

***Food and Everyday Life in the Post-Socialist World*. Ed. Melissa L. Caldwell. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. xiv, 231 pp. 15 illustrations. Bibliography. \$24.95, paper; \$65.00, cloth.**

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Food and Everyday Life in the Post-Socialist World is a significant contribution to the field of food studies and to the anthropology of post-socialism. The book reveals how communities in the post-*Soviet* world (rather than in the entire ‘post-socialist world’) are experiencing changes wrought by the globalization of their food system. Most of the contributions center on consumption in neoliberal spaces, carved out by global processes such as the regulation of foodstuffs, food safety and quality standards, and the proliferation of commodities and of consumer ‘choice.’ The focus on how extra-local conditions affect (and are affected by) social memories of Soviet food systems and the everyday production, exchange and consumption of particular commodities—i.e. paprika (Gille, ch. 2), milk (Mincyte, ch. 3), coffee (Caldwell, ch. 4), sausage (Klumbyté, ch. 5)—is a useful corrective to the dogma of post-socialist ‘transition,’ encouraging us to reconsider the scale at which social change in the ‘post-socialist world’ really occurs.

With the exception of Metzko (ch. 7), who writes of the gendered and social psychologies of drinking in Russia, most of the authors concentrate on relations between one or more of the following scales: global (i.e. European) determinations of ‘good’ food; national(ist) projects to deal with external influences and constraints and everyday experiences,; and memories and practices through which food, its spaces and its controls become social and meaningful.

As Marion Nestle writes in the forward to the book, the authors use food as a ‘synecdoche in action’ (p. x), a *part* of human experience that, when treated as a social object, can stand for the *whole* of social life. The editor, Melissa Caldwell, takes the idea of a social ‘whole’ to task, however, arguing strongly against any homogenizing discourse of the post-socialist experience: ‘A key objective of this volume is to unsettle the idea, often presented in both scholarly and popular accounts of this region, that a “postsocialist” [sic.] *cultural form* is somehow distinctive and definitive’ (Caldwell, 3, my emphasis). Her argument is substantiated by local narratives provided in each chapter, which certainly reveal the varied experiential aspects of globalized foodways in the post-Soviet world. At the same time, Caldwell does acknowledge overarching patterns that connect different post-socialist spaces. Her brief reference to the idea of the habitus, which ‘produced similar *cultural forms* in different cultural contexts’ (ibid., p. 4, my emphasis) reminds us that ideological ideals of state socialism may remain embodied in practice, even if in an oppositional sense. More theoretical attention to the relation between overarching values and everyday thought and action – a social binary that

recalls very compelling debates in anthropology between, for example, *Conformity and conflict* (Spradley and McCurdy 2009 [1971]), ideology and culture (Dumont 1980[1966], Wolf 1999, Herzfeld 2005) or bounded structure and everyday agency (i.e. Giddens 1984) – could have raised important issues that largely remain under the surface of description, such as how people separate goods or ‘entitlements’ (Sen 1981) from the world of commodities (Gregory 1982, 1997).

The most interesting chapters, for this reviewer at least, are those that uncover the synchronicity (or ‘coevality’; see Gregory 1997) of contrasting preferences, which often reflect two opposing value systems: 1) the exaltation of consumption during the Soviet period; and 2) the denunciation of the Soviet food system in light of more neoliberal forms of consumption (Jung, ch. 2; Mincyte, ch. 3; Caldwell, ch. 4; Klumbyté, ch. 5). The ethnographic narratives in these chapters reveal how dominant political economic projects of the Soviet period and beyond are indeed implicated in local moralities of food, i.e. in the value of ‘Soviet’ over ‘Euro’ brands (Klumbyté, ch. 5); in the tension between a ‘normal life’ ‘without anxiety’ (Jung, ch. 2: 39, 47) of the past, when ‘at least nobody starved’ (ibid. 46), and a present when people can only get what they can afford (ibid. 47); or in an effort to make the elitist frills of high European cuisine accessible to all Russian nationals (Shectman, ch. 6). Caldwell’s account of the shifting nature of public and private spaces and of the ‘proprieties’ (p. 104) of consumption in Moscow may have only been improved by a more thorough treatment of the relation between consumer ‘anxieties’ (p. 110) of the post-Soviet period and changing social hierarchies that have emerged since the early 1990s, including her own position as a ‘rich’ foreigner. The recurrence of opposing *localized* versions of modernity and value imply deeper discrepancies between collective memories of ‘food for all’ and present values of consumer ‘choice’ (Jung, ch. 2, 50). As others have shown (i.e. Myrdal 1953, Dumont 1986 [1983], Hart 1986, Gudeman 2008) the moral contrast between these two versions of the ‘good’ life have counterparts in political economy.

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