Russian cuisine.<sup>724</sup> Here, Pokhlebkina bowed to realities facing Soviet consumers—limited supply, unpredictable selection, and, often, a lack of choice—and sought means of retaining long-time kitchen favorites, such as raspberry jam, while also exploring unfamiliar or less often used foods, which happened to be available in Soviet stores. Although he often rejected elements of culinary modernization, such as cafeteria fare and prepared foods, Pokhlebkina did not advocate a return to the past insofar as that would be shutting oneself off from preparing and eating nourishing and enjoyable dishes from throughout the Soviet Union and abroad.

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<sup>722</sup> As noted in chapter 1, the Brezhnev years saw a high point in the state's promotion of saltwater fish and other seafoods, which trade and food industry officials attempted to use to make up for ongoing shortages of meat in the Soviet food system.

<sup>723</sup> Pokhlebkina, "Labardan ili treska"; Pokhlebkina, "Dary Neptuna na nashem stole."

<sup>724</sup> V.V. Pokhlebkina, "Varen'e," *Nedelia*, 20-26 September 1971, 14; Pokhlebkina, "Solen'ia," *Nedelia*, 18-24 September 1972, 14-15.

Further, Pokhlebkina demanded his readers assimilate a great deal of information as part of the ongoing “internationalization” of culinary knowledge. For example, in *The Secrets of Good Cooking* Pokhlebkina calls on Soviet home cooks to learn both technique and historical narrative in order to “literately” (*gramotno*) prepare tasty and healthy meals. He explains that, in the past, the strong continuity of cultural traditions allowed some “illiterate old ladies” to cook well with little apparent effort, but a person who has no experience of these customs—such, he implies, as the average Soviet home cook—must study and practice in order to acquire such skills.<sup>725</sup> Pokhlebkina makes the case for a project of internationalization in *On Cooking from A to Z*. With this book, Pokhlebkina responded to reader requests that he compile his series of “culinary encyclopedia” articles, originally published in Soviet periodicals, into a book-length publication. In the introduction, Pokhlebkina wrote of the importance of making information about foods, cooking methods, and cookware “international,” in order to further mutual understanding and to improve both home cooking and professional gastronomy.<sup>726</sup> Finally, Pokhlebkina embraced certain aspects of modern food supply in his own life, as in his reliance on store-bought (rather than homemade) bread.<sup>727</sup> Pokhlebkina instructed his readers to use the contemporary world’s advantages wisely, exploring them with a critical eye and without rejecting established tradition.

For all the breadth of Pokhlebkina’s writing on ethnic cuisines, his approach reflected the Slavocentric (if not wholly Russocentric) conception of Soviet identity that persisted in Soviet

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<sup>725</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*, 5, 7-8, 27-28.

<sup>726</sup> Pokhlebkina, *O kulinarii ot A do Ia*, 3-7.

<sup>727</sup> Avgust recalls fetching bread from Moscow on a regular basis when he worked as a courier for his father. Pokhlebkina, interview. Ronald Feldstein has noted Pokhlebkina’s apparent ignorance of bread baking. Feldstein, “Introduction to William Pokhlebkina.”



food writing. *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* was published in Russian and several foreign languages, as noted above, but not in any of the languages of the USSR's other national groups, unlike his other works, some of which appeared in Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Tatar, and Moldavian.<sup>728</sup> Pokhlebkin's national cuisines writings spoke to the linguistic majority of this multiethnic state and to foreigners, but not necessarily to the peoples whose cuisines the author aimed to document. Although "Soviet experts emphasized that Soviet cuisine was a combination of all that was the best in the culinary traditions of various Soviet nations," these nations did not enjoy equal status in the culinary sphere as it existed in the state's political center.<sup>729</sup> Soviet cuisine remained for Pokhlebkin a subject defined by and for the political and linguistic majority.

If we set aside his gastronomic historicism, Pokhlebkin appears to have moved only a step or two beyond common representations of Soviet national cuisines. By and large, he embraced the dominant gastronomic hierarchy of nations, prioritizing Slavic cuisines, with Caucasian and Central Asian cuisines coming in second.<sup>730</sup> Russian-Israeli writer Zeev Vol'fson did credit Pokhlebkin with being the first person to suggest to him the notion that a "Jewish national cuisine" existed and, indeed, Pokhlebkin's treatment in *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* of Jewish cookery represents one of the only mentions of specifically Jewish food culture to appear in a mainstream Soviet cookbook before the late 1980s.<sup>731</sup> Yet in this work

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<sup>728</sup> Several of Pokhlebkin's book-length Soviet-era publications appeared in Soviet languages other than Russian: *Tea* (Tatar, 1973), *All About Spices* (Estonian, 1983), and *Cooking is Fun* (Lithuanian, 1986). *The Secrets of Good Cooking* enjoyed the largest number of non-Russian Soviet editions, appearing in Lithuanian (1982 and 1987), Latvian (1982), and Moldavian (1990). *Bibliografiia proizvedenii*, 59, 61, 66-68.

<sup>729</sup> Gronow and Zhuravlev, "Book of Tasty and Healthy Food," 52.

<sup>730</sup> Gronow and Zhuravlev note that major Soviet cookbooks prioritized Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian dishes, although "Soviet experts never emphasized this fact." Ibid. On Georgian cuisine's rise to prominence in the Soviet Union, see Scott, "Edible Ethnicity," 831-58. On national cuisines also see chapter 2.

<sup>731</sup> Zeev Vol'fson, "Vil'iam Pokhlebkin i evreiskaia kukhnia," *Narod moi* 19, 407 (October 2007), <http://www.jew.spb.ru/ami/A407/A407-031.html>. Alice Nakhimovsky identifies the lack of Jewish cookbooks in the

Pokhlebkina tied food practices to specific geographical regions and therefore presented Jewish cookery as a specialty continuous with the Jewish Autonomous Republic in Siberia—he placed it alongside Mongolian and “Subarctic” cooking—rather than a culture existing throughout the USSR and abroad. Since the editorial records for this book were not archived, we cannot know for certain whether Pokhlebkina or an editor made this decision regarding the location of Jewish cuisine in this text. While Pokhlebkina’s inclusion of Jewish cooking suggests a willingness to address a potentially taboo subject, the text’s arrangement demotes Jewish culture somewhat, suggesting a denial of its existence in the country’s center.

As to the role of gender, Pokhlebkina’s work existed in a somewhat ambiguous relationship to Soviet norms. Pokhlebkina did not endorse the “liberation” of anyone, let alone women, from the kitchen, thereby breaking with an understanding of women’s “emancipation” that persisted in official policy throughout the late Soviet period.<sup>732</sup> Rather, he felt that his readers—men and women alike—ought to reject the resources the state offered them to ease their domestic burdens, such as cafeterias and convenience foods. His cookbooks did not necessarily assume his readership to be female, as did much earlier cooking advice literature, such as *The Book of Delicious and Healthy Food*, and many Brezhnev-era publications targeting the “housewife.”<sup>733</sup> Pokhlebkina most often addressed himself first and foremost to the “reader” (*chitatel’*) as in the introduction to *Cooking is Fun*, where he spoke to all “eaters,” even those

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Soviet Union as symptomatic of a larger effort to hide Jewishness, including the Jewishness of particular foods, in the postwar Soviet Union. Foods were renamed, stripped of their association with Jewish culture, and became detached from their significance in Jewish ritual. Nakhimovsky, “Russian Jews Reclaim their Foodways,” 67-70.

<sup>732</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>733</sup> On the intended audience for *The Book of Delicious and Healthy Food*, see Geist, “Cooking Bolshevik,” 309. On cookbooks targeting the housewife, see chapter 3.

who did not already cook for themselves.<sup>734</sup> Most generally, Pokhlebkin believed that everyone—male and female—should know how to cook. Kitchen know-how represented, for him, a critical life skill, as well as a means of preserving national culture, a task that fell to all members of the society. Appropriately, Pokhlebkin dominated his own home kitchen. Twice divorced, he spent much of his mature life living as a bachelor, and even when with his family, he remained in charge of culinary matters.<sup>735</sup>

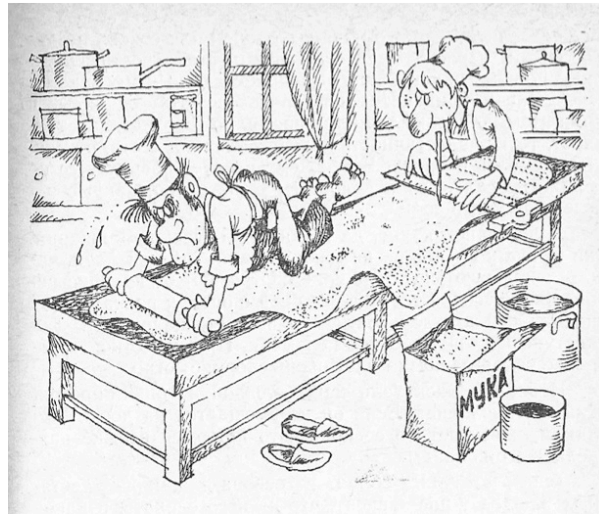
Pokhlebkin was not immune to dominant understandings of Soviet gender roles, in which women handled home cooking. He sometimes directed his comments at the *khoziaika*, especially in his articles for *Nedelia*, which appeared under the “For the Home and the Family” heading in a section aimed at female readers. His books also featured gendered imagery, such as drawings depicting home cooks as females and professional chefs as males. Women smiled and blushed in aprons, while men ran the show in professional kitchens, decked out in tall hats, as in the images from *Cooking is Fun* and *The Secrets of Good Cooking* presented in figures 10 and 11.



**Figure 10** A cheerful woman prepares a meal in a modest home kitchen in Pokhlebkin, *Zanimatel'naia kulinariia*.

<sup>734</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Zanimatel'naia kulinariia*, 3.

<sup>735</sup> Pokhlebkin, interview.



**Figure 11** Two male chefs toil over a batch of dough in Pokhlebkina, *Tainy khoroshei kukhni*.

While such illustrations reflect not only Pokhlebkina's preferences, but also those of the publishing house, they do express the general understanding—discussed in chapter 3—of the Soviet home kitchen as a female space, as opposed to the largely male sphere of professional culinary expertise (to which Pokhlebkina himself belonged).<sup>736</sup> Although Pokhlebkina believed that both women *and men* should take responsibility for their own diets, his writings fell into a genre understood as feminine and therefore also aligned with Soviet gender norms, which expected wives and mothers to handle food procurement and preparation, in addition to their responsibilities outside of the home. He challenged not the established gender order, in which Soviet women shouldered a double burden of domestic and professional responsibilities, but rather the normalization of poor food standards in public dining and in Soviet homes.

<sup>736</sup> Authors submitting manuscripts to Food Industry publishers were asked to also submit illustrations, which would then be reviewed and accepted or rejected by the Art Director, as stated in a 1965 directive to the publishing house staff. The illustrations in these volumes are not Pokhlebkina's own and, since the editorial records of these publishing houses were not archived, we cannot know with any certainty whether he had a hand in their production. If those involved followed publishing procedure, Pokhlebkina would have at the very least seen the illustration before the manuscript was submitted for publication. According to his son, Avgust, Pokhlebkina could be very demanding about the appearance of his books. It may thus be safe to assume that the images represent some kind of compromise between author, illustrator, and publishing house staff. GARF, f. R-9659, op. 2, d. 69, l. 90; Pokhlebkina, interview.

For all his efforts to change the way his readers approached food and cooking, Pokhlebkina remained tied to the realities of late Soviet life. Although constantly promoting gastronomic historicism, Pokhlebkina tempered his convictions by accepting some elements of innovation. Similarly, he combined his desire for a return to native customs with a belief that Soviet home cooks would benefit in both intellectual and alimentary terms from better understanding the cultures of their neighbors inside and outside of the USSR. Further, while he hinted that all people (men included) ought to take responsibility for cooking and eating good food, his books sometimes affirmed women's primary responsibility for the home kitchen. Food writing, particularly in Pokhlebkina's case, could and did provide a platform for critiquing contemporary customs. While Pokhlebkina's demand for "historically correct" cooking flew in the face of much of mainstream Soviet food culture—which still touted the modernization, industrialization, and medicalization of the diet—his cookbooks and culinary prose continued in certain ways to reinforce the status quo. This stems at least in part from Pokhlebkina's own convictions and practices, and in part from the necessary ceding of some control to censors, editors, and publishers. Yet the intrusion of Soviet reality into Pokhlebkina's ideal gastronomic landscape also speaks more generally to the limitations of food writing as social critique. A food writer must, in order to render his or her texts practical, acknowledge the conditions of everyday life and the character of their potential readership. Demanding too much in terms of cooking in a "historical" manner or fighting too hard against popular practice and belief would have rendered Pokhlebkina's texts objects of curiosity (if they were published at all), rather than useful tools for kitchen labor. Instead of dealing in fantasy, Pokhlebkina chose compromise and with this a greater ability to shape what his readers put on the table.<sup>737</sup>

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<sup>737</sup> This recognition of reality sets Pokhlebkina's works apart, of course, from the earlier "Socialist Realist" school of

## Conclusion

In the Brezhnev era, Pokhlebkin's cookbooks and gastronomic prose embodied a new current in Soviet food writing, advocating cultural renovation through a recapturing of national traditions and lost wisdom. While other food writers, such as those discussed in chapter 2, took part in this movement, Pokhlebkin has remained its most prominent representative. Pokhlebkin's cuisine was not the monolithic pan-Soviet diet of sweetened-condensed milk and variations of salad Olivier we find codified in today's Soviet nostalgia cookbooks.<sup>738</sup> It represents neither the science-and-industry gospel of Stalin-era socialist realist foodways nor the powdered-soup "rationality" of the Khrushchev era. Rather, Pokhlebkin's vision aimed to bring together the best aspects of each national cuisine, of each national culture, allowing the peoples of the Soviet Union to develop a sense of shared national identity not through homogenization, but through the recognition of distinction, a respect for difference, and the embrace of their shared investment in good health, happiness, and the perpetuation of cultural traditions. Moreover, in championing tradition, packing his books with historical information, and appearing to unmask truths about foods familiar and forgotten, Pokhlebkin sought to recalibrate his reader's conceptions of authority in the culinary realm. Soviet citizens, should, in Pokhlebkin's view, move away from trendy diets and convenience foods, instead returning to (or creating anew) a life in which good food, properly and lovingly prepared, plays a key role. He thus largely rejected the earlier

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food writing, represented most notably by *The Book of Delicious and Healthy Food*. As I demonstrate in chapter 6, Pokhlebkin continued, even after his death, to be a major presence in the Russian gastronomic imagination. To date, all of his food-related books remain in print.

<sup>738</sup> See, for example, Vail' and Genis, *Russkaia kukhnia v izgnanii*; Levintov, *Kniga o vkusnoi zhizni*. Like most nostalgia cookbooks, recent scholarship on Soviet cuisine tends to focus on iconic Soviet dishes, such as salad Olivier (*salat Oliv'e*) or Georgian-style chicken *tabaka*. Kushkova, "At the Center of the Table"; Lebina, *Entsiklopediia banal'nostei*.

“rationalist” paradigm in which dining required constant expert mediation by food industry officials, nutritional scientists, and food service workers. Pokhlebkin turned his back on these received authorities, cataloguing instead the fundamental skills and information necessary to eat and live well independently of Soviet specialists.

Pokhlebkin did not want his readers flying blind in the kitchen, of course, and he accordingly gave extensive advice and the constant assurance that not only his own expertise, but also centuries of human experience have thoroughly tested all of his recipes. Although tradition rested at the heart of Pokhlebkin’s project, he neither defined this concept, nor pinpointed a crossover point between the traditional and the modern. Rather, in treating food as traditional, Pokhlebkin offers tacit approval, identifying the items as sufficiently historical. In this, his approach to tradition conforms to folklorist Lin T. Humphrey’s assessment of popular uses of the notion of “tradition” in American culture. She writes, “where we find traditional recipes and food stories, ‘traditional foods’ may refer to either the kind of heritage or history that we actually had or the one we wish we had. When we label food traditional it is usually a mark of approval.”<sup>739</sup> Pokhlebkin, in this way, also introduced himself as a necessary intermediary for the reader, a sage who could interpret past and present cuisines, identifying the best foodstuffs, dishes, and means of cooking and eating.

Taking this approach, Pokhlebkin rearranged the hierarchy of trust and authority that existed in the Soviet kitchen.<sup>740</sup> From the 1930s through the late-1960s, science, medicine, and

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<sup>739</sup> Humphrey, “Traditional Foods? Traditional Values?” 162-69.

<sup>740</sup> This portion of my analysis draws on the ideas of historian of science Steven Shapin. He argues that, in the “credibility-economy,” claims to authority can be strengthened in two different ways through different modes of accessibility: “On the one hand, where we have independent access to the ‘facts of the matter,’ we may be able to use that knowledge to gauge the claims of experts. On the other hand, the representation of expert knowledge as far beyond lay accessibility can serve as a recommendation for its own truth.” Steven Shapin, *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as if It was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 30. Elsewhere, Shapin

industry reigned supreme, with countless experts offering advice that claimed to tap into this necessary body of knowledge. In Pokhlebkina's conception, however, history and experience appeared at the top of the hierarchy, while his own writings served as the ultimate conduit for this information. Pokhlebkina's work thus attempted to alter one of the trust relationships that guided food choices within the Soviet Union. He sought to undermine the reader's faith in scientists, doctors, and industry, while establishing his own credibility through his historical and culinary expertise. Having thus demonstrated his authority, Pokhlebkina granted access to this font of wisdom, thereby empowering the reader in gastronomic matters. Pokhlebkina revealed, to echo historian of science Steven Shapin, "the facts of the matter," offering his reader the tools he or she would need to navigate (or abandon) the complex world of modern, urban food culture.<sup>741</sup>

The fact that Pokhlebkina's message held—and, as the following chapter demonstrates, continues to hold—so much appeal for Soviet, later Russian, citizens may point to an ambivalence toward the advances of the modern era, at least in the sphere of food culture. Had all his readers retained their faith in science and industry, had they been comfortable with allowing these entities to put food on their plates, Pokhlebkina's arguments would likely have fallen on deaf ears. Portions of the Soviet public proved ready to follow Pokhlebkina on a search for a new authority, a new source of knowledge, one that they could trust not only to fill their stomachs, but also to offer a better way of living. This search led them into the past, with Pokhlebkina playing a prominent role in bringing the late Soviet "historical turn" into the home kitchen. Pokhlebkina's culinary historicism tapped into the desire of many of his readers to

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argues that much of our "knowledge" comes not from direct experience, but rather is mediated by relationships of trust that exist between ourselves and various authorities: specific individuals, certain categories of people, and also institutions or groups of individuals. Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3-41.

<sup>741</sup> Shapin, *Never Pure*, 30.



reclaim a lost or vanishing national heritage, and with it their health, their happiness, and their *kasha*.

## CHAPTER 6

### DOWN WITH “CULINARY STUPIDITY”: V. V. POKHLEBKIN AT HOME AND ABROAD SINCE 1991

In March 2000, an unknown assailant stabbed V. V. Pokhlebkina to death in his Podol'sk apartment. Pokhlebkina's body remained undiscovered for some time—possibly as long as three weeks—before his editor prompted local police to enter the apartment in early April.<sup>742</sup> The murder, which remains unsolved, attracted a great deal of press attention and a considerable amount of speculation. Most observers insist that the crime started as a robbery.<sup>743</sup> Pokhlebkina possessed a valuable collection of books, in addition to large sums of cash and various rare items related to his work as a historian, such as certificates of heraldry. Whether or not such objects as rare books and heraldic paraphernalia would have ultimately proven useful to a thief, they could very well have attracted unwanted attention from local criminals. Indeed, investigators took the robbery theory seriously enough that they decided to hold Pokhlebkina's *ex libris* stamp as evidence, though it remains unclear whether the attackers actually took anything.<sup>744</sup> The elderly Pokhlebkina had long feared theft and violence, at least once describing himself as a “slave” to his library, and on another occasion refusing to receive telegrams about meetings in Moscow, as such documents might give bandits the knowledge they needed to steal his books while he was

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<sup>742</sup> *Smert' kulinar; Aleksandr Evtushenko, “A telo prolezhalo v kvartire tri nedeli,” Komsomol'skaia pravda, 21 April 2000.*

<sup>743</sup> On theories about Pokhlebkina's death, see, for example: *Smert' kulinar; Roman Ukolov, ““Knizhnyi' grabezh zakonchilsia ubiistvom,” Segodnia, 17 April 2000; Pivovarov, “Smert' po retseptu.”*

<sup>744</sup> Pokhlebkina, interview.

out.<sup>745</sup> Some have even suggested that, since Pokhlebkin assiduously guarded access to his home, he must have known his attacker.<sup>746</sup> Investigators have yet to definitively confirm these theories and it appears they never will. Instead, Pokhlebkin's final work, *Cuisine of the Century* (Kukhnia veka, 2000), unfinished at the time of his death, serves as his epitaph, fittingly, as it provides a sweeping history of twentieth-century Russian and European cuisines.

Still, *Cuisine of the Century* and the mystery surrounding his demise by no means represent Pokhlebkin's only contributions to post-Soviet Russian culture. The very fact that the murder of a historian-turned-food writer garnered such extensive attention—inspiring numerous news stories and multiple television specials—speaks to his significance in post-Soviet Russia. Much of this owed to the fame he earned as a food writer both in the Soviet period and after. Adding to his already impressive *oeuvre*, Pokhlebkin penned well over a thousand pages on the histories and practices of Russian and world cuisines between 1991 and 2000. During these years, he continued to work toward his goal of teaching the Russian public to live well by embracing their heritage and learning to enjoy home cooking and good food. Even after his death, Pokhlebkin still held a prominent place in the world of Russian gastronomy, with his image and his culinary writings drawing a thread of continuity through the final decades of the twentieth-century and the first decade of the twenty-first.

In this chapter, I follow the development of Pokhlebkin's thought in his post-Soviet publications, in addition to examining both reactions to his work at home and also the relationship between Pokhlebkin's ideas and developments in other world food cultures.

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<sup>745</sup> Irina Pulia, "Ubili Pokhlebkina," *Trud*, 18 May 2000; Mushkina, *Taina kurlandskogo piroga*, 303.

<sup>746</sup> One of the few journalists to interview Pokhlebkin at his home in Podol'sk contends that Pokhlebkin must have known his killer and allowed him into his home. The journalist, who declined to be named in this work, expressed this opinion to myself and linguist Ronald Feldstein. Interview with A. R., Moscow, 25 June 2011; Ronald Feldstein to author, 3 November 2011. This theory is also presented in *Smert' kulinara*.

Focusing on Pokhlebkin's publications of the 1990s, I demonstrate the intensification of his nationalist sentiments and the ongoing importance of his gastronomic historicism in the post-Soviet context. To this end, I explore his book-length works, such as the internationally recognized *A History of Vodka* (Istoriia vodki, 1991), and press columns, as well as press articles about Pokhlebkin. In order to delve further into the reception and resonance of Pokhlebkin's work and the development of his public image, I discuss controversies surrounding *Tea: Its Types, Properties, and Use* (originally published in 1968) and *A History of Vodka*, which came to light in the 1990s and after his death. Finally, I outline the place of his culinary thought in the larger world of international food writing in the late twentieth century, making use of recent scholarship on world food cultures and the works of American and British culinary experts.

During the 1990s, Pokhlebkin espoused gastronomic historicism and nationalism to anchor the national community, which appeared under threat from economic instability, foreign influence, and the degradation of culture and morality. He claimed that the circumstances of life in post-Soviet Russia demanded individuals take control of their diets and work to understand how to eat well on a tight budget. Pokhlebkin's concerns connected directly with the difficulties many Russians faced during and after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Shortages and dysfunctional distribution had long been a regular part of Soviet life, forcing citizens to stand in line, use connections to obtain deficit goods, and improvise in the kitchen. Reform only intensified these problems. Under Gorbachev, production declined and queues for necessary goods grew longer. Debt and inflation ballooned, and the state and Party grew less and less capable of managing agriculture or state enterprises.<sup>747</sup> The subsequent economic turmoil of the

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<sup>747</sup> Stephen Lovell, *The Shadow of War: Russia and the USSR, 1931 to the Present* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 93-96; Peter Gattrell, "Economic and Demographic Change: Russia's Age of Economic Extremes," in *Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 3, ed. Suny, 404-6.

1990s left many Russians going hungry or lining up for soup kitchens, while new elites dined out in opulent restaurants or gorged themselves on imported delicacies.<sup>748</sup> The 1990s and early 2000s also brought major changes to Russian food culture through increased business contacts with former foes, such as the United States, revelations in the press about environmental disasters, and growing awareness of the counterfeiting and adulteration of food and drink products.<sup>749</sup> The former Soviet Union was awash, it seemed, in Big Macs, radioactive mushrooms, and toxic vodka.<sup>750</sup> Pokhlebkin offered a means of coping with this deeply troubling situation.

Growing out of his responses to the conditions of Soviet life under Brezhnev, Pokhlebkin's concerns segued neatly into critiques of *perestroika* and post-Soviet society, while also mirroring trends taking hold elsewhere in the world. The ongoing popularity of Pokhlebkin's works and his lasting legacy in Russia today speak to the ability of his ideas to resonate with a Russian public that craved calm and continuity. The concerns that fueled the Brezhnev era search for stability flowed steadily into the anxieties of the post-Soviet period. Meanwhile, parallels between Pokhlebkin's ideas and public discourses about food in Europe and America suggest that, in certain ways, Soviet Russian and some foreign food cultures

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<sup>748</sup> Donald J. Raleigh offers a concise overview of economic hardship in the 1990s in *Soviet Baby Boomers*, 312-13. Also see Gattrell, "Economic and Demographic Change," 406-9. On daily life, poverty, and the second economy in post-Soviet Russia, see Caldwell, *Not by Bread Alone*; Simon Clarke, *Making Ends Meet in Contemporary Russia: Secondary Employment, Subsidiary Agriculture and Social Networks* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2002); Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours*; Ries, *Russian Talk*; Boym, *Common Places*.

<sup>749</sup> Caldwell, "Domesticating the French Fry"; Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 373-400; Sarah Drue Phillips, "Half-lives and Healthy Bodies: Discourses on 'Contaminated' Food and Healing in Post-Chernobyl Ukraine," in *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader*, ed. James L. Watson and Melissa L. Caldwell (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005): 286-98; Jane Zavisca, "Contesting Capitalism at the Post-Soviet Dacha: The Meaning of Food Cultivation for Urban Russians," *Slavic Review* 62, 4 (2003): 800; Caldwell, *Dacha Idylls*, 84-93.

<sup>750</sup> Moonshine, often produced by impoverished pensioners, and adulterated vodka smuggled into Russia to avoid alcohol taxes killed numerous Russian citizens during the 1990s and 2000s. Patricia Herlihy, *Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 160-62. Pokhlebkin penned two articles on counterfeit tea and vodka in 1995: V. V. Pokhlebkin, "Fal'shivyi chai: Kak rasposoznat' ego?" *Kuranty*, 12 September 1995, 8; Pokhlebkin, "Zla vodka, kogda ee delaiut takoi," *Kuranty*, 6 April 1995, 7.

evolved in tandem, responding to similar impulses and anxieties. Rather than an isolated phenomenon of the age of “developed socialism,” gastronomic historicism represents the culinary facet of a search for roots that took place throughout the industrialized world in the late twentieth century; studying this development reveals commonalities between seemingly diverse geographic and temporal spaces.

### **Russia vs. “Culinary Degradation”**

In the 1990s, a time when many Russians faced hunger and others turned their backs on home cooking, Pokhlebkin encouraged his readers to return to their kitchens and their Russian roots. Each person ought, he asserted, “to know about, study, and love the cuisine of their country as a critical element of national culture, as a vital, practical connection with their people, and with their people’s past and future.”<sup>751</sup> During the decade between the first appearance of *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* in 1978 and the publication of *On Cooking from A to Z* in 1988, Pokhlebkin’s historico-gastronomical mission oriented more on teaching mutual understanding than promoting an explicitly or specifically Russian nationalism.<sup>752</sup> In the early 1990s, however, his focus on Russian national culture intensified. In several of his major works of this period, Pokhlebkin still encouraged his readers to embrace the best that other cultures had to offer, but he now emphasized more heavily the importance of resurrecting and defending Russian cuisine and culture. Accordingly, he criticized any developments in Russia’s history that appeared, in his view, to have deformed national character or customs. Fearing the decline of

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<sup>751</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 1999), 49. This is a collection of previously unpublished recipes and essays Pokhlebkin wrote during the 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>752</sup> Avgust Pokhlebkin described *National Cuisines* as an “appeal to ethnic tolerance.” Pokhlebkin, interview.

Russian culture and morality, Pokhlebkin sought to use the kitchen as a way to give the nation much-needed stability, something that Russia's leaders seemed incapable of providing.

As before, Pokhlebkin celebrated and privileged Russian foods, but in the 1990s he went further, encouraging his readers to prioritize eating foods from their "own" national cuisine. In *My Cuisine and My Menu* (*Moia kukhnia i moe menu*, 1999), Pokhlebkin sets forth this view in his discussion of first courses, calling for the resurrection of the art of soup-making. While the country had once had one of the richest varieties of soups in the world, few Russians now consumed these dishes on a regular basis and most housewives tended to "systematically break" all of the rules that guide proper soup cookery. This, in Pokhlebkin's mind, not only made for a poorer diet, but also had the potential to degrade national identity, chipping away at the bedrock of Russian food traditions. Later, discussing grain porridges, Pokhlebkin railed against the common perception of *kashi* as crude, overly simple, or somehow unhealthy. Such mistaken prejudices point to a move backward in cuisine, an evolutionary malformation. In order to live well and perpetuate Russian national culture, people must embrace the old proverb, "Without kasha, supper isn't supper." In some cases, rediscovering knowledge of traditional food culture could even ward off death and disaster: Pokhlebkin claims that many cases of mushroom poisoning could be prevented if people only retained age-old wisdom about how to correctly prepare these beloved forest delicacies.<sup>753</sup> For Pokhlebkin, much of Russianness resided in cuisine, and this included both a connection to the past and an ability to apply practical, culinary know-how in daily life. Each step away from old food customs, which Russians rich and poor formerly embraced, dealt a blow to national health and identity.

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<sup>753</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe menu*, 245-46, 19, 15-17, 36, 155.

So tight were the connections between food culture and national identity, in Pokhlebkin's view, that he could use a particular food to describe Russian "national character." In one of his first essays for *Ogonek*—a popular illustrated periodical to which he contributed over a dozen articles between 1996 and 1998—Pokhlebkin used kvas to outline the key markers of Russianness. Russians' "slovenliness and carelessness" left grain to grow damp and begin to ferment in clay pots; Russians then saved the grain through their characteristic desire to "make use of a worthless item"; and, finally, Russian "genius" transformed this mess into a beverage that would nourish Slavs for centuries to come. Kvas, Pokhlebkin asserted simply, "developed along with Russia." Placing this depiction of kvas in a larger debate, ongoing in *Ogonek* at the time, about American soft drinks in Russia, he further rejected the notion that cola drinks represented the future, insisting that "one cannot frame a question about food products like that. All well-known, good, natural products are old. And all so-called new products are artificial. Man, not nature, made them."<sup>754</sup> Closing with a recipe for kvas, Pokhlebkin encouraged his readers to engage in cultural preservation at home. Rather than consuming "sterile" American colas or counterfeit mineral water (the subject of another article in the same issue of *Ogonek*), Pokhlebkin hoped, one might subvert the false, unwholesome new dietary order and thereby work to preserve national and individual wellbeing.

In the 1990s, Pokhlebkin also published works on Russia's other "national drinks," vodka and tea, seeking to anchor their privileged places in Russian culture. In *A History of Vodka*, Pokhlebkin set about defining vodka as exclusively Russian. Describing Moscow-region river water as one of the key ingredients that renders vodka authentic, he labels the products of European and North American liquor firms "pseudo-vodkas," since they use different raw

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<sup>754</sup> Pokhlebkin, "Nekvasnoi patriotizm."



materials.<sup>755</sup> According to Pokhlebkina, we can draw a direct line from the murky, impure distilled liquors of old Muscovy to the contents of Soviet “Moscow Special” bottles. As he asserts in a revised edition of *A History of Vodka* published in 1992, modern vodka—flavorless, odorless, and consistent—represented simply the “ideal form” of a “national beverage,” the “logical result of its earlier evolution.”<sup>756</sup> Pokhlebkina attributed the Gorbachev government’s decision to reduce vodka production to the stupidity and ignorance of a regime blind of the workings of history. Pokhlebkina also longed for a tea of Russia’s own and grew bitter at the decline of domestic production after the Soviet collapse. In a revised 1995 edition of his 1968 book *Tea*, Pokhlebkina blamed the former Soviet republic of Georgia for the fact that Russia now had to import tea. He declared that Georgia’s leaders wanted to live off the labor of others, allowing their republic to be the “spoiled daughter” of the USSR. Wrongly, Pokhlebkina claims that Georgians did not drink tea. Expanding on this, he contends that they therefore did not want Russians to have it and consequently sabotaged production.<sup>757</sup> Vodka and tea formed an important part of Russians’ cultural heritage and Pokhlebkina now saw it as his duty to attack those he held responsible for shortages of these products or for their declining quality.

Pokhlebkina believed that Russian culinary culture as a whole—not only Russia’s favorite drinks—faced a threat from foreign influence and interference. In *Cuisine of the Century*,

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<sup>755</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkina, *Istoriia vodki* (Moscow: Inter-verso, 1991), 236. The only foreign vodka Pokhlebkina praises is the Finnish Finladia brand, but even this falls short of the mark, since the Finns use a different rye and thereby create a vodka that lacks the “characteristic rye taste of the Russian cereal.”

<sup>756</sup> William Pokhlebkina, *A History of Vodka*, trans. Renfrey Clarke (London: Verso, 1992), 144. The English language edition of Pokhlebkina’s book differs little from the original in terms of content, though the book’s organizational structure has been streamlined and clarifying statements, such as the one quoted here, were added throughout.

<sup>757</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkina, “Chai, ego tipy, svoistva, upotreblenie,” in *Chai i vodka v istorii Rossii* (Krasnoarsk: Krasnoarskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1995), 288. This is a revised edition of *Chai, ego tipy, svoistva, upotreblenie*, published together with *Istoriia vodki*. Darra Goldstein notes that tea, introduced in the nineteenth century, developed a strong presence in Georgia during the Soviet era when the Georgia was the USSR’s leading tea producer. Goldstein, *Georgian Feast*, 6.

Pokhlebkin asserted that, after the Soviet collapse, many young people had turned their backs on national tradition in order to ape Western habits. Imported packaged and prepared foods, in particular, became fashionable and desirable; Pokhlebkin interpreted this phenomenon as a symptom of laziness and ignorance. Many urban dwellers did not want to “waste” time preparing their own meals and, enamored of Western culture and the ease of consuming fast food, began to subsist almost exclusively on foreign-made junk food and domestic imitations. Not only young people, but also adult members of the intelligentsia contributed to “culinary degradation” through their reliance on bad tea, cheap sandwiches, and large quantities of sausage. Pokhlebkin further condemned many new dining establishments claiming to serve Russian cuisine. Quick-fix eatery chains such as Russian Bistro (*Russkoe bistro*) offered, in Pokhlebkin’s view, “fake,” “vulgar” dishes of a quality even lower than the “worst train station restaurants of the Soviet period.” False folksy decor, a dearth of fresh produce, a reliance on pre-prepared items, and low sanitary standards marked these supposedly authentic restaurants as “pseudo-Russian” and “eclectic.” The new class of wealthy elites set their own course, but they too turned their backs on Russian cuisine, preferring to do everything with a “foreign accent.”<sup>758</sup>

Pokhlebkin’s concern for Russian tradition also fed into his responses to the economic upheavals of the first post-Soviet decade. He thus decried the role of income inequality in destroying Russian cuisine, writing in *Cuisine of the Century* of the creation in the 1990s of two different Russian cuisines: one for the rich and one for the poor. The cuisine of poverty relied on root vegetables, cabbage, and onion, supplemented with small amounts of dairy, vegetable oil, and sugar, while the cuisine of affluence featured a wide variety of high-quality meats, seafood,

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<sup>758</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 382-86, 389, 393. Pokhlebkin denied that sausage had any place on the Russian table, decrying it as foreign (“English-German”) and unhealthy. V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Chuzhdoe pivo i vrazhdebnaia kolbasa,” *Ogonek*, May 1997, 54-55.

produce, and dairy products, but tended to lack an understanding of authentic cuisine. Public dining contributed to this division, with the lower classes embracing fast food and the upper classes dining out in chic, eclectic restaurants. These were both “cosmopolitan cocktails,” Pokhlebkin asserted, “alien, not of our country, not native.” Economic weakness, a fascination with Western goods, the loss of important agricultural regions (e.g., Ukraine and Kazakhstan), and a new need to import grain and other goods created a situation in which Russian products and dishes began to fade into the background even more than they had in the Soviet era.<sup>759</sup> Pokhlebkin had condemned a perceived turn away from tradition in the Soviet period, but the new capitalist era appeared to offer even greater threats to national culinary heritage and national identity. Russians, in his view, needed more than ever to return to their past in order to preserve their culture and their very Russianness.

More concerned with average people than new Russian elites, Pokhlebkin sought to soften the effects of poverty—for individuals and Russian culture in general—by providing advice on making-do with scarce and unpredictable resources. Pokhlebkin had long been concerned with affordability and accessibility, offering advice on how to work with low-quality ingredients and emphasizing the need for economy in the home during the Soviet era.<sup>760</sup> In the 1990s, he seized the opportunity to address supply deficits and insufficient incomes more explicitly, as in *My Cuisine and My Menu*, a collection of previously unpublished essays and recipes penned during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Here, alongside recipes for Old Russian dishes (pastille candies, apple preserves) and the author’s own inventions (spiced kefir, nettle and potato puree), Pokhlebkin gave instructions for preparing meals with whatever one had

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<sup>759</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 393-94, 378-79.

<sup>760</sup> See for example, V. V. Pokhlebkin, “Prazdnichnoe zastol’e,” *Nedelia*, 1-7 November 1971, 19; Pokhlebkin, “Na liuboi vkus,” *Nedelia*, 30 October-5 November 1978, 22; Pokhlebkin, *Zanimatel’naia kulinariia*, 19-20.

on hand. Most of these recipes, which come from Pokhlebkin's personal notebooks, rely largely on grains and vegetables, sometimes calling for small amounts of fish or "any" meat rather than a specific variety, and requiring few kitchen implements. Pokhlebkin's hardship dishes bear names like "Perestroika Autumn Soup, or Exquisite Poverty" (a vegetable soup dating from 1990) and "The Eve of Collapse, or Accidental Harvest" (a grain and lentil pilaf created in 1991).<sup>761</sup> These recipes point to Pokhlebkin's commitment to Russian cuisine, his belief that crisis demands innovation, and his dry sense of humor. These dishes, although invented by a man with vast knowledge of foreign cuisines, required only ingredients and cooking techniques common to Russian cuisine: apples, root vegetables, and whole grains, prepared as soups, pilafs, and porridges.

In criticizing the dismal state of post-Soviet Russian food culture, Pokhlebkin condemned not only foreign influence, but also Soviet-era developments, the legacies of which continued to plague Russian cuisine. Looking back on the history of the twentieth century, Pokhlebkin came to believe that during the Soviet period, principally after the Second World War, food had been standardized, the culinary arts had declined in status, and public dining had become "one of society's most purulent sores."<sup>762</sup> Pokhlebkin blamed food industry officials' faith in American public dining models for the declining quality and variety of foods available in Soviet cafeterias in the postwar period. As the USSR sought to catch up with the West, officials betrayed their national heritage, offering hot dogs (*sosiski* in Russian) as a main course and allowing the assortment of dishes available to diners to grow narrower.<sup>763</sup> Even as Russians renewed their

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<sup>761</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu*, 32, 40.

<sup>762</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 269.

<sup>763</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu*, 234-35.

interest in cooking during the 1970s, Pokhlebkina believed, they had to start from square one. Cultural wisdom had vanished and some people could not even identify Russian dietary staples.<sup>764</sup> According to Pokhlebkina, the foolish meddling of bureaucrats and doctors had wrought havoc on public health and cut Russians off from their national traditions. Disheartened, Pokhlebkina did not represent one of the Russians who looked “back upon the Brezhnev era as a time when Russian national traditions were nurtured and protected,” although the connection of his works with this era may stimulate such feelings in his readers.<sup>765</sup>

Echoing his Soviet-era rhetoric, Pokhlebkina most harshly criticized the influence of doctors and nutritional scientists on the Russian diet. In *Cuisine of the Century*, he declared that “culinary stupidity” and Soviet officials’ medicalization of food had burdened Soviet citizens with unpalatable, low quality, and unhealthy fare.<sup>766</sup> Earlier, in *My Cuisine and My Menu*, Pokhlebkina had similarly railed against “culinary illiteracy” and the degradation of the national diet both during and after the Soviet period. In his view, the Russian public had grown “too naive and trusting” of medical experts’ advice during the twentieth century, and had therefore fallen into dreadfully unhealthy eating habits. Confronting Soviet medical experts’ proclamations, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, that fats contribute to heart disease and obesity, Pokhlebkina now insisted that a dish’s healthfulness hinges on its preparation, not its fat content.<sup>767</sup>

Pokhlebkina absolved butter and lard of any wrongdoing, asserting that “culinary illiteracy” and

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<sup>764</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Kukhnia veka*, 324.

<sup>765</sup> Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation,” 654.

<sup>766</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Kukhnia veka*, 301, 330.

<sup>767</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Moia kukhnia i moe menu*, 276-77. Darra Goldstein addresses the importance of fats to Russian conceptions of good food in Goldstein, “Women under Siege,” 143-60.

artificial fats caused the health problems that so concerned Soviet doctors.<sup>768</sup> In order to enjoy healthy, delicious food, he suggested, one must rely on tradition, not modern or alien innovations.

Yet, as before, Pokhlebkin did not wholly reject foreign cuisines, instead praising “internationalization,” while condemning the process by which cuisines became “cosmopolitan.” Here Pokhlebkin reproduced a murky distinction that pervaded Soviet culture from the late 1940s forward, between positive and negative forms of foreign influence. As anthropologist Alexei Yurchak explains, on the one hand, “cosmopolitanism was described as a product of Western imperialism, which, in pursuit of its materialist goals, strove to undermine the value of local patriotism among the peoples of the world, thereby weakening their national sovereignty.” On the other hand, “internationalism,” a “good and enriching” form of foreign influence, stood as cosmopolitanism’s opposite, representing a progressive international culture, rather than a product of imperialism.<sup>769</sup> As the very vagueness of these definitions suggests, both internationalism and cosmopolitanism remained in the eye of the beholder.

For Pokhlebkin, culinary internationalization involved the dissemination of knowledge about traditional cooking methods from around the world, elements of which can be incorporated into other national cuisines. In *My Cuisine and My Menu*, he thus reiterated a position he first clearly articulated in the introduction to *On Cooking from A to Z* in 1988, namely that internationalization involved chefs learning new techniques, restaurants dedicating themselves to different “national cuisines,” and home cooks learning recipes from around the world. By contrast, cosmopolitanization described standardization and modernization, including the

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<sup>768</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu*, 55.

<sup>769</sup> Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, 162-63.

universalization of a narrow range of cooking technologies and of modern, industrially produced foods.<sup>770</sup> Pokhlebkin's use of "cosmopolitanism" carried no obvious taint of anti-Semitism, as the term had in earlier Soviet discourse, although did employ it to signify dishes that evince a suspicious lack of "national specificities."<sup>771</sup> Best represented by American-style dining, cosmopolitan cuisine prizes uniformity and convenience over good taste, seasonality, or wholesomeness.<sup>772</sup> Russians, Pokhlebkin argued, can and should dabble in foreign food traditions, delving into "the process of culinary enlightenment" and developing good taste in order to become "cultured." Yet they simultaneously must avoid the temptation to rely on fast food, "eclectic" dishes not related to any national cuisine, and prepared convenience foods. Pokhlebkin described this as the only way to "guarantee the preservation of Russian cuisine's national distinctiveness" and to renew the "national spirit."<sup>773</sup> In Pokhlebkin's mind, working to understand foreign cuisines represented part of an effort to preserve Russian national cuisine, to build a strong and stable cultural base for daily life.

In the 1990s, Pokhlebkin spoke to a larger trend in post-Soviet Russian food culture, namely a heightened desire for foods that could be interpreted as fundamentally Russian. During this period, the introduction of foreign food products and restaurants, in combination with growing income inequality and a seeming loss of collective values, spurred a nationalist backlash in the culinary sphere. Food advertising and packaging drew on cultural-historical allusions to

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<sup>770</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu*, 108-9; Pokhlebkin, *O kulinarii ot A do Ia*, 3-7.

<sup>771</sup> Elena Zubkova addresses the idea of "cosmopolitanism," in one of its earlier manifestations, as part of Stalin's persecution of Soviet Jewry in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Elena Zubkova, *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, ed. and trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 135-38.

<sup>772</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 367, 472.

<sup>773</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe meniu*, 111, 183.

exploit nostalgia for the past, while also appealing to “a nationalist pride that reinforces the specificity of a Russian experience at odds with the encroaching outside world.” According to anthropologist Melissa L. Caldwell, post-Soviet Russian consumers who made “nationalist” food choices did so not only because these foods appeared more wholesome and familiar, but also because purchasing and consuming these foods connected them with a larger, imagined Russian community, a bulwark against declining collective responsibility, poor health, and socioeconomic stratification.<sup>774</sup> Even wild and homegrown foods tap into Russian “geographic nationalism,” being perceived as the bearers of cultural values, by virtue of growing from the Russian soil.<sup>775</sup>

Pokhlebkin’s more obvious nationalism stemmed largely from the disillusioning potential of historical study and his experience of the ongoing social, political, and economic upheavals of the late 1980s and the 1990s. In the heady and uncertain climate of the first post-Soviet decade, food for many Russians—Pokhlebkin and his admirers included—represented not only sustenance and a tool for conviviality and sociality, but also a medium through which they could experience their own Russianness. This was, however, not a new development, but a continuation of the nostalgia, nationalism, and gastronomic historicism that had blossomed during the Brezhnev years. Pokhlebkin’s Soviet-era writings, like his publications of the 1990s, relied on a vision of primordial ethnicity that had grown in prominence in the late Soviet period.<sup>776</sup> Pokhlebkin had in the 1970s lauded the “flowering” of national cultures throughout the

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<sup>774</sup> Caldwell, “The Taste of Nationalism,” 309.

<sup>775</sup> Caldwell, “Feeding the Body and Nourishing the Soul”; Caldwell, *Dacha Idylls*, 74-100.

<sup>776</sup> Adrienne Edgar, “Rulers and Victims Reconsidered: Geoffrey Hosking and the Russians of the Soviet Union,” *Kritika* 13, 2 (Spring 2012): 434. See also Jenks, “Palekh and the Forging of a Russian Nation.” On primordial ethnicity, see introduction.



USSR. Yet the climate of the 1990s appeared to be incorrect for nurturing Russian national culture, and the conditions of the Brezhnev era—however welcoming they had seemed at the time to a project of cultural restoration—had apparently not allowed for a true national culinary revival. Over the course of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, Pokhlebkin witnessed declining culinary standards, growing interethnic tensions, and the introduction of state projects that, in his view, ignored historical realities. The “friendship of the peoples” he had once championed appeared to have not forged strong and lasting interethnic bonds. Rather, it had helped encourage the articulation of individual national identities, which eventually superseded Soviet identities in the minds of many Russians and members of other national communities within the USSR. Camaraderie gave way to competition and, finally, enmity.

In the 1990s, Pokhlebkin’s discourse thus proved more politically charged, more Russocentric, and more critical of anything he perceived as a deleterious influence on specifically Russian national culture. The continuity of similar concerns and priorities in his work over three decades suggests that the ideas Pokhlebkin expressed in the 1990s grew out of the late Soviet experience, remaining intimately connected to his Soviet-era gastronomic historicism and to late Soviet nationalist revivalism. Pokhlebkin reacted angrily to the apparent realization of the fears underlying the Brezhnev-era search for historical continuity and cultural stability, as global fast food and economic crisis widened the gulf between Russians and their national culinary heritage.

### **Post-Soviet Pokhlebkin—Adoration and Controversy**

Over the course of his career, Pokhlebkin traveled the long road from obscure intellectual to cultural icon. Although some readers initially suspected that the name “Pokhlebkin,” closely

related to an old Russian word for soup, *pokhlebka*, masked a group of researchers, Pokhlebkin came in time to be hailed as the “patriarch of the kitchen.”<sup>777</sup> His own self-fashioning and reactions to his work by acquaintances and strangers together rendered Pokhlebkin as a rather mysterious and hermetic eccentric in possession of a formidable knowledge of food and its history. Since his death in 2000, however, he has come to occupy a less comfortable position in the popular imagination. Devotees and opponents depict Pokhlebkin variously as an unassailable expert and an unreliable hack, as a patriot, an unreformed Stalinist, and a stifled political dissident. Not all responses to Pokhlebkin’s work have been positive, but even harsh criticisms speak to his prominence in Russian food culture. An examination of Pokhlebkin’s public profile in the 1990s and early 2000s reveals that both Pokhlebkin and the gastronomic historicism he helped to pioneer retain significance in contemporary Russian culture, as many food writers and home cooks retain a belief in the deep connection between Russian identity, culinary traditions, and national history.

Building on memories of Pokhlebkin’s Soviet-era popularity, some Russian intellectuals who came of age in the 1970s reminisced decades later about their love of his food writing. In a 1991 interview, Russian-Jewish émigré writer Zinoviy Zinik attested to the popularity of *Tea* among the Moscow intelligentsia during the 1970s and 1980s, also reporting that this book played a role in inspiring his 1986 novel *Russofobka i fungofil* (published in English as *The Mushroom-picker* in 1987), which features an enigmatic professor modeled on Pokhlebkin

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<sup>777</sup> On the group of researchers theory, see “Volshebniiaia kukhnia Pokhlebkina,” 65; Anna Amel’kina, “Pered smert’iu geniia kulinarii zhestoko pytali...,” *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, 21 April 2000; Mushkina, *Taina kurliandskogo piroga*, 300; *Smert’ kulinara*. On this theory and the origins of Pokhlebkin’s surname, Feldstein, “Introduction to William Pokhlebkin.” Food journalist Anna Ianina described Pokhlebkin as the “patriarch of the kitchen.” Ianina, “Bol’she chem prosto eda,” *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, 24 November 2006.

mentoring a food-obsessed intellectual.<sup>778</sup> Literary critics Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, co-authors of the satirical cookbook *Russian Cuisine in Exile* (Russkaia kukhnia v izgnanii, 1987), have provided glowing praise for Pokhlebkin. Vail', who penned the introduction to *Cuisine of the Century*, labeled Pokhlebkin a “cultural hero,” crediting him with teaching Soviet citizens to enjoy dining and cooking as part of the good life.<sup>779</sup> Genis, meanwhile, has placed Pokhlebkin alongside other literary greats—N. V. Gogol', F. M. Dostoevskii, Alexandre Dumas, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle—describing Pokhlebkin's readers as members of a “world-wide secret society,” who, upon encountering one another, experience a “spiritual kinship.”<sup>780</sup> Pokhlebkin achieved his greatest popularity, then, among educated urbanites, some of whom continued to praise his cookbooks and his influence on Russian cuisine even after they had moved abroad.

In twenty-first-century Russia, Pokhlebkin's name adds an air of authority to discussions of food and drink. Appropriately for the era, he now enjoys a considerable online presence, with numerous of his books available—albeit illegally—on the internet and several websites boasting his name and likeness, including a popular recipe-sharing website, Pohlebkin.Ru, named in his honor.<sup>781</sup> Food columnists for such major papers as *Izvestiia*, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, *Vedomosti*, and *Novaia gazeta*, rely on Pokhlebkin's wisdom about a wide variety of dishes and products from throughout the former Soviet Union, including paskha, vodka, mushrooms, barley

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<sup>778</sup> Zinovii Zinik, “Emigratsiia kak literaturnyi priem,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 20 March 1991, 11.

<sup>779</sup> Petr Vail', “Veselyi stol,” in Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 7.

<sup>780</sup> Aleksandr Genis, “Khleb i zrelishe,” *Zvezda*, 1 January 2000, 220; Genis, “Pokhlebkinu,” in *Kolobok: Kulinarne puteshchestviia* (Moscow: AST, 2006), 206-19.

<sup>781</sup> Pohlebkin.Ru, <http://pohlebkin.ru/>. Also see “Knigi o chai: Pokhlebkin i ne tol'ko,” Tea.Ru, <http://www.tea.ru/200.html>; “10 legendarnykh kulinarov vsekh vremen,” Kuliavedia: kulinarnaia entsiklopediia, [http://kulivedia.ru/articles/10\\_legendarnykh\\_kulinarov\\_vseh\\_vremen](http://kulivedia.ru/articles/10_legendarnykh_kulinarov_vseh_vremen).

kasha, and stuffed grape leaves.<sup>782</sup> Tat'iana Mar'ina, current lifestyle columnist for *The St. Petersburg Gazette* (Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti), frequently references Pokhlebkin's writings to shore up her claims about the histories of cakes, cereals, and other Russian dishes, describing the historian as "a great connoisseur of the foods of all peoples and all ages."<sup>783</sup> Celebrity chef Maksim Syrnikov, meanwhile, has proclaimed himself Pokhlebkin's "heir," and his readers seem to agree, often discussing the merits of Pokhlebkin's work on Syrnikov's LiveJournal blog.<sup>784</sup> Some authors have gone so far as to place Pokhlebkin alongside the other greats of the Russian kitchen, especially Elena Molokhovets, author of *A Gift to Young Housewives* (1861), which is regarded as the most important prerevolutionary work on Russian cuisine.<sup>785</sup> In today's Russia, Pokhlebkin represents a master whose expertise provides a stable foundation upon which to build gastronomic knowledge.

Pokhlebkin's work has, however, come under fire for propagating historical inaccuracies and for inconsistencies in argumentation. Syrnikov sometimes corrects Pokhlebkin's recipes if they seem insufficiently historical, as when Pokhlebkin appears to have relied on a nineteenth-

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<sup>782</sup> "Paskha na troikh," *Izvestiia*, 2 April 2010, 30; Aleksandr Genis, "Kak vypit' ot dushi i zakusit' na slavu," *Novaia gazeta*, 24 December 2010, 24-25; Svetlana Gromova, "Osobennosti russkogo vkusa," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 28 April 2003, 10; Elena Ivanova, "Mendelev byl by dovolen," *Novaia gazeta*, 5 April 2007, 15; Anna Liudkovskaia, "Poimat' syroezhku," *Vedomosti*, 18 August 2006; Irina Mak, "Ot legkoi okroshki do sytnoi dovgi," *Izvestiia*, 11 June 2009, 31; Mak, "Naslazhdaia's' zhemchuzhnoi kashei," *Izvestiia*, 3 December 2010, 7; Mak, "Sobrat', no ne solit'," *Izvestiia*, 25 November 2005, 29; "Konvertiruemoie bliudo," *Izvestiia*, 14 December 2007, 28.

<sup>783</sup> Tat'iana Mar'ina, "'Zolushka' v opale," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 26 September 2007, 6. Also see Mar'ina, "Dvoika v kremovykh tsvetochkakh," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 25 August 2005, 6; "'Shrapnel' gladiatora," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 4 February 2009, 6; "Tortik dlia sekretarshi," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 26 August 2009, 6; "Tortik dlia liubimoi babushki," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 29 September 2010, 6.

<sup>784</sup> A search for Pokhlebkin's name on Maksim Syrnikov's LiveJournal blog would yield over 130 items as of September 2012. See in particular Maksim Syrnikov, "Poklon," *Reaktsionno-kulinarnyi ZhZhurnal*, 23 December 2009, <http://kare-l.livejournal.com/200662.html?thread=3419094>.

<sup>785</sup> "Borshch nashei zimy," *Trud*, 17 January 2008, 32; Anastasiia Barashkova, "Syrnaia golovushka," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 16 September 2007, 41; Mak, "Sobrat', no ne solit'." On Molokhovets, see Toomre, introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking*.

century source, which Syrnikov deems less authentic than its seventeenth-century predecessor.<sup>786</sup> Historian I. A. Sokolov took Pokhlebkina to task in a 2011 monograph on the Russian tea trade for contradicting himself on the question of tea's accessibility at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>787</sup> Further, experts on vodka and its history have identified errors of fact and interpretation in Pokhlebkina's *A History of Vodka*. Historian David Christian described Pokhlebkina's theories as "crackpot." Damningly, he suggested that the reader ready a bottle of vodka to "stun the thoughtful parts of [his] brain" in order to consider, for instance, that "perhaps the Monk Isidor discovered how to distil from grain while held prisoner in the Chudov monastery in the 1430s, then got his guards drunk and escaped." In Christian's view, no such thing happened, let alone was documented.<sup>788</sup> Political scientist Mark Lawrence Schrad points out Pokhlebkina's misidentification of key historical dates, such as the year the Russian state established taverns (Pokhlebkina lists the date as 1533, rather than 1553).<sup>789</sup>

For writer and vodka connoisseur Boris Rodionov, the most egregious error Pokhlebkina commits is conflating vodka with all Russian spirituous liquors. Rodionov argues for two clearly defined stages in the development of strong drink in Russia, rather than the single, smooth process of evolution Pokhlebkina outlines. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Russians had *khleboe vino*, a beverage not unlike other "impure" distillates made elsewhere in the world, such as whisky. Only in the late nineteenth century, when new technology appeared thanks to

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<sup>786</sup> Maksim Syrnikov, "Eshche raz pro kundiumy," Sait Maksima Syrnikova, 25 November 2011, [http://syrnikov.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=76:2011-12-06-06-36-00&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=50](http://syrnikov.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76:2011-12-06-06-36-00&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=50).

<sup>787</sup> I. A. Sokolov, *Chai i chainaia trgovlia v Rossii, 1790-1919 gg.* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2011), 41. Thank you to Audra Yoder for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>788</sup> David Christian, Review of *A History of Vodka* by William Pokhlebkina, *Slavic Review* 53, 1 (1994): 245.

<sup>789</sup> Mark Lawrence Schrad, *Vodka Politics: Alcohol, Autocracy, and the Secret History of the Russian State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 64.

state initiatives, did modern vodka come into being as a wholly new beverage made only of spirit and water. Vodka, by Rodionov's account, cannot be considered a "national drink," since the tsarist and Soviet states—not the Russian people—took the leading role in creating and promoting what we now know today as "vodka."<sup>790</sup>

Controversy now surrounds Pokhlebkina's histories of tea and vodka, and not solely on account of errors and misinterpretations. In Pokhlebkina's version of events, proliferated most broadly in a 2005 made-for-television documentary, *Tea* became the target of a vicious attack in the press shortly after its 1968 publication.<sup>791</sup> Singled out by a KGB agent as a cover for dissident sentiments, *Tea* led, so the story goes, to a government ban that prevented Pokhlebkina from publishing for ten years, closed him off from the academic community, and disallowed him from defending his doctoral dissertation. This does not, however, mesh with certain key facts. First, Pokhlebkina's works never stopped appearing in print. Between 1968 and 1978, he published over forty articles in the Soviet press and another book-length work on cooking, *All About Spices* (*Vse o prianiastakh*, 1974), while *Tea* came out in Tatar in 1973 and Polish in 1974.<sup>792</sup> Second, *Socialist Industry* (*Sotsialisticheskaia industriia*), the newspaper in which the denunciation allegedly appeared, did not exist in 1968 and my examination of its first thirty months of circulation (mid-1969 through 1971) turned up no obvious mentions of Pokhlebkina or his book. Third, references to the alleged denunciation of *Tea* tend to lead back to Pokhlebkina's own account, which appeared first in the 1990s in an article now widely available on the internet entitled "The Circumstances of Creating Books (*Obstoiatel'stva sozdaniia knig*)," rather than to

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<sup>790</sup> Boris Rodionov, *Bol'shoi obman: Pravda i lozh' o russkoi vodke* (Moscow: AST, 2011), 10-11.

<sup>791</sup> The version of events found in Gromova, *Smert' kulinara* matches the narrative found in Pokhlebkina's essay "Obstoiatel'stva sozdaniia knig," as cited in Feldstein, "Introduction to William Pokhlebkina."

<sup>792</sup> *Bibliografiia proizvedenii*, 59-61.

any concrete attack in the press.<sup>793</sup> If the denunciation took place, then, it did not prevent Pokhlebkina from continuing his work as a freelance historian, journalist, and food writer. It seems more likely that the book's edgy reputation grew out of its popularity among the disaffected urban intelligentsia—for whom it would be convenient to consider Pokhlebkina something of a dissident—than from its content, which offers criticisms of the Soviet status quo that feel no more pointed or strident than those found in his other Soviet-era writings.<sup>794</sup>

Pokhlebkina's *A History of Vodka*, supposedly born of controversy, has also sparked speculations about fabrications and misrepresentations on the author's part. In the book's introduction, Pokhlebkina claimed to have originally taken up the project in the late 1970s in order to fight off efforts by socialism's Western enemies to strip the Soviet vodka monopoly of its right to the term "vodka" on product packaging and in advertising.<sup>795</sup> Pokhlebkina's book, which states that vodka was invented in Moscow in the late fifteenth century, allegedly helped to undermine Polish claims to the rightful and sole use of the word "vodka." The "international tribunal" that, according to Pokhlebkina, resolved the conflict, found in favor of the Soviet Union

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<sup>793</sup> Journalist Sergei Banin, for instance, relies on Pokhlebkina's essay in his discussion of this controversy. See Banin's introduction to V. V. Pokhlebkina, "Pasport: Istoricheskii ocherk," *Sibirskie ogni* 7 (June 2006), <http://www.sibogni.ru/archive/61/731/>. Also see *Smert' kulinar*; Pivovarov, "Smert' po retseptu"; Feldstein, "Introduction to William Pokhlebkina"; "Pokhlebkina, Vil'iam Vasil'evich," *Vikipediia: Svobodnaia entsiklopediia*, last modified 8 June 2013, last accessed 10 June 2013, [ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Похлёбкин,\\_Вильям\\_Васильевич](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Похлёбкин,_Вильям_Васильевич).

<sup>794</sup> It may initially seem strange that readers would have taken Pokhlebkina for a dissident, considering his nationalist leanings, which became clearly evident in his later writings. Two considerations, however, make this interpretation understandable (though it was incorrect). First Pokhlebkina's early culinary prose expressed far fewer overtly nationalist sentiments than his later works. It hewed quite closely to the official line on Soviet nationalities. Second, as Nikolai Mitrokhin vigorously argues, there were many nationalist dissidents in the Brezhnev years, though their story is less well known in the West than that of the liberal or democratic dissidents. Pokhlebkina therefore could have been both a nationalist and a dissident (though he was not). See Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, especially 5-11.

<sup>795</sup> Again, Pokhlebkina's version of events has been propagated in the contemporary Russian media and by his admirers. See, in particular, *Smert' kulinar*; Pivovarov, "Smert' po retseptu"; Mushkina, *Taina kurliandskogo piroga*, 301-2.

on the grounds that vodka was uniquely Russian, not Polish.<sup>796</sup> This so-called “vodka war,” however, either never took place, or was vastly less serious than Pokhlebkina suggested. Schrad has determined not only that no evidence exists to support Pokhlebkina’s version of events, but also that the affair could not have taken place in this way, as “vodka,” being a “generic term,” does not have protection under international trademark law.<sup>797</sup> Rodionov further clarified the matter of the “vodka war,” learning through interviews with former officials at the Soviet export organization Soiuzplodoimport that they did not commission *A History of Vodka*, as Pokhlebkina claimed, nor did they use it in any international arbitration of the sort Pokhlebkina described: such a court case never took place.<sup>798</sup>

In his own writings and in post-Soviet popular culture, Pokhlebkina sometimes appeared as a quasi-dissident, an embattled researcher struggling to have his voice heard in a repressive society. In *Cuisine of the Century*, Pokhlebkina asserted that censors held the manuscript for *National Cuisines of Our Peoples* for five years, releasing it only after the publication of another more official book, *Soviet National and Foreign Cuisines*, written by two Ministry of the Food Industry representatives. He also stated that “specialists” (he used quotations marks here derisively) at this ministry blocked the publication of his “culinary encyclopedia” for nearly a decade, in spite of popular demand for the volume from chefs and home cooks alike. Pokhlebkina interpreted these challenges as efforts on the part of Soviet officials to “close the path to knowledge” for chefs and, further, as a case study in the degradation of Soviet bureaucracy. The volume did finally appear, however, in 1988 as *On Cooking from A to Z*, published by a firm in

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<sup>796</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Istoriia vodki*, 13.

<sup>797</sup> Schrad, *Vodka Politics*, 66-67.

<sup>798</sup> Rodionov, *Bolshoi obman*, 65-69.



Minsk, where it could be produced with fewer restrictions than in Moscow.<sup>799</sup> Reminiscences about Pokhlebkin's life and work offer similar tales of censorship and dissidence. In her 2008 memoir, Elena Mushkina recalled the difficulties Pokhlebkin faced in seeking publication of *On Cooking from A to Z*, stating that, on account of Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign, the text had to be stripped of all mentions of alcohol, even those recipes that used only a gram in their preparation.<sup>800</sup> Even more overtly, the documentary *Death of a Food Expert* (*Smert' kulinara*, 2005), describes Pokhlebkin explicitly as a "dissident," claiming that he became one on account of the supposed controversy surrounding *Tea*.<sup>801</sup>

None of these claims about Pokhlebkin's alleged dissidence holds up under scrutiny. First, regarding the publication of *National Cuisines*, the records of the Pishchevaia promyshlennost' (Food Industry) Publishing show that Pokhlebkin's health prevented him from delivering the manuscript in time for his October 1974 deadline and also that the publisher began considering the volume for display at book exhibitions as early as 1976.<sup>802</sup> Perhaps the publishing house dragged its heels releasing Pokhlebkin's volume, but, if so, no more than three years elapsed between the manuscript's completion and the book's first public appearances. Second, alcoholic beverages appear in several entries in *On Cooking from A to Z*. True, vodka, cognac, and champagne were absent, but entries for wine (*vinogradnoe vino*), infused liqueur (*nastoika*), and a handful of archaic tipples remained.<sup>803</sup> Finally, and most importantly,

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<sup>799</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnia veka*, 338-40.

<sup>800</sup> Mushkina, *Taina kurlandskogo piroga*, 307.

<sup>801</sup> Gromova, *Smert' kulinara*.

<sup>802</sup> GARF f. R-9659, op. 2, d. 120, ll. 54-56; f. R-9659, op. 2, d. 127, l. 5.

<sup>803</sup> Pokhlebkin, *O kulinarii ot A do Ia*, 42, 121. Also see entries for "Akvetta," "Erofeich," "Napitki," and "Norvezhskii sup," in *Ibid.*, 12, 57, 118-119, 125.

Pokhlebkina did not identify as a dissident during the Soviet period. According to his son, Pokhlebkina once was approached during a hospital stay by an American official who believed the historian to be a political dissident held against his will. Pokhlebkina informed this individual sharply that no such thing was taking place.<sup>804</sup> After 1991, Pokhlebkina complained openly of censorship and willingly cast himself as the lone voice of reason in a mad world, possibly using claims about political repression and unfair censorship to detach himself from the discredited communist regime. This image appealed to some of his admirers, who propagated it in turn, apparently now preferring to embrace Pokhlebkina as a Russian thinker, a defender of national culture and good sense, rather than a product of the defunct Soviet system.

While the reasons for these apparent inaccuracies remain unclear, the controversies surrounding Pokhlebkina's books have much to tell us about his public persona and the importance of his work.<sup>805</sup> Rodionov notes, for example, that the "vodka war" tale allowed Pokhlebkina in the late Soviet period to trumpet the virtues of state economic planning and production monopolies. As Rodionov writes, Pokhlebkina "set before himself the task of creating a marketing legend that would help [Soviet] export organizations."<sup>806</sup> Rodionov thus helps highlight Pokhlebkina's attachment to domestic production and his desire for the Soviet Union—and later Russia—to retain its position as an exporter of goods, a view Pokhlebkina also revealed in a revised, post-Soviet edition of *Tea*, in which he accused deliberate production slow-downs in the Georgian tea industry for the fact that Russia had to import tea, the other Russian "national

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<sup>804</sup> Feldstein reports this story, related to him by Avgust Pokhlebkina, in "Introduction to William Pokhlebkina."

<sup>805</sup> Avgust Pokhlebkina had little to contribute on this topic. Too young to remember the events in question, if they did take place, he accepts his father's version. Yet he freely admits that he has not looked into the *Tea* controversy, finding the subject too emotionally challenging. Pokhlebkina, interview.

<sup>806</sup> Rodionov, *Bolshoi obman*, 111-12.

drink.”<sup>807</sup> Pokhlebkin had elsewhere openly expressed disgust with the fact that the Soviet Union had collapsed. In *My Cuisine and My Menu* he touched on this topic in the midst of a discussion of popular dissatisfaction with the way chickens were packaged and priced, writing, “the USSR fell apart on account of such nonsense and trifles, as the sum of all of these little things made life and daily existence inconvenient; this laid the ground for an inaccurate assessment of the politics of the government as a whole, it whipped up a movement for freedom from all of its attendant little stupidities. . . . Instead of getting rid of inconvenience, trifles, they brought down the entire government.”<sup>808</sup> To Pokhlebkin’s mind, state socialism had failed not on account of any inherent flaws in the system, but because of the public’s shortsightedness and, perhaps, the late Soviet leadership’s inability to make the people understand the true stake they had in allowing Soviet power to remain in place.

While Vail’ described Pokhlebkin affectionately as a “sincere and . . . declarative patriot,” other critics have seized on Pokhlebkin’s pro-Soviet sentiments to cast him as a rote Marxist, a Stalinist, or a blind supporter of Soviet power.<sup>809</sup> Avgust Pokhlebkin supports this view to an extent, having identified what he calls “undigested Stalinist dogmas” in his father’s later historical works, namely *The Great Pseudonym* (Velikii psevdonim, 1996), a volume in which Pokhlebkin claims to uncover the source of the name “Stalin.”<sup>810</sup> Here, Pokhlebkin looks to Stalin’s “bravery and wisdom” as a ruler for solutions to post-Soviet Russia’s woes.

According to Pokhlebkin, “Stalin created a great empire from a ruined, poor, backward country.

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<sup>807</sup> Pokhlebkin, “Chai,” in *Chai i vodka v istorii Rossii*, 288-89.

<sup>808</sup> Pokhlebkin, *Moia kukhnia i moe menu*, 150.

<sup>809</sup> Vail’, “Veselyi stol,” 7; Christian, Review of *A History of Vodka*, 245-47; Marcus Warren, “Email from Russia,” *The Telegraph* (UK), 27 February 2001; Geraldine Sherman, “Varmints Made off with Their Drink: A History of Vodka,” *The Globe and Mail*, 23 January 1993.

<sup>810</sup> Pokhlebkin, interview.

His ‘heirs,’ with their negligent and talentless administration, converted a rich country into an impoverished [one].” He argues that only an equally firm hand will return Russia to its rightful place as a great world power. Pokhlebkin thus calls for the Yel’tsin government to take a page from the Bolsheviks’ playbook and refuse to repay its international debts.<sup>811</sup> In this way, *The Great Pseudonym* expresses anguish at Russia’s declining status and casts blame for this sad state of affairs on both Soviet and post-Soviet leaders. Pokhlebkin thus appears as both a patriot and an admirer of—even apologist for—Stalin and his rule. We might describe him as an adherent of “national Bolshevism,” an ideology originating in the Stalin era, which fused Russocentrism, statism, and Marxism-Leninism.<sup>812</sup> Naturally, though, Pokhlebkin’s attitude may have proved somewhat different had he experienced the frustrations of censorship (and worse) under Stalin, instead of under Brezhnev.

Pokhlebkin’s posthumous relevance would be difficult to dispute, even in light of the criticism that has, in recent years, tarnished his image as a culinary authority. Indeed, reactions both positive and negative to Pokhlebkin and his cooking advice literature indicate the potency his message has retained. Fans build on Pokhlebkin’s thought as a bedrock of authority and authenticity, citing his works as reliable sources for both recipes and information on the origins and evolutions of food products and dishes. Critics attack his willingness to play fast and loose with the facts, his apparent betrayals of history. Commentators such as Rodionov, Schrad, and Syrnikov not only critique Pokhlebkin, but also echo very similar concerns, as their denunciations of Pokhlebkin all hinge, ultimately, on a deep concern for historical accuracy, tradition, and the preservation of Russian national culture. Pokhlebkin’s gastronomic historicism,

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<sup>811</sup> V. V. Pokhlebkin, *Velikii psevdonim: Kak sluchilos’, chto I. V. Dzhugazhveli izbral sebe psevdonim “Stalin”?* (Moscow: Iudit, 1996), 140, 151, 156.

<sup>812</sup> See David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 6.

born out of his desire to combat the degradation of national heritage at the hands of doctors and nutritional scientists, remained relevant in the post-Soviet period. Russian home cooks and food experts sought—and continue to seek—stable roots for their culture, aiming to protect it from the injurious effects of modernization, urbanization, and the spread of global capitalism.

Importantly, these issues, as I demonstrate below, resonate not only in Pokhlebkin's homeland, but also elsewhere in the industrialized world.

### **The Search for Roots in Russia and Abroad**

Pokhlebkin's ongoing fame and relevance proceeds not only from acerbic critiques of his work, warm memories of reading his recipes, and sensational theories about his murder. Ideas complementary to Pokhlebkin's have also resonated—and continue to resonate—both within Russia and far beyond the borders of his homeland, and well after his death. In focusing on ethnic cuisines and historical authority while bucking against the dominance of nutritional science, Pokhlebkin tapped into a sociocultural zeitgeist taking shape on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. After the Second World War, diverse societies in Europe and North America produced movements in the sphere of food culture that focused on revitalizing national traditions and rejecting the dietary interventions of modernity. Gastronomic historicism appealed to many in an age when business interests and questionable medical expertise apparently encroached on individual and group health and happiness.

At home in Russia, Pokhlebkina's thought has taken on new life in the work of Maksim Syrnikov, who has emerged in recent years as a key gastronomic historicist.<sup>813</sup> Syrnikov focuses on the historical aspects of cookery, seeking out "traditional" Russian dishes from the eighteenth century and earlier.<sup>814</sup> Syrnikov describes his work as "wholly dedicated to authentic national cuisine, that which, as part of traditional Russian culture, helps . . . to preserve our Russianness (*russkost'*) and not get lost among the bright advertisements of global fast food."<sup>815</sup> Since the early 1990s, Syrnikov has been on a crusade to preserve and reconstruct historical Russian dishes, wiping away the stains of modernization and non-Russian influence.<sup>816</sup> Like Pokhlebkina, Syrnikov has rejected much that the modern world has to offer, asserting that national history holds a wealth of time-tested recipes and techniques that contribute more meaningfully to the wellbeing of the Russian nation than any product of modern international food systems. In his words, "so long as Russians prepare *shchi* and *okroshka* at home, preserve cabbage and salt

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<sup>813</sup> Syrnikov, responding to a reader who believed he had too harshly criticized Pokhlebkina, once stated that he does not regard his corrections of Pokhlebkina as "criticism," but rather as the "development" and "continuation" of "what Pokhlebkina himself did." Maksim Syrnikov (kare\_1), 22 June 2012 (8:55-8:57 am), comment on Maksim Syrnikov, "Kniga "Polugar. Vodka kotoruiu my poteriali," *Reaktsionno-kulinarnyi ZhZhurnal*, 1 June 2010, <http://kare-1.livejournal.com/229338.html?thread=3942618#t3942618>.

<sup>814</sup> Syrnikov relies on on prerevolutionary cookbooks and housekeeping manuals, such as the sixteenth-century *Domostroi* and the nineteenth-century works of Ekaterina Avdeeva and Elena Molokhovets. He also claims to draw on older materials, including the twelfth-century Primary Chronicle (*Povest' vremennykh let*). Maksim Syrnikov, *Nastoiashchaia russkaia eda* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2011), 316-17. On the *Domostroi*, see Pouncy, ed. and trans., *Domostroi*. On Avdeeva and Molokhovets, see Toomre introduction to *Classic Russian Cooking*, 3-12.

<sup>815</sup> Maksim Syrnikov, Sait Maksima Syrnikova, <http://www.syrnikov.ru/>. Further research on Syrnikov's thought will be needed to determine the depth of his nationalism, but his choice to use the word *russkost'* suggests that nationalist sentiments may be fundamental to his identity as a food expert. *Russkost'*—meaning either "ethnically Russian" or, less often, "of Russian character"—featured centrally in literary debates in the mid-1980s through mid-1990s in which nationalists sought to purge the Russian canon of Soviet artistic and ideological influences, as well as of Jewish and other non-Russian writers who wrote in Russian. Kathleen F. Parthé, *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics Between the Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 102-31. Today, *russkost'* is often associated with so-called "tests of Russianness," meant to determine whether the test-taker is assimilated to Russian language, culture, and values. See, for example, the Russianness test distributed online by the newspaper *Kommersant*. "Prover'te sebja na russkost'," *Kommersant*-Vlast', <http://www.kommersant.ru/k-vlast/vlast-test.asp>.

<sup>816</sup> Ioffe, "Borscht Belt."

mushrooms for the winter, as long as kvas, rye bread, and buckwheat kasha remain necessities, then the Russian people will also exist.”<sup>817</sup>

Decades earlier, strains of gastronomic historicism had emerged in both Europe and North America. In West Germany during the 1950s and 1960s, cookbooks used recipes for “traditional” German foods to connect home cooks to culinary customs throughout Germany, including areas that were not part of the FRG, as a means of creating a new and, in historian Alice Weinreb’s words, “digestible” postwar nation.<sup>818</sup> Similar developments took place in postcolonial Britain in the 1970s, with Jane Grigson and others penning cookbooks that celebrated good English fare and imagined a small and cozy nation. Food experts of foreign extraction, such as Egyptian-born Claudia Roden, also furthered the diversification of the British table and the ethnic integration of British society by exploring their heritage through its culinary and historical roots.<sup>819</sup> In the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, food experts and writers reacted to recent social, cultural, and political upheaval, a rising tide of ethnic revivalism, and a longstanding American fascination with continental European cuisine by concerning themselves with food traditions rooted in American soil, embracing everything from frontier cookery to “soul food.”<sup>820</sup> In the socialist world outside the USSR, food discourses also served as conduits for ethnic identities and “banal nationalism,” as in Yugoslavia where cookbooks appearing in the

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<sup>817</sup> Syrnikov, *Nastoiashchaia russkaia eda*, 331.

<sup>818</sup> Alice Weinreb, “The Tastes of Home: Cooking the Lost Heimat in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s,” *German Studies Review* 34, 2 (2011): 359.

<sup>819</sup> Kate Colquhoun, *Taste: The Story of Britain through Its Cooking* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 361-64.

<sup>820</sup> See chapter 4. Also see Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty*, 213-26; Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 175-201; Jacobsen, *Roots Too*.

1970s and 1980s often set the “authentic, traditional” cultures of individual peoples (or sometimes the whole Yugoslav “people”) in opposition to modern foods and lifestyles.<sup>821</sup>

Foreign food writing, in fact, may have influenced Pokhlebkina’s thinking. While it remains difficult at best to uncover the exact pathways by which foreign influences made their way to a given Soviet thinker, Pokhlebkina left behind some clues. In *Cuisine of the Century*, he discusses the “Greatest Culinary Experts of the Twentieth Century,” naming and praising chefs from across the Western world, including the American chef and proponent of domestic dining James Beard.<sup>822</sup> Pokhlebkina’s apartment in Podol’sk, which still houses his personal library, offers hints as to which materials shaped his thinking.<sup>823</sup> In addition to a wide variety of Soviet and Russian cookbooks, Pokhlebkina owned cooking texts from around the world. Thanks to his academic background, Pokhlebkina knew Serbo-Croatian, Estonian, several Scandinavian languages, and German all more or less fluently. According to his son, Pokhlebkina never learned English, although he had sometimes cited English works, many of which remain in Pokhlebkina’s personal library, along with several Russian-English dictionaries. The same is true of French—and, tellingly, in at least one French-language cookbook I observed obvious signs of use, including annotations in Pokhlebkina’s hand. Pokhlebkina, who presumably knew enough English and French to slog through some of these publications with the aid of language reference works, amassed a collection including Danish, Swedish, and German cookbooks, a rare English-language volume on Cambodian cookery, and a 1967 edition of *Nouveau Larousse*

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<sup>821</sup> Wendy Bracewell, “Eating Up Yugoslavia: Cookbooks and Consumption in Socialist Yugoslavia,” in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, eds. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 185-91.

<sup>822</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Kukhnia veka*, 438.

<sup>823</sup> I enjoyed the great privilege of visiting Pokhlebkina’s former home, now the residence of Avgust Pokhlebkina, during the summer of 2012. I am grateful to Avgust for this opportunity and for his generous hospitality.



*Gastronomique*.<sup>824</sup> This final item, a world-famous gastronomic encyclopedia, doubtlessly provided Pokhlebkin with a wealth of information on cooking customs from across Europe. As of yet, no catalog of Pokhlebkin's library exists, but this peek into his collection suggests that the world of late Soviet cuisine did not evolve in a vacuum of state socialism, as one of the gastronomic guiding lights of the Soviet Union's final decades sought—and apparently managed—to absorb developments from beyond Soviet borders.

Although in his later years Pokhlebkin frequently railed against the American mode of eating and against encroachments on Russian culture, his work falls neatly in line with the writings of certain American food experts. Most notably, Pokhlebkin felt a kinship with James Beard and striking parallels exist in their thought. Beard insisted in the introduction to *American Cookery* (1972) that Americans ought to cease worshipping foreign delicacies and instead “look into the annals of our own cuisine.” Americans have, Beard claimed, “so much to complain about in the quality of food served in many restaurants and in not a few homes that we forget what distinguished food [we] have produced in several periods of our history.”<sup>825</sup> Like Pokhlebkin, Beard concerned himself with affordability and accessibility, making his name not only through expertise and ambition, but also by offering postwar America a means of eating well on a tight budget.<sup>826</sup> Most tellingly, each of these gastronomes observed contemporary developments in his homeland and looked to the past, rather than overseas, to locate culinary treasures in need of recovery and guardianship. For his part, Pokhlebkin lauded Beard for

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<sup>824</sup> Pokhlebkin, interview.

<sup>825</sup> James Beard, *American Cookery* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972), 4.

<sup>826</sup> One of Beard's early books was the popular *How to Eat Better for Less Money* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), which has since been reprinted several times.

focusing on “simple, natural, honest food . . . that can be eaten with delight.”<sup>827</sup> Had Pokhlebkina lived longer, he might also have found a kindred spirit in American foodie guru Michael Pollan, who today laments the United States’ medicalization and industrialization of food, as well as the apparent lack of a “single, strong, stable [American] culinary tradition.”<sup>828</sup> Pokhlebkina reacted much like his colleagues elsewhere in the world to the growth of industrial food production and the fetishization of foreign cuisines.

Of course, these food writers do not express identical agendas or espouse a single ideology. Perhaps most importantly, as Melissa L. Caldwell has highlighted, key differences exist between Russian natural foods ideologies and the core vision of the Slow Food movement in Western Europe and the United States. Russians’ interest in wild and “ecologically clean” products stems not from an environmentalist counterculture, but from a belief that Russian nature will care for the Russian people.<sup>829</sup> Within Russia we also find divergences, notably between Pokhlebkina, who emphasized frugality and abhorred income inequality, and Syrnikov, who teaches costly master classes and hosts meals for modish, well-to-do Muscovites.<sup>830</sup> But these contrasts should not obscure the important convergence that we see in the development of gastronomic discourse in Russia, Europe, and North America during the period in question.

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<sup>827</sup> Pokhlebkina, *Kukhnia veka*, 438.

<sup>828</sup> Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 5. See also Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 1-15.

<sup>829</sup> Caldwell, *Dacha Idylls*, 78-80.

<sup>830</sup> The price tag attached of these events alone speaks volumes: tickets to a dinner hosted by Syrnikov at a chic Moscow food co-op in 2010 cost 2500 rubles apiece—over ten-percent of that year’s average monthly salary in Moscow. “Lavka v dekabre: Klaus na Rozhdestvo, svinskii Novyi god, pervyi uzhin Syrnikova,” LavkaLavka. Podderzhi mestnogo fermeri!, 23 November 2010, <http://vkusnaya-eda.livejournal.com/227321.html>. According to official numbers, the average income of Russian citizens hovered around 20,000 rubles per month in 2010. Department for Foreign Economic Activity and International Relations of the City of Moscow, “Denezhnye dokhody i raskhody naseleniia,” Moskovskii mezhdunarodnyi portal, accessed 30 October 2012, [http://moscow.ru/ru/infrastructure/economy\\_business/bisness/market\\_in\\_Moscow/cash/](http://moscow.ru/ru/infrastructure/economy_business/bisness/market_in_Moscow/cash/). Also see Ioffe, “Borscht Belt.”

Pokhlebkina, like Beard, Pollan, and others, sought to renew the nation through its kitchen. These experts responded to the seemingly deleterious effects of modernization, urbanization, and post-industrial life generally, serving forth history and national culture in the place of pseudo-foods, foreign concoctions, and false wisdom.

## **Conclusion**

Pokhlebkina's culinary project was initially inspired by the best and the worst of late Soviet food culture: he criticized the blandness and cultural rootlessness of much of the Soviet diet, while celebrating and propagandizing the wholesome, delicious, and traditional dishes of the USSR's titular nationalities. He also came to help shape the late Soviet culinary sphere, bringing together in his cookbooks key threads of Brezhnev-era Soviet public culture: historicism, ethnic revivalism, and a desire to cultivate sociality within the home. In the post-Soviet period, Pokhlebkina retained the same approach and priorities. He homed in on the problems plaguing Russian cuisine, while attempting to change the bleak status quo by teaching the principles of good cooking and emphasizing food's role in good living. After 1991, his writings evinced a new urgency. Pokhlebkina believed he now had to confront not only the negative legacies of the Soviet past, but also pernicious new influences, including economic inequality and Western—especially American—food culture.

As a historian, Pokhlebkina could not help but resort to the past for authority, relying on recipes and customs that had, in his view, been conditioned and refined by generations of experience and tradition. At the same time, his dedication to considering food culture in terms of its historical evolution proved somewhat disillusioning. Pokhlebkina had, in the 1970s, championed a "flowering" of national cultures and advocated a return to home cooking as a

means of improving daily life and building a more robust Soviet culture, comprising numerous national traditions with a lively Russian cuisine at their helm. Looking back from the perspective of the turbulent 1990s, however, he came to believe that the postwar Soviet Union had experienced an undeniable and unavoidable decline in culinary standards, largely on account of the actions and attitudes of pigheaded elites and medical charlatans. Post-Soviet Russia seemed to be reaping the whirlwind: a lack of popular culinary wisdom, the encroachment of global fast food culture, and economic disaster all worked together to threaten the persistence of Russian national heritage.

Pokhlebkin had, as a culinary expert, enjoyed notable popularity before the Soviet collapse, a trend that continued into the twenty-first century. This in itself suggests cultural continuity between the 1970s and the 1990s. Pokhlebkin received praise in the Soviet-era press and found a dedicated readership among educated urbanites, later becoming an icon of culinary wisdom, a source which, when invoked, could lend younger food writers an air of expertise and authority. Tales of alleged censorship and political repression enhanced his supposed role as an embattled intellectual, even as his strident nationalism marked him, in some critics' eyes, as a rabid and untrustworthy Marxist. Since 2000, however, controversy has complicated and, to some extent, damaged his public persona. Revelations about the fabrications and exaggerations underpinning the tales that helped popularize his books have muddied Pokhlebkin's image, while critics have spotted historical inaccuracies in his works on food and drink. Even these attacks speak to the continuing relevance of the perspective on food and Pokhlebkin strove to articulate, as those who engage with his work do so with a mind to setting the record straight in terms of gastronomic history. Rather than attacking Pokhlebkin for being backward, parochial,

antimodern, or boorish, his critics express a commitment, much like Pokhlebkina's own, to preserving national history and custom.

Pokhlebkina first concentrated on Soviet nationalities, later focusing his energies more intensely on the Russian nation, yet the fundamental ideas underlying his efforts were not entirely unique to either the Soviet or the Russian context. Food experts and home cooks elsewhere in the developed world embraced similar forms of gastronomic historicism in an effort to recapture and revive their peoples' cultural traditions. Seen in this light, Pokhlebkina's work appears as part of a larger—albeit fragmented—international movement to anchor national identity and escape a perceived late modern cultural crisis. Pokhlebkina and his colleagues overseas found themselves reacting in similar ways to similar pressures and anxieties. During the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, empires crumbled, globalization intensified, and technology reshaped modern life. As national and imperial fictions appeared to be unraveling around the world, food became progressively more important as a marker of group identity and a link to a seemingly simpler past that was receding into the distance. Pokhlebkina and his readers, like food experts and home cooks around the world, dug up their culinary roots, combining personal explorations with a desire to return society to an imagined familiarity and domesticity by harnessing aspects of food culture they perceived as stable. A humble bowl of cabbage soup or a steaming stack of bliny could now represent something more than a nourishing meal; they spoke of cultural renewal, a potential means of escape from the inequalities, upheavals, and uncertainties of modern life.

## CONCLUSION

### NOSTALGIA AND NORMALIZATION

Upon hearing the phrase “Soviet food,” many Americans might think immediately of bread lines, empty store shelves, and other scenes of deprivation. Recently, however, a competing vision of Soviet cuisine has emerged, thanks in large part to the restaurateurs and food writers in the US and the UK now celebrating the flavors of socialism. For instance, Londoners might enjoy an evening of Soviet-style fun thanks to Russian Revels, a company that in 2012 began hosting such popular pop-up dining events as a vodka-soaked dance party commemorating Yuri Gagarin’s space flight and a “Soviet Chic Dinner,” featuring lard, eggplant caviar, and servers dressed as Young Pioneers.<sup>831</sup> In 2013, Anya von Bremzen’s foodie memoir, *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking*, also helped animate this trend. Reviewed widely in the English-language press, Von Bremzen’s book offered a cozy view of Soviet foodways and provided recipes for readers to try at home.<sup>832</sup> Inspired by this work, food journalists Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva devoted two episodes of their award-winning Hidden Kitchens podcast to the Soviet kitchen, further broadening the growing Western audience for Soviet cookery.<sup>833</sup> Soviet cuisine

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<sup>831</sup> See “Gallery: Past Events,” Russian Revels: Russian Feasts with Slavic Generosity and British Humor, <http://russianrevels.co.uk/past-events>.

<sup>832</sup> See, for example, “From Kolbasa to Borscht, ‘Soviet Cooking’ Tells a Personal Story,” narrated by Ellah Alfrey, All Things Considered, *NPR*, 19 September 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/09/28/222146362/from-kolbasa-to-borscht-soviet-cooking-tells-a-personal-history>; Gessen, “Russia: You Are What You Eat”; Sara Wheeler, “Beyond Borscht,” *New York Times*, 13 September 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/books/review/mastering-the-art-of-soviet-cooking-by-anya-von-bremzen.html>; Mina Holland, Review of *Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking* by Anya von Bremzen, *The Guardian* (UK), 15 September 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/15/mastering-art-soviet-cooking-review>.

<sup>833</sup> Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva (The Kitchen Sisters), “Hidden Kitchens Russia: Dissident Kitchens,” *Hidden Kitchens*, podcast audio, 27 May 2014, <http://www.kitchensisters.org/hidden-kitchens/dissident-kitchens/>; Nelson

also has hit the blogosphere. Most notably, in 2014, Moscow-based journalist and cooking instructor Anna Kharzeeva undertook to cook her way through *The Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*. Published by *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, Kharzeeva's articles have not only appeared online, but also in *RBTH* print supplements in the *New York Times* and other major newspapers.<sup>834</sup>

Yet all of this may have less to do with any innate fascination with Soviet cookery on the part of Brits or Americans than it does with Russians' own ongoing love affair with the Soviet table and other elements of the Soviet past. Most tellingly, almost all of the individuals behind these sources hail from the Soviet Union.<sup>835</sup> Meanwhile, in Russia today foods perceived as Soviet also remain popular and easy-to-find. Grocery stores offer ice cream novelties, soft cheeses, and other products labeled "USSR," as well as "Soviet Champagne" and paper-wrapped candies promising a "taste of childhood." Cities across Russia boast Soviet-themed or even Soviet-era eateries. Some of these seek to recreate the ambience of a worker's canteen, while others provide a more luxurious experience, reminiscent of *nomenklatura*-style dining. Still others have set out to compete with McDonald's, offering pel'meni or meat pies as an alternative to burgers and fries. Numerous cookbooks also tout the joys of Soviet cuisine. Some appeared originally in the Soviet period, while others have been written only recently. They include texts lauding the "cuisines of the Soviet peoples," as well as books designed to teach the reader how to

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and Silva, "Hidden Kitchens Russia: Communal Kitchens," *Hidden Kitchens*, podcast audio, 20 May 2014, <http://www.kitchensisters.org/hidden-kitchens/communal-kitchens/>.

<sup>834</sup> Anna Kharzeeva, *The Soviet Diet* (Blog), [http://rbth.com/russian\\_kitchen/soviet\\_diet](http://rbth.com/russian_kitchen/soviet_diet).

<sup>835</sup> Katrina Kollegaeva, founder of Russian Revels, is from Soviet Estonia. Her partner, Karina Baldry, is a native Muscovite, as are Von Bremzen and Kharzeeva. The exceptions here are, of course, Nelson and Silva, though their podcasts relied on the voices of a number of current and former Russian residents, including Von Bremzen.

cook according to Soviet government standards.<sup>836</sup> As blogger Sasha Raspopina recently suggested, this latter fashion, branded with the acronym GOST (*gosudarstvennyi standart*), not only suggests reliability—a cake baked according to GOST will always taste the same—but also reminds Russians that not all food trends need to come from abroad.<sup>837</sup> In other words, Soviet culinary nostalgia tells Russians that they have a gastronomic history of their own to celebrate, and that it encompasses the years 1917 to 1991. At the same time, this passion for Soviet comestibles might be understood as an implicit critique of post-Soviet Russian foodways, an admission that, in some ways, the past may have more to offer than the present, or at least as much.<sup>838</sup>

These postsocialist cravings are most noteworthy in that they represent a continuation of a major tendency in Soviet-era food discourse: the fusing of modernity and tradition. The events, books, eateries, and blogs that promote Soviet cuisine today treat it as something traditional, even timeless. They jumble together propaganda posters from different decades with pan-Soviet dishes, such as imitation crab salad, and “traditional” foods from Russia, Georgia, and other former Soviet republics. The whole of Soviet food culture tends to be collapsed into a common reservoir of cut-glass serving dishes, layer cakes, and mayonnaise. Yet some of the food celebrated in this new discourse and treated as old-fashioned, perhaps even traditional,

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<sup>836</sup> On nostalgia cookbooks, see note 340 above. Also, on the revival of Soviet government standard recipes, see Alena Spirina, *Sovetskaia kukhnia po GOSTu i ne tol'ko... Vkus nashego detstva!* (Moscow: AST, 2013); Irina Chadeeva, *Vypechka po GOSTu: Vkus nashego detstva! Kulinarnye khity sovetskoi epokhi* (Moscow: Astrel', 2011). Eksmo Press, the publisher that has recently reprinted several of Pokhlebkin's works, has also released new editions of *The Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*, most recently in 2012.

<sup>837</sup> Sasha Raspopina, “GOST from the Past: Why is Soviet Recipe Standardization Back in Fashion?” *The Calvert Journal*, 16 December 2014, <http://calvertjournal.com/comment/show/3470/Soviet-recipe-standardisation-GOST-cakes-baking>.

<sup>838</sup> Similarly, Neringa Klumbytė observed a marked preference “Soviet” (as opposed to “Euro”) sausage in Lithuania in the early 2000s. See Klumbytė, “The Geopolitics of Taste: The ‘Euro’ and ‘Soviet’ Sausage Industries in Lithuania,” in *Food and Everyday Life in the Postsocialist World*, ed. Melissa L. Caldwell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 130-53.



represented some rather futuristic elements of Soviet-era culinary modernization. For example, one can now find recommendations for how to make a homemade substitute for Okean krill paste, a late Soviet novelty, discussed in chapter 1.<sup>839</sup> Moreover, these images and recipes travel by decidedly modern means. Without the proliferation of food blogs, podcasts, and file-sharing websites, Soviet retro dining might not have had the same domestic or international impact. Finally, in a postmodern twist, this trend also embodies the recommodification of Soviet kitsch—a tradition of sorts, rooted in a socialist modernization project—in the conditions of late modern capitalism and in a state that recently has sought to solidify its claims to historical continuity.

As I have argued, although modernization represented one of the most crucial elements of continuity connecting Brezhnev-era culinary discourse with its Soviet antecedents, it did not stand alone as the only force shaping late Soviet food culture. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the modernization impulse helped drive the invention of new food products, the establishment of new modes of service, the opening of new dining establishments, and ongoing efforts to use cutting-edge science to improve what and how Soviet citizens ate. Modernizing the culinary realm thus meant making food healthier, more convenient, and more pleasing to the consumer. It also meant placing the Soviet Union on a level playing field with Western nations, in terms of food output and consumption. These endeavors enjoyed some modest successes. The Soviet diet improved overall, even if periodic shortages persisted throughout the period. Consumption of fruit, vegetables, meat, and milk all increased, accompanied by slight declines in the consumption of bread and potatoes, Russians' ever-present poverty fare. The public dining system expanded considerably and also diversified, allowing more Soviet citizens to take

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<sup>839</sup> See, for example, “Chem zamenit’ pastu ‘Okean’?” *Svoimi rukami: Retsepty bliud, zdorov’e, raznoe* (Blog), 28 October 2013, <http://vseiobovsem.ru/chto-delat-esli-v-prodazhe-net-pastyi-okean/>.

advantage of its services. While nobody would argue that the USSR enjoyed the same widespread abundance as the US, the food situation in the Brezhnev years represented a noticeable improvement over the past—and this resulted in part from the state’s attempts to render the food sphere more “modern.”

Still, late Soviet culinary modernization did not always grant officials the outcomes they desired (or at least claimed to desire). In terms of women’s “emancipation,” modernization fell particularly flat. In spite of offering laborsaving appliances and convenience foods, the state never managed to fully “liberate” women from domestic toil, much of which centered on the kitchen. Ideologists resurrected the “women question” and recognized it as unsolved. But Soviet wives and mothers continued to bear a double burden of productive and reproductive labor throughout the Brezhnev years, while the public preeminence of male experts in the culinary realm robbed women—that is, the people who did the vast majority of the cooking in homes and professional kitchens—of much of their authority. In other cases, efforts at modernization had unexpected consequences. The growth of the dining system, for instance, granted urbanites a space in which they could engage in a rowdy nightlife that often appeared quite out of step with state-backed formulations of modern and “cultured” leisure. Additionally, Soviet citizens often had to turn to “traditional” modes of growing and preserving foods in order to live up to food experts’ admonitions to eat a varied diet rich in fruits and vegetables. Even as the popular diet improved, the selection of produce found in stores often proved dismal. Other modernization programs became thoroughly entangled with questions of cultural tradition, as in restaurants and cookbooks promoting Soviet national cuisines. Initially, they aimed to demonstrate the technological and cultural successes of the socialist system, but this project gradually became overshadowed by concerns about history and authenticity, which arose from the process of

attempting to define and promote these national cuisines. In a final strange turn, some elements of Soviet culinary modernization even made it overseas, thanks to émigré food writers, and were there cast as elements of “traditional” Russian cuisine, by dint of their inclusion in texts that claimed to be offering a glimpse of “real” Russian cookery.

Much of this tug-of-war between “modernity” and “tradition” went on under the surface of Soviet food culture and, in many cases, has to be carefully teased out of sources from this period. For instance, cookbook authors and food journalists would likely have been reticent to treat women’s “traditional” position in the kitchen as an indicator that the Soviet Union had not yet become fully “modern” in the terms set out by ideology. Instead, we see cookbooks, periodicals, and even feature films presuming that kitchen labor naturally represents “women’s work.” Placed alongside officials’ repeated declarations that the state continued to strive to “liberate” women from the kitchen, it becomes apparent that policy remained at odds with both popular assumptions and the realities of daily life. In other cases, however, the texts speak loudly and clearly to tensions between the old and the new. Pokhlebkin’s writings offer the clearest example, as he argues for privileging historical wisdom over nutritional science and modern methods of food service. His and, to a somewhat lesser degree, other works on “national cuisines,” level an implicit critique at the Soviet gastronomic status quo, contending that Soviet food policies had erred in prioritizing scientific and industrial advances over the “traditional” pleasures of the table. This had a detrimental effect on national customs, which demanded revivification by the late twentieth-century. More explicit forms of these critiques appeared both in Russian cookbooks published abroad and, later, in post-Soviet Russian texts, which lamented the decline of Russian culture during the Soviet years.

These tendencies in the culinary sphere speak to features of the broader late Soviet culture that scholars have already fingered as vitally important. First, these developments reveal that the realm of food also took part in a “historical turn,” which Denis Kozlov interprets as evidence of Soviet citizens’ need to find a new means of “legitimiz[ing] their existence.”<sup>840</sup> While some individuals gathered historical ephemera, consumed or produced nostalgic literature and films, took part in the underground nationalist movement, or fought for the preservation of architectural monuments, others, as I have demonstrated, turned to the kitchen for wisdom and inspiration, cooking up the past as a means of giving the present meaning. This represents what literary scholar Svetlana Boym has described as “restorative nostalgia,” a form of nostalgia concerned with uncovering a people’s “truth,” creating a continuous cultural memory, and restoring the past.<sup>841</sup> Second, gastronomy also felt the impact of the growing coziness between Soviet officialdom and Russian nationalists that helped shape other areas of cultural and intellectual production in the post-Stalin era. Whereas specifically Russian cuisine had once existed as an almost taboo subject in Soviet food discourse, celebrations of Russian “traditions” became central to much Brezhnev-era food writing and an increasing number of public dining establishments. Russian fare had been there all along, but now the Soviet public and foreign visitors would be reminded that certain dishes represented part of the *Russian* cultural patrimony. Third, the preceding chapters also offer some insights into why we might consider the Brezhnev years the “apogee” of Soviet socialism and why this period has emerged as the focal point for so much post-Soviet nostalgia. When considered in the context of today’s regional strife, the cross-cultural “friendship” implicit in the phrase “national cuisines of the Soviet peoples” might seem unusually attractive. Moreover, after more than two decades of foreign influence, both the

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<sup>840</sup> Kozlov, “Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture,” 578.

<sup>841</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

technological achievements represented in Soviet culinary modernization and the historical customs celebrated in late Soviet cookbooks give Russians something of their “own” to be proud of. When they tire of hamburgers, sushi, and woodfired pizzas, they can look to the past and delight in GOST cookery and a vast array of “native” (or seminate) food traditions.

By examining culinary discourses in Brezhnev’s Russia, we can also reorient some of our previous assumptions about Soviet society and culture in this period. To begin with, Soviet food culture had much more in common with the food cultures of other industrialized nations in the late twentieth century than we might previously have thought. The USSR’s discourse of gastronomic historicism and traditionalism may be part of a common reaction across the developed world to decades of governmental, technological, and scientific intervention in the food supply. After all, in the twentieth century, advances in agriculture, industry, nutritional science, and media technologies transformed diets worldwide, while also reshaping even the way people *thought* about food. States and various food authorities admonished modern publics to consider the nutritional building blocks of their meals, offering a series of sometimes-contradictory “rules” for proper eating. Living correctly now meant making the right decisions about what to put on the dinner table. At the same time, urbanization, coupled with the growing use of processed and packaged foods, placed many people in the USSR, the US, and elsewhere at a greater distance from the source of their sustenance than ever before. Further, during the Cold War the realm of food became yet another arena for competition, as American and Soviet leaders measured the relative success of their systems in meat, milk, and calories. On the whole, these trends made modern diets more robust, consistent, and safe. Yet they also inspired a host of anxieties, mainly about health and the loss of national culture. Could states and factories be trusted to look out for the individual’s wellbeing? Had canned foods, foreign fads, and a fast-

paced lifestyle replaced beloved cultural treasures? Could a food culture that placed a premium on efficiency and scientific nutrition erode familial and communal bonds? Concerns about health, national identity, and morality can all be found enmeshed in late twentieth-century food discourses. This is as true of America today as it was of the USSR in the 1970s.

Further, the struggles over modernity and tradition evident in late Soviet Russian food discourse also speak to more specifically “Soviet” issues, particularly the question of whether we can characterize the some or all of the Brezhnev years as a time of “stagnation,” or if we should, instead, be attuned to this society’s various “dynamisms.” I maintain that we ought to stop looking at this as an either/or proposition. Indeed, throughout the whole of this period, some processes of “stagnation” and “dynamism” developed alongside or in response to one another. The dining sector provides a perfect example. Even in the restaurants and cafes of the Soviet capital, one often encountered sorry service, supply shortages, and rowdy behavior. Seen from one angle, this looks like stagnation, especially if we focus solely on the Brezhnev decades (after all, such problems *always* plagued the public dining apparatus). It seems to reveal the Soviet state as perennially incapable of living up to its own standards, and either unaware of or unable to stop the little corruptions that permeated this system. But here we also find “dynamic” elements. The drive to render national restaurants more authentic, for instance, sparked a great deal of change. Some establishments underwent extensive redecoration; others had their menus revamped. This project also facilitated greater trade cooperation between the Soviet Union and some of its socialist allies. To take another example, officialdom’s inability to deliver the quantities of fruits and vegetables that it deemed “physiologically” necessary feels like a symptom of stasis. Yet few would describe the dacha culture that food shortfalls helped encourage as anything other than vital. In some ways, late Soviet food culture may have been

somewhat “stagnant,” yet there was much more to it than supply shortages, poor restaurant service, and women’s double burden. In late Soviet Russia, the culinary realm also encompassed elements of change, pleasure, exploration, and experimentation. How do we take both of these facts seriously?

As I have already suggested, we might profit by considering the Brezhnev years a period of normalization. This does not mean that we have some objective norm against which to measure Soviet successes or failures. Instead, it means that we might set aside the assumption—implicit in the “stagnation” paradigm and many refutations of it—that a revolutionary impulse necessarily animated the late Soviet state. In my view, during the Brezhnev years the Soviet Union ceased to be a revolutionary project and started settling into its identity as a world power with a status quo of its own to protect. Taking this as our baseline, we might find a more analytically rich approach to this period than either the stagnation thesis or forays into various dynamisms could provide.

Most importantly for this project, normalization helps explain the “historical turn,” in food culture and elsewhere. For Soviet society to achieve some kind of normalcy, it needed firmer ground under its feet than the Bolsheviks’ revolutionary legacy offered. Normalization demanded deep cultural roots, which would allow the public to connect with something other than unfulfilled promises of utopia, or a legacy of political repression and social upheaval. This appealed not only to the decision-makers who permitted historicist and nationalist discourses to flourish, but also to the everyday people who helped perpetuate them. Additionally, normalization permits us to ask whether the USSR was becoming more like developed, nonsocialist states in this period. The affinities between the USSR and its competitors are more abundant and meaningful than we might previously have assumed. This militates in favor of

interpretations of the Soviet collapse that cast it as the relatively sudden and surprising demise of a megastate, rather than the inevitable end of a faltering revolutionary regime. After all, the period from 1965 to 1985 saw economic recession, systemic dysfunction, and political dissent the world over and for many states these ailments did not prove terminal. Without disregarding the importance of revolution as a touchstone for Soviet policy, taking seriously the *un-*revolutionary character of the Brezhnev regime might aid us in reconceptualizing not only this period, but also the broader arc of Soviet history.



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