

# Unusual Ingredients: Gastronationalism, Globalization, Technology, and Zeppelins in the Lithuanian Imagination

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## Abstract

This project focuses on a Lithuanian dish—a potato dumpling—known as the “zeppelin” to examine the construction of national food at two different historical moments—the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In examining nation building as an everyday practice that is embedded in global cultural, economic, and technological transformations, this paper is an attempt to rethink a particular instance of East European nationalism beyond its current designation as agrarian, historical, and reactionary to understanding dynamic tensions surrounding its reproduction. First, I argue that the birth of national food in the 1920s and 1930s was deeply embedded in the processes of modernization and industrialization that allowed new ways to imagine the global, and, second, my research demonstrates that experiences of alterity continue to permeate national imaginaries in the Europeanising Baltics.

*Nationalism, food culture, modernization, history of technology, Lithuania*

In her recent article, Michaela DeSoucey (2010) introduces the term “gastronationalism” to denote a particular set of nation-making practices that draw on food as a medium for expressing ideas of patrimony, distinction, and collective belonging. Zooming in on *foie gras* as an example of French gastronationalism, DeSoucey shows how economic interests, state institutions, and local food practices converged into powerful performances of French nationalism in the context of the deepening pan-European universalism and globalization. DeSoucey goes further to suggest that, paradoxically, such food-based nation building in France itself relies on globalization of food markets and universalization of food branding claims.

While DeSoucey’s research tells a story of success in negotiating external pressures to reproduce French nationalism, Zsuzsa Gille’s (2011) examination of *foie gras* economy in Hungary paints a bleaker picture to argue that globalization and Europeanization work against Hungarian producers and the interests of the Hungarian nation state. Gille’s research reveals how universalist claims to ethical treatment of animals and institutional arrangements in the European Union (EU) paved the way for a small Austrian-based animal rights NGO to halt *foie gras* production in entire all of Hungary for extended periods of time, and hold nation state-based institutions hostage. In highlighting the uneven grounds in European food politics, Gille’s project adds an important power dimension to understanding connections between food and nationalism as embedded in geopolitics and a global political economy. Unlike French producers, Hungarians could not deflect critiques framed in universalist terms, and, as a result, they were stigmatized and presented as negligent at best and immoral, at worst.

Although Gille’s analysis does not explicitly elaborate on gastronationalism, her research complicates the idea of the alignment of transnational markets, nation state, supranational institutions, and national identities in producing national culinary tastes. It also hints at the issues related to how universalist ideas about what constitutes progress, enlightenment, morality, and modernity become problematic for national subjects in the post-socialist East European contexts where identities are reconstituted not only as a reaction to global and local politics, but also in relation to the imaginaries of backwardness and provincialism (Todorova 1997, Wolff 1994).

Building on this line of argumentation, this article is concerned with experiences of alterity in East European nation building, and particularly how it is manifested in the national culinary cultures. Indeed, how do the markings of “lack of civilization” or “underdevelopment” play into the production of national subjectivities and their performances? How are these experiences manifesting themselves in particular forms of cultural and material reproduction? What is the political economy of such national economies? More broadly, how are geopolitical inequalities, global imaginaries, and local subjectivities of alterity negotiated in performances of national identities?

Building on the case of the Lithuanian national dish, a potato dumpling called “zeppelin,” I seek to argue that experiences of alterity in Lithuania—and potentially in other post-socialist contexts—produced a particular temporal and geographic orientation in national subjectivities that drew legitimacy by looking into the future and beyond the geographic bounds of the claimed national territory. I hope to show that in addition to inwards-looking nationalist claims to shared collective history, land, bloodlines, language and culture, there were other potent cultural imaginaries that focused on technological progress, science and modernity far beyond that collective, as captured in Charles Piot’s recent analysis of experiences of poverty in West African societies and his evocative notion of “nostalgia for the future” (2010).

To be sure, this article is not an attempt to make far-reaching claims about the nature of Lithuanian nationalism. Rather, in tracing the historical trajectory of a national dish, this paper is an attempt to rethink a particular instance of East European nationalism beyond its current designation as agrarian, historical, and reactionary to understanding dynamic tensions surrounding its reproduction. By so doing, I hope to recast nationalism and its reincarnations in Lithuanian national cuisine as drawing on multiple conflicting visions, political imaginaries, existing practices, and cultural resources, many of which historically proved to be disturbingly exclusionary, and continue to be so. I also hope to highlight the significance of class and social inequalities that cut across national identities and that are made particularly visible in culinary practices. In short, this is a story of the use of unusual ingredients in reproducing transnational geopolitical hierarchies and national identities situated in them.

To advance these themes, the paper focuses on two historical moments, the early-20<sup>th</sup> century when predominantly peasant populations were incorporated in the global systems of economic exchange and became ethnic citizens of nation states, and the more recent developments in post-socialist Lithuania when the opening of the borders and fast-paced globalization pose new economic and political challenges to East European nationalisms. This paper also briefly touches on the evolution of zeppelins during the Soviet period spanning from 1940 to 1991, while recognizing that this topic deserves a much more in-depth inquiry into socialism’s particular configuration of national politics and global imaginaries. In light of this, the rest of the paper is organized around seven sections. The first two sections introduce zeppelins and survey the scholarly work at the intersection of the scholarship on globalization, nationalism, and food culture. I will then present a history of zeppelins as interwoven with that of the history of aviation in Lithuania in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Next, I will briefly explain how zeppelins became a popular food under socialism and examine how the dish has been rebranded in post-socialist contexts. The closing section will reflect on national cuisine and its peculiar relationship to technology, and its renewed claims to authenticity.

## **Briefly About Zeppelins**

Lithuania's national food is *cepelinai*. Translated as “zeppelins,” this dish usually consists of two large potato dumplings filled with minced meat or farmer's cheese, and served in a fatty bacon sauce. For Lithuanians, zeppelins are a symbol of Sunday afternoon dinners with families as well as other social gatherings bringing together the kin and guests from different corners of the country and the world around one table. In today's fast growing restaurant chains, zeppelins have also become the centerpiece of ethnic menus. One of the locally acclaimed restaurants in Vilnius now boasts serving twelve kinds of zeppelins that are designed to capture the subtleties of different regional and family traditions in zeppelin making.



Zeppelins are the centerpiece dish on the national restaurant menus and are often served in dishes that are decorated in Lithuanian national motifs. Picture taken by Sigitas Mince at the Kampas, a restaurant in downtown Marijampole, on November 5, 2011.

What is peculiar about zeppelins as a national dish is that neither its key ingredient (the potato) nor its name (originating from the German airship built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) have much to do with what one expects to constitute “authentic” Lithuanian foods and traditions. Indeed, potatoes were accepted into the homes of the Baltic peasantry only in the early-19<sup>th</sup> century; previous to that local diets were dominated by grains, dairy, fish, and meats grown on the farms, or berries, nuts, and wild game (Dunduliene 1963). To claim that the potato has historically been “the queen of Lithuanian kitchens” (“Lietuvos Valgiai” [“Lithuanian Foodways”] 2006:11), as argued in one magazine marketing Lithuania to foreign investors, is to gloss over the long and painstaking history of potato adaptation in East Europe and around the world (Zurekman 1999, O’Grada 1999, Woodham-Smith 1962, Smith and Christian 1984, Ploeg 1993, Pelto and Pelto 1983, Salaman 1985).

In addition to the obscured historical origins of zeppelins, it is also puzzling why this dish experienced a revival in post-socialist Lithuania. Often described as an unhealthy “peasant food,” zeppelins continue to occupy an important place in the globalizing diets. Despite growing numbers of global food restaurants—including American steakhouses, French bakeries, Spanish tapas bars, Italian pizzerias, Thai, Mexican, and Japanese restaurants as well as McDonalds—and the growth of international food sections in the supermarkets, the old style potato dumpling has carved out an important niche in the local diets as well as identities in Europeanizing and globalizing Lithuania.

An analysis of how these contradictions have been negotiated yields insights into how national imaginaries and identity practices were produced in particular political, cultural,

economic and material contexts. This approach to the social life of Lithuania's national food is based on the assumption that foods constitute a material medium for the expression of social distinctions, reconfirmation of social relations and rearticulation of national/ethnic belonging. As a material culture of a social group, food has been defined by generations of anthropologists as a social mediator and a cultural symbol (Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Appadurai 1990). It may also be helpful to recognize that foods are not simply vehicles for the expression of social and economic relations but, even more importantly, operate as structuring agents in the production of these very social and economic realities. In this sense, this project is built on the post-structuralist framework by taking seriously the agency of food in the process of construction of new geographies, identities and bodies.

### **Methodological Note, Data, and Analysis**

The primary methodology I employed in studying the construction and consumption of zeppelins in globalizing Lithuania is multi-sited research (Marcus 1998, 2000, Gustavson 2003). George Marcus (1995) distinguishes between two modes of multi-sited ethnography. The first utilizes multiple research sites to reconstruct and analyze processes taking place in specific locales from multiple perspectives. This mode of ethnography is called multi-sited because ethnographers use multiple research sites and approaches to examine the specific locale and the (re)production of global power systems in it. The second mode of multi-sited ethnography is less concerned with placing ethnographic sites in the larger global systems, and rather privileges exposing how the new economic, political and social systems are produced in specific contexts. The second mode of multi-sited research explores new connections, traces down the circulation of things, humans, and discourses and exposes the production of new global sites.

This project uses elements from both branches. First, as is common in doing historical and ethnographic work, to explore the construction of the national food I utilize multiple research sites including historical archives, fieldwork in different ethnographic regions, participant observations, formal and open-ended interviews in restaurants, cafés, by street vendors, in homes and at family gatherings as well as in popular media, menus, culinary books, advertising, blogs, and nutritional science publications. Conceptually, I follow the second mode of multi-sited ethnography by approaching national food as a unique site where the notions of the "global" and the "local" are reconstituted.

To gather historical data on the construction of zeppelins as a national food at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I studied the Lithuanian popular press and recorded oral histories and in-depth interviews with consumers from Lithuania's four regions—Aukštaitija, Zemaitija, Dzukija and Suvalkija and its major cities.<sup>1</sup> This research also involved conducting unstructured person-centered, open-ended interviews (Levy and Hollan 2000), listening to life histories, and engaging in participant observation. I also carried out contemporary media analysis specifically in popular food forums and on-line journals, interviewed representatives of marketing departments of restaurants and the bureaucrats from the Tourism Department and the Ministry of Agriculture.

To analyze the obtained data, I employed classical interpretative techniques used by ethnographers such as the grounded theory approach and analytic induction that are foundational in the Extended Case Study (Burawoy 1998, Burawoy et al. 2000). These approaches move between inductive and deductive analysis by first identifying a pattern or a theme in the data, then switching into verification of the theme by confirming it or qualifying and then starting a

new inductive cycle. The themes identified in the first round of analysis were confirmed by the second and third iterations.

### **Globalization and National Cuisine**

The idea that national foods—and identities—are related to global processes is not new. Stuart Hall, for example, has powerfully shown us that English tea—a quintessential marker of “traditional” English society—is an embodiment of colonialism. Paradoxically, produced in England’s colonial margins, the tea leaves, the sugar and china have played a central role in re-inventing the national identities of the metropolis and the practices of Englishness in the everyday (Hall 1991:27). Similarly, Richard Wilk (1999, 2001, 2006) demonstrates that what appears as a “local” or “traditional” Belizean/Caribbean food is a mix of products of local subsistence economies, imports and industrial diets brought about by centuries of trade, slavery, colonialism, migration, and more recently, tourism. Many others—Sidney Mintz (1985, 2006), James Watson (1997), David Goodman and Michael Watts (1997), Lawrence Busch (2004), George Ritzer (1998), Marianne Lien and Bridgette Nerlich (2004) have shown that local culinary practices and dietary imaginaries are deeply embedded in global history and economies.

Simultaneously, in Russian, East European and Eurasian area studies, Melissa Caldwell (2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2006), Jennifer Patino (2002), Gediminas Lankauskas (2002), and Elizabeth Dunn (2004, 2005) have made the case that foods have become a profound medium for renegotiating local practices and identities—including national and religious affiliations—in the globalizing East and Central Europe. By focusing on new commodities such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, McDonalds fast food or (in Dunn’s work) the introduction of leaner, genetically uniform pigs in Polish farms and “European” style pork onto the tables of the new elites, the authors have showed how food consumption is entangled in the production of new social hierarchies and geographies.

Such an approach to understanding local identities as produced through globalization of food chains is consistent with an older and well established literature on global systems. A number of scholars have argued that globalization does not mean homogenization of experiences, practices and commodities. In this literature connections between the local and the global have been theorized through the concepts of creolization<sup>2</sup> (Hannerz 1987, 2000), fragmentation<sup>3</sup> (Huntington 1996), localization<sup>4</sup> (Brenner 1999), glocalization<sup>5</sup> (Robertson 1992, Kraidy 1999) and, especially, hybridization (Nederveen-Pieterse 1994, 2003; Appadurai 1990, 1996) to emphasize the on-going reconstitution, mixing and transformations of global practices, commodities and institutions as they are introduced locally. In this sense, DeSoucey’s notion of gastronomicalism discussed above speaks particularly to the kinds of mutual constituency of national identities and global pressures.

Yet, such approaches do not account for differences in subject positions in global centers and its peripheries. While claims to authenticity, history, patrimony, geography and even relationships to soil are common in naming national cuisine dishes, the title and history of Lithuanian zeppelins suggests that they can also stand as indexes for the imaginaries of technological advancement, progress, and modernization. At the heart of this issue in Lithuania is a fundamental change that took place in the region in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when predominantly peasant populations were remade into ethnic subjects of nation states (Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm 1990).

Benedict Anderson (1983) draws attention to the significance of technologies as transmitters of national identities arguing that the growth of mass media, the proliferation of print cultures, the strengthening of transnational markets globally and industrialization, more broadly, were the driving forces behind nationalism. Similarly, in the Baltic States (Schwartz 2006, Eglitis 2004), it was the transportation technologies that challenged and remade experiences of distances, the commentator voices from the newly acquired radios, and the images from remote places that defined the subjectivities and everyday experience in the Baltic homes.

In the case of Lithuania, these technologies acquired a particular place in cultural imaginaries and worked as methodologies for re-envisioning Lithuania as a modern, forward-looking nation with its modern attributes. Even if the past served as a point of reference in defining the group boundaries and legitimizing national claims over the territory, the future and its technologies were seen as a key element in national discourses. In this sense, technologies were not only mediators for circulating nationalist discourses, but also played an important part in defining the contents of these discourses.

### **Cooking up a Revolution: The History of Zeppelins in Lithuania**

While the connection between the airship and food may seem dubious and even humorous from today's perspective, Count Zeppelin's machines occupied a special place in the popular imagination of the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. With the fast-paced advances in engine technologies, the airships captured the minds and hearts of the entire generation who experienced unprecedented technological progress, the rise of nationalist sentiments across the continent, and the materialization of revolutionary ideas about social transformations. Advertising, newspaper articles, radio programs, pictures, drawings, caricatures, novels and real-life accounts depicting zeppelins, all fed the imagination of the masses. In Germany, for example, images of zeppelins could be found not only in books, toy stores or shop showcases, but also in the postcards used as promotional materials for specialty food shops and restaurants as well as in the names of food such as "zeppelin bread" in Vienna and "zeppelin wurst (sausages)" in Frankfurt. As Guillaume de Syon in his book on the politics and culture of zeppelin production in Germany states: "[w]hile relatively few people flew in the 'flying cigars,' the masses adopted them as their own" (Syon 2001:3).

In Lithuania, whose territory had been under the yoke of the Russian Empire since 1795, zeppelins were made familiar through local newspapers as well as underground publications. But it was not until 1916 when the first zeppelin landed in Lithuania as part of Germany's military strategies in the Eastern front. As social unrest spread through the Russian Empire, Germany decided to "set in motion the avalanche of revolution" (Lehman 1923:202) by sending zeppelins loaded with arms to the capital of Imperial Russia, Petrograd. While the arrival of zeppelin in Lithuania was not publicized due to its secret mission, many witnessed the flight of the LZ-98 piloted by commander Lehmann on its way to Petrograd and its landing in Kaunas in November 1916. At the time, Kaunas was a provincial city in the Western borderlands of the Russian Empire and it boasted a newly built airport. The stationing of zeppelins in Kaunas and then later in Wainoden, Estonia, had a deep impact on the inhabitants of the cities and their vicinities. For the vast majority of its observers in the Baltic borderlands, this was the first encounter with the flying machine that enchanted the millions around the world.

Even more important than the fascination with the new technological capabilities, zeppelins were part of the seismic social changes taking place in the region. While it is difficult to gauge exactly what impact the zeppelin had on the Bolshevik Revolution, the ideologies about technological progress contributed to the deepening experiences of historical transformations in the region and fomenting the national sentiments in the Baltics.

One important event in the interwar history of Lithuania, a transatlantic flight from New York City to Kaunas, is particularly illuminating in how technology, nationalism, progress and global politics were woven together into nationalist narratives in Lithuania. In 1933, on the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of Lithuanian nation state, two Lithuanian émigré pilots—Darius and Girenas—set out to break the world record in distance by flying without refueling crossing the Atlantic, from New York to Kaunas. In addition to the numerous technological innovations that were required to rebuild the Bellanca CH-300 Pacemaker airplane and the unique use of air flows that the pilots devised, the plane also carried packages of mail and, if successful, it was supposed to become one of the first deliveries of airmail. Their aircraft was appropriately named *Lituanica* (Lithuania, in Latin) and was expected to propel Lithuania's name to the front pages of the global media. In one of the letters that the two pilots wrote, they argued that success of the mission—and even its deadly failure—would bring visibility to Lithuania's technological prowess and, hence, their sacrifice was worthwhile.

Darius and Girenas successfully crossed the Atlantic and flew without landing for over 7,000 km. It, however, crashed near Soldin, Germany (now Pszczelnik, Poland), only 650 km short of their destination in Kaunas. Not surprisingly there are many conspiracy theories as to why the plane crashed, with the most widely spread version as being shot by the Germans after mistaking it for a spy plane.

The arrival of the bodies of the two national heroes became the pinnacle of national sentiment in Lithuania when crowds gathered to mourn across the country, constituting the largest mass gatherings in the interwar period. After crashing in Germany, the two pilots became the symbols of Lithuanian nationalism and the source of national pride. Not only was the wreckage of the plane included on a permanent display in the War Museum in Kaunas, but the bodies of the two pilots were also embalmed and placed in the newly built mausoleum. Today, the two pilots are memorialized in history textbooks, popular songs, memorials, and even on one of the bills of national currency, *Litas*.

It is in this historical backdrop that the narratives surrounding aviation in particular and technological progress in general played in the reproduction and performances of Lithuanian nationalism. However superficial and perhaps even ironic were the connections between the shape of the potato dumpling and the airship, the meanings of these two cultural artifacts became deeply intertwined in the emerging national material culture and narratives.



Zeppelins resemble airships in their shape and color. They are most frequently filled with meat and dressed with bacon sauce and sour cream on the side. Picture taken by the author at the restaurant Gudeliu Karcema, a rural tourism establishment in South Eastern Lithuania, on August 19, 2011.

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The construction of the zeppelin as Lithuanian national food in the popular press was a gradual process, but it is certain that by the late 1930s the dish was acknowledged as one of the “most Lithuanian” of the local foods. Along with dumplings made of flour and filled with meat, cheese or berries, zeppelins were included in the cookbooks published in the 1930s as the staples of Lithuanian cuisine. The recipes for dumplings resembling zeppelins, however, date back to much earlier cookbooks such as the first cookbooks on Lithuanian cooking *Kucharka Litewska* (1854) by Wincenta Zawadzka, and *Gaspadinystes Knyga* (1904) by Liudvika Didziuliene-Zmona.

Unlike the zeppelins of the late-20<sup>th</sup> century with only two most popular fillings—cottage cheese and minced meat—the early recipes featured a wide range of potato dumplings. These early forms of dumplings included filling made out of mushrooms, cabbage, carrots or bacon mixed with cheese. In some cases, dumplings were deep fried in oil, as opposed to “classical” boiling. Such a variety in potato dumpling making was due to seasonal changes in food supply as well as the creativity of the cook. Additionally, the texture of the dish depended heavily on the type of the potato and size of the grater, and therefore the potato dumpling in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century differed significantly from region to region.

It is during the decades of socialist rule in Lithuania that the potato dumpling gained the taste and meanings of the zeppelin we know today. Industrialization of agricultural production made meat and dairy available throughout the year and breeding techniques led to the increased productivity as well as durability and resistance of potatoes to pests and diseases, leading to the popularization of potato dishes more broadly and zeppelins in particular. Most of the contemporary zeppelins were made out of starchy potatoes and filled with either meat or cheese. Additionally, with the introduction of new household appliances in the 1960s, the grueling manual labor of grating the potatoes was replaced by mechanical kitchen devices. In most cases, Soviet Lithuania’s consumers were unable to obtain the graters, and they used their creativity, resourcefulness and engineering skills to transform any device with small engines (e.g. juicers)



into potato graters. As the zeppelins became easier to make, they were turned into the quintessential family meal in the homes of the urbanites.

In short, industrialization of agriculture made potatoes more readily available and the mechanization of zeppelin-making under socialism streamlined the recipe for the zeppelin, bringing uniformity in taste, texture and the look of the dish. In the context of Soviet attempts to redefine nationalism as a remnant of the past that needed to be collected, preserved, and displayed in museums, boiled potatoes with skins were defined as a Lithuanian national food, but it was the zeppelin that became the most popular and desired meal known as “national food” and cooked in the homes of Soviet Lithuania’s nationals.

### **Global Economies, Local Divides: Zeppelin and the Politics of Urban/Rural Nationalism**

While nationalist narratives claimed to be all encompassing, the actual performances of national identity, particularly those related to producing food, turned out to be wrought with contradictions and internal divisions. As this section suggests, the construction of zeppelins as a national dish did not erase, but served to reproduce urban and rural divides, making national identities a permanent fixture of the urban elite culture.

Despite the fact that the potato dumpling was included in the canon of Lithuanian cuisine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the dish was primarily prepared and consumed in the homes of the urbanites well into the late-20<sup>th</sup> century. The primary reason was that zeppelins were labor and time intensive, a luxury that peasants did not have. To serve five adults, one had to prepare the filling, grate six pounds of potatoes, prepare and roll the dough, assemble the dumplings, make sauce, and cook the zeppelins for almost an hour. Not surprisingly, only those who could afford cooks or servants in their homes in the interwar period and household technologies during socialism were able to eat them. Diets of the rural inhabitants embodied the logic of subsistence and labor efficiency, as they continued to eat soups (often two a day), porridges, dairy products, eggs, and, only on occasion, meat.

The major transformation in the daily life and economic status of a peasant in Lithuania took place after the Agricultural Reform of 1922 when the newly-founded state redistributed old manorial estates and moved the peasants from villages into separate settlements. Until then, most of the peasants in Lithuania had continued to live in villages built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of the Reform, about 7,000 villages disappeared and 160,000 families moved into homes built directly on their own land. The old strip farming was abandoned and new multi-field cultivation techniques were introduced. In this sense, the Land Reform of 1922 unmade the feudal village.

Along with these major changes in rural landscapes and societies, Lithuania’s government started developing an institutional, economic and informational grid that connected local agriculture into the global economy. By introducing the Chamber of Agriculture and five powerful economic organizations that actively propagated growing cash crops, and by aggressively investing in technology imports and agricultural education, the Lithuanian state sought to invent itself as a global player. Even in the most remote settlements, Lithuania’s farmers raised Rhode Island chickens, English white swine, pure-bred Holstein-Friesian cows, East Prussian Trakener horses, and grew the prominent German and Dutch potato varieties such as Boehms Odelwaelder Blaue, Kamekes Laurus, Richtes Prinzess, Rhein, Schmidts Praesident Krueger, Kamekes Hindenburg and others. Lithuanian bacon reached England, butter traveled to Denmark, eggs went to Germany, and flax was shipped to Switzerland. In such a context, agriculture emerged as the largest and the strongest area in Lithuania’s economy: in 1939, 73.2%

of the population lived in the countryside and worked in agriculture, and 78% of all Lithuania's exports consisted of agricultural products.

In such a manner, by the end of the 1930s, Lithuania emerged as a relatively strong agrarian state integrated into European food and agricultural commodity markets. The major shifts in the agricultural sector that occurred in the interwar period transformed the lives of the farmers by making them the subjects of the global economy as well as these of the state institutions. Yet, from the local perspective, they continued to be the producers of potatoes, not consumers of zeppelins, a key difference in how they experienced their belonging to a nation.

Zeppelin consumption embodies the social boundaries that emerged in this period. For urbanites and the upper echelons of rural society, the national question rested in solving the tensions implicit in the building of "closed" national communities (Schwartz 2006) in the world where the imperial and nation state borders were opening to global market exchanges. By endowing the local potato dumpling with the name of the most impressive German airship and the meanings of modern progress, the national elite found a venue for negotiating tensions between nationalism and globalization. Prepared by servants and cooks, and on rare occasions by poorer stay-at-home women living in Lithuania's towns, zeppelins enabled the new urban elites to experience a membership in the modern, technologized and globalized world through consumption of its national food, and by so doing, to proudly perform their Lithuanian-ness.

For the rural populations, the zeppelin was a sign of luxury and wealth, and not that of a nation. As one of the respondents suggests:

We did not make zeppelins when I was growing up [in the 1930s]. It was so labor intensive that it simply did not make sense. Now everybody says that zeppelins are a Lithuanian dish, but I think this is plain wrong... Zeppelins is a Soviet invention (Interview conducted on June 15, 2008)

While Lithuanian city dwellers lived in ebbs and flows of nationalism and patriotism, the farmers remained outside of these movements. Even though arguments were made that the predominantly peasant populations had become ethnic subjects of European nation states by the early-20<sup>th</sup> century (Hobsbawm 1990), in Lithuania, the newly founded farmers were preoccupied with their subsistence and farming. In another interview, a former teacher says:

I don't think that my parents put much thought into what it meant to be Lithuanian... We certainly were different from the Russians and the Jews, but I was also different from my cousin who was born and lived in Kaunas (Interview conducted on July 1, 2008).

This point exposes the deep seated experiences of the urban-rural divide and it resonates with Bourdieu's argument that shaped by the economic realities, cultural tastes work as mechanisms for reproducing social class boundaries. However, this also signals major differences in the embodied experiences of nationalism and globalization among the two social groups in Lithuania. On the one hand, the urbanites were looking outwards to connect Lithuanian nationalism with the events in the global political scene. By consuming national meals, they performed their commitment to the two cultural domains—the local and the global. On the other, the rural populations lived in the realities of the global economy through their labor, by planting new seeds, tending pure-bred animals, and working with the new machineries. In their world,

tensions between the national and the global were resolved through economic relations and production.

The urban-rural and consumption-production divides that emerged in the early decades of Lithuanian nationalism persisted through Soviet times into the years of national revival in the late-1980s and the early-1990s. Under socialism, just like in the 1920s and 1930s, the zeppelins were hardly ever prepared in the homes of the *kolhozniks*—the collective farm workers—and state farm employees. They simply did not have the time to prepare the zeppelin. Even with the new household technologies, the making of Lithuanian national food was not worth the effort. In the Soviet Lithuanian cities, however, the zeppelin became one of the most coveted foods with deeply nationalist undertones.

While the national liberation movements of 1989 drew strongly on an agro-nationalism and defined the farmer as the ultimate steward of the nation, the ideals and ideologies of nationalism gained little traction with the rural populations in the early 1990s. As the urbanites—those of working class background and the educated elites—took to the streets to protest the Soviet occupation and make a statement about the political aspirations of the Lithuanian nation, most of the rural inhabitants remained distant observers (Creed 1995). More broadly, if we consider food consumption as an embodied act of identity making, then Lithuania's rural populations were the Other kinds of bodies within the nation. Paradoxically, even though it was the farmers in interwar Lithuania and agrarian workers under socialism who were using impressive modern technologies such as tractors, fertilizers, and imported, newly bred plants and animals, these technological achievements proved to be too prosaic to compete with the national imaginaries of aviation and progress.

### **The Potato Republic: The Political Economy of Zeppelin Making in Contemporary Lithuania**

In today's Lithuania, the zeppelin continues serving as a conduit between global economy, geopolitics, national identities and local social hierarchies (global geopolitics and markets and local economic culture and practices). Two contradictory moves are important in this period. On the one hand, zeppelins are deeply embedded in the political economy of post-socialist agriculture, where potatoes were a reliable source of nutrition, enabling the survival of scores of people who did not have other access to food. On the other hand, zeppelins are contested as a national dish of Lithuania, exposing live nerves of debates over what constitutes patrimony, authenticity, national identities, heritage and traditions in the increasingly globalizing economies. This suggests that the proliferation of this national dish in a globalizing Lithuania reveals on-going negotiations in regards to national identities, but also contradictions in the economic systems and market rationalities.

With the end of socialism and the re-establishment of Lithuania as an independent nation state, local economy was reshuffled. In the same way as in other post-socialist states, land belonging to collective and state farms was privatized, infrastructures crumbled, technologies deteriorated, and small-scale semi-subsistence farming prevailed. In the mid-1990s it was not uncommon to see a horse used as a draw animal for plowing fields or as the only means of local transportation in rural areas, a sight that some scholars interpreted as a return of feudalism and the medieval existence (Shlapentokh 1996, see also Verdery 1996) or repeasantization (Creed 1993, Cartwright 2001, Leonard and Kaneff 2002).

In the context of such transformations, potato was at the center of survival strategies. As a rich, nutritional food that was relatively easy to grow and difficult to steal and that could be kept through the winter, potatoes were grown virtually on every plot of land and could be found in most of the cellars both in urban centers and in the countryside. Commenting on a similar situation in Russia and particularly the importance of potato as a dietary strategy, Nancy Ries suggest that potatoes embody the ontology of frugality and survivalist practices that define post-socialist condition:

The underlying mode of being in the world is... a largely unspoken, nearly unspeakable frugality embodied in everyday labor, foundational to the concatenation of nutritional, physical, discursive, and political-economic processes. (Ries 2009:186)

As my visits to the farms attests, the ontology of frugality was, too, practiced in Lithuania villages where every household had set aside land for growing food for their own consumption, such carrots, beets, onions or tomatoes. Potatoes usually occupied a large part of these local farms and they play an important role in the lives of the farmers. While often criticized as inefficient, these fragmented and small-scale potato farms supplied the farmers with a steady source of food and fodder and often cash. On these farms, potato became a safety net that made the bodies of the farmer (and the urbanites) independent from fluctuations in markets, skyrocketing inflation, and unreliable supply of food and resources.

In Lithuania, potatoes continued to be grown ubiquitously even after the decade of “wild” capitalism was over. Not only is the potato consumption per person in Lithuania one of the highest in the world (120 kg per year), but it is also produced on most of the farms. In the late 2000s, 85% of all farms in Lithuania, by far the highest rate in the European Union (Ollier et al. 2008:14), produced potatoes. In comparison, only 4% of all farms in the UK grew potatoes, while in Germany the proportion was 16%. In post-socialist EU member states where farm structures were similar to those in Lithuania, considerably fewer farms were producing potatoes: 55% in Poland, 26% in Romania and 12% in Hungary. Only in neighboring Latvia, where 80% of all farms grow potatoes, the situation was similar (Ollier et al. 2008:14).

The centrality of potato as a dietary and cultural strategy in Lithuania are deeply implicated in the current popularization of zeppelins. During the first wave of privatization of the food industry in Lithuania in the late-1980s and early-1990s, zeppelins became the centerpiece of local restaurant menus, effectively moving from domestic kitchens to public spaces and markets. Like most of the other national dishes, they were soon incorporated into fast food restaurants, introduced into delis and made available in frozen food sections at the supermarkets. Zeppelins have also been the subject of multiple widely publicized eating competitions; and they are highly valued and sought after in the Lithuanian Diaspora communities spread out around the world. Additionally, zeppelins have appeared in advertising, songs, fiction, newspaper articles, and TV shows as well as on T-shirts, political campaigns and art galleries.

For example, a recent art exhibition in Vilnius featured a picture of a Coca-Cola advertisement where the name of the brand “Coca-Cola” was replaced with “Cepelinas” (zeppelin). Written in small print and matching design, the picture made it difficult to distinguish between the two and some viewers missed the replacement. For those who noticed, the image offered a powerful critique of an on-going commercialization of national cuisine; it also exposed the connections between global food industry and zeppelin’s “McDonaldization.”

The proliferation of zeppelins in markets, supermarkets, galleries and the media in post-socialist Lithuania suggests that potato has moved from the place of being the food of survival to become a rich cultural enterprise. In explaining how the potato fits in Russia's household economies, Ries shows that potato could be seen as an organic currency and a discursive strategy through which Russians define and experience their place in post-socialist society:

[P]otato has figured as organic capital and currency, with substantive immediacy relative to the dominant but distant commodities of Russia's capital wealth. In this aspect, potato and its kin products create a semblance of food security, and the activities that support that semblance are often highly elaborated, fetishized, aestheticized, and celebrated. Discursively, potato appears as a touchstone referent, summarily capturing the multifaceted, historically and culturally meaningful strategies that families, networks, and communities feel compelled to deploy in postsocialism. (Ries 2009:187)

While there are many similarities in how Ries theorizes the place of potato in Russian cultural, political and material ecologies, her analysis does not elaborate on the relationship between potato and Russian nationalism, suggesting that there are few tensions in how Russians attach their national pride to this food. This can be explained by the changing geopolitical landscape where Russia is emerging as a powerful political and economic player on the global scale. Olga Shevchenko (2008) argues that such a change has been accompanied by a popular sentiment recognizing that Russia is no longer a "transitioning" economy, but is a stable and confident country that is no longer living in "crisis."

In Lithuania, on the other hand, recent years saw the emergence of significant ruptures in the narratives surrounding national cuisine in particular and nationalism more broadly. Since the mid-2010s, several vocal culinary commentators started contesting potato as part of Lithuanian cultural heritage and calling for a change in Lithuanian national culinary politics. It was argued that the potato dumpling was not a worthy representative of a nation that boasted a long and rich cultural history. Vincentas Sakas, a self-proclaimed independent dietary and culinary expert, for example, posted a note on a popular forum called Dishes.lt (Patiekalai.lt) in 2006, entitled "Known As the Pinnacle of Lithuania's "High" Cuisine, Zeppelin Is the Food of Culinary Analphabets" (Sakas 2006). His short note contained plenty of inflammatory language arguing that Lithuania, along with some other East European neighbors, failed to make educated, and hence they continue to consume heavily processed potato dumplings:

It is important to realize that zeppelins that are being forced upon us by the uneducated media is a dish that has been known to all European nations, but many of these nations abandoned this dish because they were following healthy dietary principles. (Sakas 2006)

In a different post, Sakas argues that the designation of zeppelins as a national dish degrades and reduces a millennium-long history and diverse culinary culture of Lithuania to the peasant's experience of "walking behind the wooden plow," a sign of technical backwardness and lack of cultural capital (Sakas 2009).

The idea about the poverty of zeppelin has resonated in Lithuanian gourmet blogosphere where chefs, nutritional experts, food enthusiasts and lay persons exchanged fires about what

constituted the truly Lithuanian culinary heritage. For instance, originally published in a journal and later reprinted in one of the most popular on-line news portals, Delfi.lt, an article comments on the Lithuanian cuisine to suggest that

[i]t is enough to look at the food consumed by Lithuania's nobility and the myth of poverty [of Lithuanian dietary culture] disappears in a second. A number of historical sources tell us stories about luxurious receptions in Lithuanian courts when "mead was flowing as if it was water in rivers" and "tables could not hold the weight of numerous and diverse dishes." And these are not just empty stories (Tradiciinė Lietuviška Virtuvė 2007).

Such arguments about the diversity and value of court cuisine in Lithuania are often followed by an impressive list of dishes that used to be prepared for the Lithuanian nobility, including stuffed pheasants, eels marinated in sweet-flag and then cold-smoked, geese stuffed with apples, elaborate mushroom soups, and smoked cheeses. In these narratives, the Soviet period is presented as either as a breaking point or a period of stagnation in the "natural evolution" of Lithuanian cuisine and national culture.

Powerful rebuttals to the claims that zeppelin is a poor representative of a nation has come from those who proclaim their love for the taste of zeppelins. In the same vein, some food bloggers and experts make a point that the history of dumplings is much longer than that of a humble zeppelin and is rooted in the foodways of the Baltic tribes living the territory in current Lithuania. In one such instance, Giedrius Vilpisauskas, a popular food blogger, posted a short history of dumplings in Lithuania, anchoring the history of zeppelins in the old traditions of dumpling making reaching back to at least the Medieval times. An anonymous commentator enthusiastically supported such a defense of zeppelins by stating: "Bravo. I was about to start organizing a resistance movement with a title 'Hands off from zeppelins!'" (Vilpisauskas 2008)

The debate about what constitutes Lithuanian heritage has also been picked up in the Diaspora in Western Europe and especially in the United States where different generations of emigrants are exchanging fiery notes about what (and who) counts as truly Lithuanian. A series of the articles in the media were termed as "zeppelin wars," suggesting that the stakes in this cultural warfare are high.

The increasing contestations over national food practices in Lithuania can be seen as the emergence of the new nation-building politics that draws legitimacy not by looking into the future and believing in progress as in earlier decades, but by reclaiming the past and recasting that past in terms of authenticity, civilization, and wealth. It is in the whirlpool of these changes that new temporal organization of the global space is being cast.

## **Conclusions**

This history of zeppelins reveals connections between imaginaries of modernity, new technological advancements, and the spread of nationalism among mostly peasant populations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Baltic States. I argue that the birth of national food in the 1920s and 1930s was embedded in the experiences of industrialization that allowed for new ways to imagine and experience the world outside of the local settings. Through this paper I also argued that zeppelin consumption marked the fault line between rural and urban populations and their participation in nation-building. By not making, cooking and eating the zeppelins, the rural

inhabitants did not participate in the material culture and remained outside of the body of the Lithuanian nation.

Today, zeppelins have emerged as a new arena for negotiating national identity politics and practice. On the one hand, potato is celebrated as a source of nutrition and self-sufficiency, on the other hand, zeppelins stand for the peasant food that portrays Lithuania as a backwards and unenlightened country.

Writing on Slow Food movements and the case of *lardo di Colonnata* (lard, in Italian), Alison Leitch famously argues that “food and identity are becoming like the ‘Euro,’ a single common discursive currency through which to debate Europeaness and the implications of economic globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (Leitch 2003:442). It is not surprising, therefore, that the construction of Lithuanian national cuisine at two different historical junctions was oriented towards European audiences. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and especially today, nationalism in the Baltic States is always a response and/or resistance to European identities as embodied in national attributes and its institutional structures.

Yet, what often remains invisible from the European perspective is the hidden fears of provincialism and irrelevancy. As I hope to have showed above, the preoccupation with “civilization” and the image of the nation in the eyes of other European and global states hints at the vastly different subject positions between those in the European/global centers and in their peripheries.

In his analysis of the conspicuous display of European goods and clothes in Africa, James Ferguson makes a similar point eloquently by arguing that the mixing of local and global forms of cultural production in Africa should be understood as performances of alterity in the context of global inequalities. Ferguson makes a case that the value attached to Western artifacts in Africa is not simply the case of localization, but an expression of claims to membership in world society:

[T]he most vital political question raised by practices of colonial emulation did not concern the incorporation of Western symbolic materials into African local cultural systems (though this was surely happening, in various ways and in many settings) but, rather, the place Africans were to occupy in a *global* sociocultural order, their status in a new “world society.” (Ferguson 2006:161, italicized in original)

Ferguson’s argument resonates with the case of zeppelins in Lithuania where the cultural adoption of Western technology as an index for national identity can be interpreted as an attempt to re-imagine Lithuania’s nationals as “full and equal citizens of a modern urban society” (Ferguson 2006:161). In a strikingly similar way as in Ferguson’s interpretation of the adoption of Western goods in Africa, modern technologies acquired a particular place in the cultural imaginaries among the Lithuanian rural populations at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as they were increasingly incorporated in the global systems of economic exchange, but also in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century when new claims about aristocratic and authenticity are being made in attempts to be a legitimately European nation. In this sense, the fascination with technology and authenticity that are captured in the name of zeppelin highlights the underlying desires of being at the center.

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<sup>1</sup> Circulated widely in villages, the Lithuanian newspapers were instrumental in raising national consciousness among the rural population. The newspapers include—the *Varpas* (the *Bell*; monthly; published 1889-1905; 1913-1914; 1920-1921; 1931-1932), the *Ausra* (the *Dawn*; biweekly; published 1911-1915, 1919), the *Tevynes Sargas* (the *Guardian of the Motherland*; monthly; published 1896-1904) and the *Ukininko Patarejas* (the *Farmers Guide*; bi-weekly; published 1925-1944). Of all the newspapers, the *Ukininko Patarejas* turned out to be most pertinent. First published as an insert in the *Ausra*, it became one of the most popular newspapers. It focused on educating Lithuania's farmers about the newest agricultural technologies, surveyed international food markets and food commodity prices, and propagated new animal breeds, plants, and food cooking/storing techniques. Among other topics, the newspaper also had a section "Women's Household" and later "Hostess" (1937-1940) where recipes, cooking tips, and food preparation technologies were introduced.

<sup>2</sup> Ulf Hannerz (2000) is critical of theories of cultural homogenization. He argues that actors in periphery (meaning global South/East) do not simply adopt practices and cultural products brought to them from global North/West. Rather, they creatively modify—*creolize*—new artifacts to fit local conditions and, by so doing, develop new syntheses or hybrids.

<sup>3</sup> In scholarship on globalization, fragmentation is often referred to in three contexts. First, in the literature on globalization of culture, fragmentation relates to the surfacing of new "cultural wars" that are propelled by the strengthening of broad cultural identities such as racial, ethnic or religious affiliations (Huntington 1996, Barber 1995). Second, fragmentation also refers to the erosion of national identities, the process that is often referred to as "balkanization" of cultures. Finally, for Marxist geographers, fragmentation relates to breaking of communities along class and racial lines (Massey 1994, Duncan and Savage 1991). More broadly, this term emphasizes growing differences, inequalities and conflicts emerging between various ethnic and social groups.

<sup>4</sup> The concept of localization or localism emphasizes the growing political, cultural and social significance of smaller-than-national spatial units. In this context, local governmental institutions are argued to have a larger impact than the more distant state government (Brenner 1999, Keating 1998).

<sup>5</sup> In the 1980s, the term "glocalization" was used by the Japanese marketing practitioners to refashion products so as to match them with the local markets and their cultural, political, social and economic contexts. Robertson (1996) and Kraidy (1999) introduced this concept as part of the theory that explains how global culture is appropriated and transformed locally.



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