ABSTRACT In Lithuania, the first country to secede from the Soviet Union, the term Soviet has been used in public space to refer to the vanished Soviet empire and to experiences of colonization and resistance. However, in 1998, the “Soviet” symbol was successfully revived in the Lithuanian consumer food market as a brand name for meat products—primarily sausages. In this article, I argue that the market is a political arena in which values, ideologies, identities, and history are being shaped. The marketing and consumption of “Soviet” sausages is a form of political engagement that negotiates current power relations and inequalities. The meanings and practices surrounding “Soviet” sausages tell an intriguing story about broader processes of change. The “Soviet” sausage renaissance in Lithuania implies a critique of the postsocialist neoliberal state and constitutes an attempt to create an alternative modernity that is both post-Soviet and European.

Keywords: food, consumption, marketing, political subjectivity, Lithuania


REZIOME В Литве, первой из стран, вышедших из состава Советского Союза, термин «советский» используется в публичном пространстве, обозначая ушедшую советскую империю, а также в связи с опытом колонизации и сопротивления ей. Однако в 1998 г., символ «советского» был успешно возрождён на рынке продовольствия как бренд мясопродуктов, в особенности колбас. В данной статье я утверждаю, что рынок — это политическая арена, на которой формируются ценностности, идеологии, идентичности и история. Маркетинг и потребление «советских» колбас является формой политической активности, которая проходит в диалоге с текущими властными отношениями и неравенством в обществе. Значения и практики, связанные с «советскими» колбасами, рассказывают увлекательную историю, связанную с более широкими процессами перемен. Ревессис «советских» колбас в Литве подразумевает критику пост-социалистического неолиберального государства и представляет собой попытку создания альтернативной современности, одновременно пост-советской и европейской.

By taking food into the body, we take in the world.
—Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World
Objects create subjects much more than the other way around.
—Daniel Miller, The Comfort of Things

Lithuania was the first country to secede from the Soviet Union. 1 In March 1990, more than a year before the Soviet empire finally crumbled, the government of Lithuania proclaimed it an independent republic. At the referendum of February 9, 1991, three-fourths of the citizens of Lithuania voted in favor of forming an independent democratic state. In
September 1991, Lithuania became a member of the United Nations. The establishment of independence was soon followed by a transition to democracy and a market economy, as well as integration into NATO and the European Union in 2004.

As in most of Eastern Europe, the Soviet period is now officially perceived as a time of colonization, oppression, suffering, annihilation of the nation, and economic and cultural backwardness. Repudiating the past has been part of building the new European present and future: Soviet statues were demolished; street and park names were changed; biographies and histories were rewritten; and new laws were passed guaranteeing the existence of the new nation-state.

Although the public space was purged of objects associated with the Soviet past, Tarybinės dešrelės (Soviet sausages) emerged in the consumer market in 1998 and reoccupied memories, dinner tables, and bodies. “Soviet” sausage brands overwhelmed competing brands and emerged as a clear leader in the market, gaining about one-fifth of the sausage market share in 2004. Urban and rural landscapes have now been populated with billboards inviting people to consume “Soviet” products (see Figure 1). The billboards invoke Soviet realities, including the Stalinist era, and contrast with the post-Soviet state’s renderings of the past and the present.

Journalists, intellectuals, and politicians met the introduction of “Soviet” sausage with strong opposition. Managers of companies producing “Soviet” sausages were labeled cynics who, as argued by Audrius Matonis (2005), call high-quality products “Soviet” without considering that the Soviet system and Soviet ideology crippled Lithuania and its people. Erdvilas Jakulis, a linguist from Vilnius University, stated that tarybinis, tarybinė (Soviet) may invoke the assumption that the products are made in a nonexistent state or that producers and consumers of these products are pro-Soviet.3 Dabartinis lietuvių kalbos žodynas, the modern dictionary of the Lithuanian language, records that tarybinis (Soviet) means “belonging to the Soviet rule or state, for example, the Soviet regime” (2000:831). Some intellectuals and politicians were convinced that consumers of “Soviet”

sausages and their commodified Soviet nostalgia vote populist and think communist (see Jonušys 2004) and, thus, were a real threat to independence and democracy. They called those nostalgic for the Soviet past “victims” longing for the “torturer” and the Soviet state (see Donskis 2005), backward people delaying social and political progress, or “turnips” (derogatory) attempting to stop the country’s integration with Europe. Vytautas Landsbergis, a member of the European Union Parliament and a leader of the national movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, argued that nostalgic people long for oppression: “They do not understand or remember that they weren’t free...That their lives were limited, controlled, and threatened” (Landsbergis 2007). Landsbergis maintained that nostalgic thoughts are infantile and suggested that business people should display “Soviet” pig’s feet, which would better represent Soviet times.

The producers defended the branding of their sausages by giving interviews and publishing promotional articles. But there were invisible supporters of “Soviet” sausages too: the consumers who savored them, nodded in affirmation of their tastiness, and, defying mainstream public opinion, made sausage sales rise exponentially. One is left to wonder: How could the symbol “Soviet,” which signifies oppression and exteriority and was discredited in national spaces in postsocialist Lithuania, have become a successful marketing label?

The case of “Soviet” sausages shows that, in the context of the post-Soviet transformations in Lithuania, the market has become a political arena wherein competing values, identities, and history circulate. In this article, I challenge the usual understanding of consumption and marketing as economic practices and examine their importance as political processes. I argue that marketing and the consumption of “Soviet” sausages is a form of political engagement wherein contemporary Lithuanians negotiate current power relations and inequalities. Marketing and consumption produce spaces of negativity and of commonality and, at the same time, objectify and shape political subjectivities.

This article follows the circulation of the object (“Soviet” sausage) from the offices of marketing specialists in meat-packing plants, where they first emerged as ideas, to the courtroom, where several companies competed for the right to sell “Soviet” sausages, to consumers’ dinner tables, where they were consumed and invoked memories. I rely on my research on political identity, nationalism, and the state in Lithuania during 2003–04 and follow-up research on “Soviet” sausage brands. “Soviet times” refers to the late Soviet period—namely, the 1970s and 1980s, the years most often invoked in people’s memories.

CONSUMERS, CONSUMPTION, AND POLITICS
Studies of consumption became an important part of anthropology in the 1980s (Carrier 2006; Miller 1995). Since then, the burgeoning literature on consumption has covered a variety of themes, ranging from everyday consumption practices and exchange (Elliston 2004; Linnekin 1985) to consumption as a global process (Holtzman 2003; Kaplan 2007; Miller 1998). Scholars have traditionally associated consumption with market capitalism; they studied it primarily as an economic activity rather than a political one. In the volume Citizenship and Consumption, Kate Soper and Frank Trentmann argue that

Texts on citizenship have plenty to say about citizens in relation to the state, nationality, rights and freedoms, the equality of sexes, and the environment, but consumption tends to receive short shrift. The consumer appears only as an individuated figure of a neo-liberal world of markets challenging the citizen. The consumer here is located within the domain of the market, distinct from that of the state and its citizens. [2008:1]

Although anthropologists discuss the ways in which consumption practices are embedded in historical, social, and political contexts (Kaplan 2007; Mintz 1985; Wilk 1999) and analyze how consumption interconnects with power and identity (Bourdieu 1984; Counihan 1999; Friedman 1994; Humphrey 2002; Roseberry 1996), few concentrate on consumption, citizenship, and the state. In most anthropological studies, consumption is of minor significance in the broader political processes of nation-state building,
resistance, or change. It is not seen as a political arena in which political values and ideologies are being shaped but, rather, as an economic and social field, with its own politics and power relations.5

The recent studies of consumption in socialist and post-socialist countries constitute an exception. Anthropologists have recently documented that the state was and is actively engaged in shaping consumers and consumer regimes in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, China, and Cuba. They have shown how consumers emerge as a top-down phenomena through state-sponsored consumption programs (Berdahl 1999; Merkel 2006; Patico 2008) and how consumption reinforces or challenges state and international agendas (Caldwell 2002, 2009; Dunn 2008; Gille 2009; Porter 2008).

Some interesting recent studies that explore the nexus between consumption and politics in Jordan and the United States illustrate how consumption can be interrelated with political subjectivity and citizenship in other than socialist or postsocialist contexts. Anne Beal’s study of villa design in Jordan illustrates that ideas about taste—and corresponding practices such as villa design, interior decoration, and clothing selection—instantiate conceptions of membership in different moral and political communities (Beal 2000:65). Carolyn Rouse and Janet Hoskins show that food desires among African American followers of Sunni Islam in the United States are entangled in historically informed perceptions of subjectivity, citizenship, and race. Rouse and Hoskins find food to be “a central medium for expressing religious commitment, and for positioning oneself in relation to a history of slavery and new forms of liberation” (Rouse and Hoskins 2004:227, 229). As both studies illustrate, consumption in other than socialist and postsocialist contexts is also intertwined with political processes and historically rooted practices of citizenship and nationhood. Both Beal’s and Rouse and Hoskins’s studies, as well as studies in socialist and postsocialist societies, encourage asking new questions about consumption, including the questions asked in this article: What is the relationship between consumption and political subjectivity? How does consumption express and shape political ideologies and histories? How can political values, sensibilities, and relations be produced not only in the more traditional spaces of power circulation—such as social movements, nationalist upheavals, state building, or colonization—but also in practices of everyday life, like purchasing and enjoying sausage?

Methodologically, unlike other anthropological studies that focus on consumers, I follow objects, drawing on the work of Igor Kopytoff (1986) and Hoskins (1998). Kopytoff shows that objects, like people, can have multiple and changing natures or careers over time. Following Kopytoff, I demonstrate that sausage has various competing articulations. But I also see sausage as a semiotic phenomenon that is embedded in and expressive of social, political, and economic contexts, very much like Clifford Geertz’s cocks in his essay, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” (1973). As a quintessential historical commodity (see below), sausage both shapes and is shaped by history. In my approach, sausage has power to shape identity and politics. Like Geertz’s cocks, sausage is about the people who consume them and as such is a lens into social life. However, unlike cocks, sausage is the site of cultural change, rather than enduring passions, values, and desires. Sausage is also the site of competition and the rearticulation of memory and history.

I share with Hoskins an interest in the biography of objects that are intimately intertwined with people’s lives. Sausage is a biographical object comparable to Hoskins’s betel bags, drums, and domestic animals, which are central in the lives of the Kodi of Indonesia. Unlike Hoskins’s biographical objects, sausage has a different circulation and relation to an individual. It is perishable and temporal. Its biography is that of an imagined “Soviet” sausage that exists in replicas or tokens. However, like a biographical object among the Kodi, sausage is a pivot for reflection and introspection, a tool of autobiographical self-discovery, and a way of knowing oneself through things (Hoskins 1998:198). I contribute to Hoskins’s analysis by showing that a biographical object is also a tool for understanding political history and expressing a political self.

Building on the studies discussed above, I lay out an alternative frame of analysis for the consumption of food as a political expression and for consumption as a political process. I focus on meaning and signification as well as on social and political history and political economy to understand the political careers of “Soviet” sausages. The object-sausage here is a bearer of meaning generated and negotiated by advertisers, consumers, intellectuals, politicians, scholars, and journalists. At the same time, it is embedded in broader political, economic, and historical processes.

SOVIET–ERA SAUSAGE BIOGRAPHIES

Sausages occupy a specific niche in the food history of Europe. They have been produced since the days of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Making sausage was originally a method to preserve meats, and the word sausage derives from the Latin salus, meaning “salted.” Although there is no exact documentation of where the first wiener-type sausage was produced, there are some indications that Johann Georg Lahner of Frankfurt first produced it in 1805 in Vienna.

Sausages emigrated from Europe a long time ago, and retailers in the United States now sell Polish kielbasa, German bratwurst, and sausages labeled Italian, Lithuanian, and Irish. Although the global career of sausages from Europe appears fragmented when compared to the careers of other processed foods, such as sushi or McDonald’s fries, sausage is a distinctive product in the diets of many Europeans, including Lithuanians, within and outside Europe (see Figure 2).

During the Soviet era, sausages produced and consumed in Lithuania and other Soviet republics were integral to Soviet modernity. The centerpiece of Soviet modernity was its massive drive for industrialization and the creation of an
industrial proletariat (Kotkin 1995). Anastas Mikoyan, the Communist Party leader in charge of provisioning throughout the 1930s, introduced frankfurters, a kind of sausage new to Russians and derived from the German model, to the mass urban consumer (Fitzpatrick 1999:90–91). He used imagery of pleasure, plenty, and modernity to promote them. According to Mikoyan, frankfurters, “a sign of bourgeois abundance and well-being,” had to be available to the masses (Fitzpatrick 1999:90–91). As mass-produced products, they were superior to food produced in the old-fashioned way by hand (Fitzpatrick 1999:91). Soviet Stalinist experience with sausage production was introduced to Lithuania after its incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1940 and its consequent reintegration after World War II.

In Lithuania, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, industrialized food produced in huge plants and connected to Soviet state-sponsored culture signaled social and economic transformations as well as a change in people’s diets, habits, and bodies (Mincyte 2003). Consumers who had previously eaten either homemade sausages or those from various private firms and meat-packing plants were now subjected to common tastes encoded in the GOST standards, Государственные стандарты СССР (USSR government standards), developed and regulated by the Soviet state. Thus, industrialized food was also a form of colonization (and self-colonization because people purchased sausages voluntarily); it helped to link the empire together, creating common forms of daily life among people with previously distinct culinary traditions (cf. Dunn 2008; Toomre 1997).

Industrially produced sausages indicated the vitality of the Soviet empire, beginning with the construction of huge meat-packing plants that produced a variety of sausage brands and ending with the stagnation of the 1970s and 1980s, when food production and per-capita consumption decreased. This deteriorating situation was the object of many jokes, such as the one about the Soviet Union’s progress toward communism:

Communism, Socialism, and Capitalism plan a get-together. But Socialism arrives half an hour late.

Socialism: Sorry, comrades, I had to get some sausage for dinner, and there was a long line.

Capitalism: What’s a line?

Communism: What’s sausage?

No less telling are the “sausage trains,” which refer to trains rolling into Moscow from outlying areas, from which, according to Peter Aleshkovsky (1990), “hordes of people alight driven by the single-minded desire to buy sausage” (Oushakine 2000:97). The existence of these “sausage trains” illustrates that sausage availability varied and that its availability indexed the difference between the center and the periphery.
In the 1970s and 1980s, sausages were a luxury, in the sense of transcending basic needs or exceeding the regular shared standard of life, in the eyes of both consumers and authorities. In the Soviet space, and less so in Lithuania itself, sausage was a sign of material wealth; people admitted emigrating to the West “for sausage.” As Katia Belousova pointed out, “leaving for sausage” was opposed to “leaving for freedom,” and both constituted “self-identified lines of emigration” (personal conversation, April 28, 2007). In September of 1999, at Moscow State University, Vladimir Putin, then prime minister of the Russian Federation, astutely mentioned both freedom and sausage as evidence of Russia’s success: “The 20-year-old down-to-earth dream of Soviet paradise—with sausage and freedom as its main symbols—is almost fulfilled now; we have plenty of both” (Oushakine 2000:98).

Considered an extravaganza of late Soviet times, sausages were saved for children or the sick, offered to guests, and served at dinner or birthday parties. Getting two wiener’s with bread and mustard at a state-run restaurant in a resort was a way to engage in a pleasurable gastronomic indulgence. Sausages were also available at special stores for the citizens privileged and honored by the Soviet state, such as war veterans, mothers with many children, and the Soviet bureaucratic elite. They were distributed through some workplaces as incentives and rewards, thereby stimulating unity with the Soviet state. Among the people I interviewed, only a few were able to purchase sausages on a more or less regular basis. The majority remembered that sausage was hard to get.

Even if not originally labeled as such, “Soviet” sausages constitute a meaningful order that was recaptured and re-circulated by the postsocialist market. Sausages, with their rich Soviet-era biographies, provide a positive environment for the “Soviet” brand to thrive. Production of post-Soviet “Soviet” sausages in Lithuania, Russia, Latvia, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere indicates their significance as a commodity throughout the former Soviet space (see Figure 3).³

THE “Soviet” SAUSAGE INDUSTRY

The Origins

The closed joint-stock company Samsonas started the “Soviet” sausage industry in 1998 (see Figure 4). The company’s profits skyrocketed after it began to produce “Soviet” brands; by 2005 they constituted more than half of Samsonas’s meat production. In 2006, Samsonas produced 21 brands of various meat products labeled “Soviet,” most of them among their premium products. In 2004, Samsonas “Soviet” brands captured about 20 percent of the sausage market share in Lithuania. The next most popular brand, “Lithuanian standard,” produced by the company Biovola, made up only five percent. The popularity of “Soviet” brands had not significantly decreased by 2007. Some “Soviet” brands had disappeared from store shelves by 2009. In 2009, however, in Vilnius supermarket chain Maxima, “Soviet Milk Sausages” continued to enjoy their popularity; in fact, the store ad on the shelves with tens of different sausage brands announced that “Soviet Milk Sausages” is “the most popular Lithuanian [sausage] product” at Maxima.

At the end of 2002, the joint-stock company Vilniaus Mėsos Kombinatas, another meat-packing company, also started to produce “Soviet” brand sausages. Samsonas, the legal owner of the trademarks for “Soviet” sausages (which at the time included “Soviet Doctor’s sausage” and “Soviet Milk sausages”), requested Vilniaus Mėsos Kombinatas to change the name of its products. After negotiations, Vilniaus Mėsos Kombinatas renamed its products to Tarnybinis, semantically different (an adjective meaning work, service), but phonetically and graphically very similar to the word tarybinis. Samsonas, objecting to the choice of Tarnybinis, brought Vilniaus Mėsos Kombinatas to court for unfair competition and trademark infringement. Samsonas argued that Vilniaus Mėsos Kombinatas aimed to benefit from the good reputation and popularity of Samsonas’s “Soviet” brands. According to Samsonas, the name Tarnybinis is not sufficiently different and may mislead consumers. During the lawsuit, government institutions such as the State Language Commission, university professors, public relations experts, lawyers, journalists, and many citizens discussed the meaning and value of the label “Soviet.” The lawsuit, statements by various experts, and reports in the media contributed to the visibility of “Soviet” brands.

The Appellate Court decision of May 2004 prohibited Vilniaus Mėsa, the company that had taken over Vilniaus Mėsos Kombinatas’s production and brands, from using Tarnybinis in commercial activity. The company moved its “Soviet” brands to Latvia and Estonia, where it is a rightful seller of “Soviet” sausages. Thus, products utilizing “Soviet” also proliferate outside Lithuania. Used in former Soviet countries, “Soviet” products symbolically reunite the former Soviet space.

THE IDEOLOGY OF FOOD

Samsonas, currently the only legitimate producer of “Soviet” sausages in Lithuania, promotes an apolitical image of their product. They claim that “Soviet” sausages are exclusively about taste and lifestyle but not politics. According to Samsonas, “Soviet” meat products represent a resolute search for quality and a return to the natural (Samsonas 2006). Rimgailė Vaïtišienė (2004), the former director of marketing for Samsonas, claimed that in Soviet times sausages were made without meat substitutes and, therefore, were more natural and more delicious. Similarly, Vilniaus Mėsa’s webpage introducing its “Soviet” sausages sold in Latvia argues that the brand name does not mean a return to the Soviet system. It is a reminder of what was best in Soviet times, when producers did not use meat substitutes (Vilniaus Mėsa 2006).

Marketing of “Soviet” sausages recirculates food ideologies that many consumers share. These ideologies prioritize natural food and Lithuanian traditions. As in the commentary below, people invoke a specific historical and geopolitical
FIGURE 3. (A) From Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, a 2006 billboard echoing D. S. Moor’s poster inviting people to join the Bolsheviks in the Civil War of 1918–21 in Russia. The text reads: “The taste and quality of the great country. Have you bought ‘Soviet’ sausage? 100% meat. We care about your health!” (Photo courtesy of Serguei Oushakine) (B) D. S. Moor’s poster, “Are you a volunteer?” (Image in the public domain)

order when describing good quality food. Regina, a woman in her early seventies from the city of Kaunas, maintained:

Earlier food was natural. My relatives from Germany used to ask me to bring butter and cheese from [Soviet] Lithuania because they did not have good food. And Lithuanian food was delicious and natural. Now, when they [the producers in Lithuania] started to copy everything from the West, all the food got much worse . . . Sausage was also good [in Soviet times]. Now bologna is simply starch and blood. [interview, July 20, 2003]
In contrast to the Cold War discourses and post-Soviet official narratives, which privilege Europe and the West, in Regina’s reflections Soviet-era Lithuanian tradition is the source of goodness: Soviet-era food is good while post-Soviet Western “copies” are not.16

Like Regina, many consumers attribute “naturalness” to Soviet-era food as well as post-Soviet “Soviet” sausages. “Naturalness” is a major indicator of food quality throughout the former Soviet space (Caldwell 2002). As other ethnographic studies of Eastern Europe confirm, consumers prefer food they perceive as “natural” because they assume it lacks preservatives and additives. The use of antibiotics and growth hormones in animal feed also makes food “unnatural” (see also Lankauskas 2002). Informants considered “Soviet” sausages natural because they lack meat substitutes such as soy, starch, or finely ground bone. A doctor in her early fifties from Kaunas argued that she buys “Soviet” sausages “because they don’t contain meat substitutes. As they were earlier [in Soviet times]. Without chemicals or soy. They are the best of all. Very delicious” (interview, July 20, 2006).

The “natural” Soviet-era sausage invoked pleasant memories of Soviet food and life for Jonas, an unemployed former landscape engineer in his early fifties from the suburbs of Kaunas. When he was traveling down memory lane, listing prices, items, shops, and superb taste, I asked him about quality. Yes, my interlocutor remembered, he found a rat nail in a sausage once. He started to laugh and said you could have used it instead of a toothpick. He also said that back then factory caldrons echoed with the shrieking of rats. But, he said, at least you can take out rat nails, they’re natural. It wasn’t as bad as it is now, he concluded. Chemicals, according to his wife, a farmer in her fifties, kill people.

The packaging on “Soviet” sausages is designed to appeal to these attitudes toward naturalness.17 Every package has a logo “No for meat substitutes!” which represents producers’ ideology about natural sausage. Moreover, most images include smiling and happy young people on a background of nature, which, according to Vaitkienė, should also invoke ideas about “naturalness.”18 The images promise a positive experience: the smiling, happy, healthy-looking men and women looking out from the packages of the “Soviet” brands do not bring Stalinist horrors to mind but, instead, conjure up optimism and happiness as fashioned by the Soviet state (see Gronow 2003; Fitzpatrick 1999; Kotkin 1995). The images of people are signs of youth, beauty, energy, fitness, romance, and enjoyment. They promise pleasurable positive involvement in an aesthetic post-Soviet community.

Although consumers like Regina and Jonas disagree, in late Soviet times, most sausage did contain meat substitutes. As I have mentioned, the Soviet-era food production began to stagnate in the 1970s under Leonid Brezhnev. The Moscow authorities asked all the Soviet republics to economize on meat; therefore, various meat substitutes were used in sausages, with the exception of the premium brands distributed in special stores for privileged citizens. Currently, according to the Lithuanian Standardization Department, all the highest-grade sausages are made without meat substitutes, unlike first- and second-grade sausages.19 However, only a few of my informants were acquainted with the existing quality classification of sausages, and none of them knew that all the sausages ranked as highest quality are made without meat substitutes.

Furthermore, none of the post-Soviet “Soviet” sausages are exact replicas of those available in Soviet times, because the technology and recipes used in their production are different. However, my interviews, representative surveys, and linguists’ analyses confirm that many consumers associate Samsonas’s “Soviet” sausages with Soviet-era sausages.20 Consumers project familiarity, rather than authenticity, onto the sausages. Familiarity implies continuity with the past and
the intimate biographical link of a subject to an object. Familiarity, like authenticity, is a form of cultural discrimination (Spooner 1986:226). However, unlike authenticity, it does not guarantee the homogeneity of the objects under consideration. Despite not being exact replicas, “Soviet” sausages are related to sausages of the Soviet period because they remind consumers of the Soviet-era sausages. As the following discussion shows, they also invoke the goodness of the Soviet past.

**Post-Soviet Modernity**

The opponents of “Soviet” sausage often fail to recognize that it is a post-Soviet hybrid, imbued in the imagination with both Soviet and Western goodness. Samsonas represents itself as a “European and modern company.” This description implies that Samsonas produces healthy, safe, and good-quality products; meets the EU’s sanitary requirements; uses new production and packaging methods; and exercises effective quality and production control.21 Samsonas also takes pride in producing sausages using “mature Western technologies.” “Technology” associates sausages with progress, prestige, success, and the West. The labels of “Soviet” products also project the Western or European value of sausages. “Soviet salami,” for example, is a product that was never produced in Soviet times. During our conversation, Artūras Skairys, the marketing director of the meat-packing company Biovela, pointed out that taste-testing experiments conducted by the Kaunas University of Technology Food Institute showed that Lithuanians love to see a piece of fat in a sausage. He claimed that this attitude is rarely encountered in the West, where these pieces are mixed well to make sausages like salami.22 Thus, a product such as “Soviet salami” marks developing “Western” tastes (see Figure 5).

During the Soviet era, the state was the primary agent of modernization; now the state’s role is circumscribed by the market offerings of modern gastronomic endeavors. The market reflects the broader political economic transformations that took place in Lithuania, including the decentralization of state authority and functions, integration into the European Union market, and changing identities. For producers and many consumers of “Soviet” sausages in this changing political, economic, and social space, “Soviet” increasingly becomes synonym for “ours” and “Lithuanian,” which challenges the normalized dichotomy of “Soviet” versus “Lithuanian” in the mainstream official discourse. As one woman from the city of Šiauliai argued, much credit is owed to Samsonas, the producer of “Soviet” sausages, for recognizing “our Soviet experience.” For her, the Soviet era was also “our” national era, characterized by pleasant memories and positive gastronomic experiences, rather than foreignness, oppression, and suffering. She identified “Soviet” sausage as “our” Lithuanian sausage, presumably a replica of sausage produced in Soviet Lithuania.

Moreover, consumers like the woman from Šiauliai recognize “Soviet” tradition as part of their “Lithuanian” self,
which is made up of both Soviet and more recent European experiences. Thus, the production and consumption of Lithuanian “Soviet” sausages becomes a commentary on the public Cold War renderings of Eastern Europe, in which “East” and “West,” and “Soviet” and “European,” are exclusive categories indexing oppositional social, political, and moral spaces. Sausages create a new sense of identity and modernity where Soviet tradition and the European present are reconciled.

Similar processes have been observed in other post-Soviet states. Paul Manning and Ann Uplisashvili (2007) demonstrate the ways in which the time of tradition and the time of (European) modernity are embedded in the new ethnographic Georgian beer brands. As in the case of “Soviet” sausages, there is no clear return to traditional production methods. In both cases, the new national ideology, which corresponds to circulating ideas about Europe and sentiments about the past and future, is embodied in the new brands. In the case of Lithuania, semiotic ideologies produced by the marketing specialists of post-Soviet “Soviet” brands compete with official state ideologies about national tradition and modernity. Thus, in Lithuania, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, questions of what constitutes modernity—and what the correct path to modernity is—are still open (Dunn 2009).

Stripped of their original context of an economy of scarcity and an oppressive regime, “Soviet” sausages largely recall a time that never existed and a food that only a minority tasted. Producers re-create the past by associating “Soviet” with quality, prestige, luxury, nativeness, purity, goodness, happiness, and naturalness. They challenge the political value of “Soviet” as it is projected by the post-Soviet state and transnational organizations like the European Union. The consumption and marketing of “Soviet” sausages becomes a political process that opposes state ideologies and values and launches new ideologies and values about tradition, identity, and modernity. Ideologies about “Soviet” brands reflect and shape larger processes of change and identity, as the following discussion of consumption shows.

THE POLITICAL LIVES OF “SOVIET” SAUSAGES

Nostalgia and “Soviet” Sausages

Markets create political values, and “Soviet” sausages have political lives and careers. As Ina Merkel argued, communist signs and symbols, whether invoked as representations of a political system or as signs of everyday life, are principal forms for negotiating fundamental questions about different value systems, repression and freedom, individuality and community, and distinction and equality (Merkel 2006:251). “Soviet” sausages shape political spaces and political subjectivities. They are integral to the circulation of power, resource, and prestige and to the production of hierarchies and political imaginations.

Pensioners, the unemployed, or the underemployed, from both the villages and the city of Kaunas, tended to speak positively about the availability and quality of food in the late Soviet period. In their minds, the shortages of the Soviet era were insignificant compared to the current shortage of money, which leads to experiences of subjective hunger and the suppression of desires. They repeatedly stated that “there are goods, but there is no money” and minimized their market participation (see Creed 2002). People who live on meager pensions or who are unemployed can rarely afford to buy sausages widely available today, which only sporadically appeared on store shelves in Soviet times. Roma, a villager in her early fifties, claimed not to have experienced denigration in Soviet-era food lines, nor to have felt oppressed, nor to have resisted the Soviet order of things. She remembered the Soviet past as the “better one” and recalled a happier social and individual life, when she had things to put on the table at parties—seldom given today—or when she got the beloved medˇziotojų deirelis (hunter sausages) “from under the counter” (using connections). The “better times” were times with full tables and full stomachs. At present, emptier tables and stomachs are a daily reminder of a changed social position in postsocialist society.

Nostalgia for better Soviet times indexed people’s experiences of inequality, isolation, poverty, and insecurity. For Elvyra, a doctor in her early sixties and a Kaunas resident, relative hunger and belt-tightening illustrated increased social stratification and shifts in status. She remembered Soviet times as a period of equality, security, and well-being:

I think about justice. If we have to tighten our belts, all of us have to do that. Not only those so-called masses. Those who are in Vilnius [the political elite], they don’t tighten their belts. Not likely! . . . I have an acquaintance in Jonava. She was an obstetrician all her life. She gets such a [small] pension that she has to choose between getting food and buying medicine. She said that she chooses to eat. She doesn’t see doctors . . . Earlier we were all equal. We did not have much, but . . . but . . . everyone had social benefits. . . . [In health care] many things were much better. [interview, November 8, 2003]

People also criticized the post-Soviet social and political order in their conversations about sausages. They invoked Soviet-era sausage as a symbol of better times, while the contemporary food situation illustrated post-Soviet decline and chaos. Dalia, a coat room employee in her forties from the city of Kaunas, said to me:

Meat does not look nice in shops [at present]. One sausage is brown, the next one, too, until you find something. Well, there is variety, but, well, all those sausages are . . . Earlier [in Soviet times] there weren’t very many, you went to a shop, you bought it. Now you search and search and all of them look suspicious. Once I bought a rosy one. I think there were some kind of colorings added. Earlier a sausage was a sausage, you knew that you were eating meat, well, maybe there was some starch in it, anyway. I don’t know . . . Those were times, those were good times then. [interview, July 17, 2004]

As if engaging in a dialogue with others who have a different opinion, Dalia then added: “They say we ate bones. No, we ate meat all the time. We didn’t eat bones. Really” (interview, July 17, 2004). Her mother sighed in agreement:
The best šioninė (a type of bacon) was two rubles” (interview, July 17, 2004).

By purchasing, cooking, and eating sausages, people act on their political subjectivities and reflect on changing citizenship regimes. In the Girstupis market, I met an old lady with a scarf who bought several “Soviet” sausages. After ordering the sausages, the old lady commented: “We were full under the kacapai (a derogatory term for Russians)” (personal communication, Girstupis market, June 17, 2006). Her stunningly reproachful tone was a commentary on post-Soviet alterity and express sentiments for inclusive citizenship (cf. Boyer 2006). People such as this elderly woman reflect confirm, are not about the return of the USSR and socialism. The derogatory name for “Russians” shows that the nostalgic stance toward the Soviet past does not imply tolerance for Russians, the leading nationality of the former USSR, and, as other studies confirm, are not about the return of the USSR and socialism (cf. Boyer 2006). People such as this elderly woman reflect post-Soviet alterity and express sentiments for inclusive citizenship (see also Klumbytė 2008). The sausage, as manifested in this microspace, objectifies their feelings and gives a material form to circulating sentiments about society, political community, and the post-Soviet political and social history.

Nostalgia for Soviet times finds expression in different forms of political behavior, including voting. Roma and Dalia, mentioned above, voted for excommunist and populist parties throughout the post-Soviet period. Many journalists, intellectuals, mainstream political party politicians, and scholars consider votes for populists to represent people’s antagonism toward democracy. Votes, however, express deep feelings of difference and marginality in post-Soviet society rather than negativity toward democracy. People voted for agendas that promised honorable citizenship and recognition; they did not vote against the democratic regime. Most of the informants whom I interviewed were willing to live in a democratic European society and voted for a better future for their children in the European Union during the referendum for integration in 2004. People’s votes, like “Soviet” sausages, expressed the local political vernacular in which the Soviet-Lithuanian tradition and the European present coexist.

Scholars note that nostalgia depends on a fiction of the past, an idealized and sanitized version of it (Lupton 1996), and that it is essentially about the present (Boym 2001). An important conclusion by marketing research is that personal communication, Girstupis market, June 17, 2006). Her stunningly reproachful tone was a commentary on post-Soviet alterity and express sentiments for inclusive citizenship (cf. Boyer 2006). People such as this elderly woman reflect confirm, are not about the return of the USSR and socialism. The derogatory name for “Russians” shows that the nostalgic stance toward the Soviet past does not imply tolerance for Russians, the leading nationality of the former USSR, and, as other studies confirm, are not about the return of the USSR and socialism (cf. Boyer 2006). People such as this elderly woman reflect post-Soviet alterity and express sentiments for inclusive citizenship (see also Klumbytė 2008). The sausage, as manifested in this microspace, objectifies their feelings and gives a material form to circulating sentiments about society, political community, and the post-Soviet political and social history.

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In this context, shortages in general, and shortages of sausage in particular, were among the hegemonic mechanisms extending to the compromised tables of Soviet citizens and reaching into their bodies. Those in power were able to devalue others’ sense of self: the inability to provide for oneself and the family was a sign of one’s powerlessness, even if it was conceived as a form of moral power by the subjects themselves. Darius, a historian in his forties from Vilnius, remembered a relative who always had meat on the table, a fact of which she was proud. The relative worked every third day at the airport. On her free days, she traveled from one shop to another, followed delivery schedules, stood in queues, and was able to find and buy meat and sausages. Although the state shortages extended to both Darius and his relative’s stomachs, for Darius it was an experience of state hegemony, but for his relative it was an experience of her heroism (cf. Ries 1997). Her sausages pointed to her status and power and to Darius’s powerlessness and relative hunger.

Soviet-period sausages were integral to the negative memories of Soviet times in Linas’s and Darius’s narratives. As Darius observed: “Earlier in a shop you could see a loaf of bread, two eggs, herring, but there were no sausages. I remember those times. Empty shops. If you got a good salary you could buy everything that was in a shop” (interview, July 28, 2006). Criticizing the quality of Soviet-era sausages, an art expert in his mid-forties joked: “In meat-packing plants...
they had the technology to make sausages from mice and rats” (interview, May 29, 2004).

At present, people who refuse to find anything admirable in the Soviet past either reject consuming “Soviet” sausages or apparently suspend their political consciousness. Darius and Linas express their political subjectivities in their refusal to consume “Soviet” sausages. In 2007, the Samsonas company launched some new sausage brands aimed at consumers like Darius and Linas, including “All times,” “New times of 1991” (the year the USSR collapsed and Lithuania gained international recognition), and “Smetoniška,” named after Antanas Smetona, a long-term president of pre-Soviet Lithuania.

In the case of those nostalgic for the Soviet past, the goodness of the post-Soviet “Soviet” sausages reinforces their visions of the past and gives their memories, marginalized publicly, authority and power. In the case of those who are critical of the Soviet period, “Soviet” sausage opens up the space to reaffirm their negative views about the Soviet past. “Soviet” sausages are intimately intertwined with people’s political sensibilities and experiences of social history. Like biographical objects among the Kodi in Indonesia, “Soviet” sausage is a pivot for reflection and introspection, a tool of autobiographical self-discovery, a site for knowing oneself through objects, and a means of relating to social history and political community. It is a site of competition and negotiation as well as of recirculation of political values and ideologies.

CONCLUSION
Marketing and consumption of “Soviet” sausages illuminate the ways in which public identities and citizenship are constructed in the context of postsocialist and post–European Union enlargement. In this context, individuals are vested not only with juridical competences, obligations, and entitlements (or lack of them) endowed by the state but also with particular modes of belonging based on their subjectivities and experiences (cf. Dávila 2001:10–11). As research on the Latino market in the United States has shown, it is in the market and through marketing discourse that populations are increasingly debating their social identities and public standing (Dávila 2001:2). Consumers of “Soviet” sausages, especially those who are nostalgic for Soviet times, debate the post-Soviet personhood and citizenship regimes and their status as the disempowered or the marginalized.

From one perspective, the “Soviet” sausage renaissance in Lithuania carries a critique of the postsocialist state and skepticism toward the ideals of liberal democracy. Scholars, intellectuals, politicians, and consumers whose thinking is informed by Cold War idioms and the binaries of capitalism versus communism, totalitarian regime versus democracy, and East versus West would be among the ones to question the ethics and politics of “Soviet” sausages. Paradoxically, this reproduces the visions that inform their thinking: the Cold War discourses and the antagonisms it entailed. The consumers and producers of “Soviet” sausages are classified with communists, the oppressive Soviet state and its successor Russia, and the new populists and radicals who challenge democracy, sovereignty, and concurrent integration into Western and European structures. In this context, the production and consumption of “Soviet” sausages redefines the boundaries of society and reproduces alterity (cf. Boyer 2001). Consumption of “Soviet” sausages is an important criterion for inclusion or exclusion as well as a reiteration of hegemonies and ideologies. As elsewhere in food contexts, “Soviet” sausages signal rivalry and commonality, solidarity and segregation, and intimacy and distance (cf. Firth 1973; Geertz 1960; Ortner 1978; Young 1971).

However, although “Soviet” sausage is about politics and power, it is not about a return to Soviet times. For many “Soviet” sausage consumers, consumption is a way to reclaim honorable citizenship and recognition in a post-Soviet neoliberal state. By purchasing “Soviet” sausage (and voting for populists or excommunists), they resist economic and social marginalization without resisting democracy. Thus, from another perspective, “Soviet” sausages may be considered an example of the new postsocialist utopia, successfully consumed in the literal and metaphorical sense, which mixes the imagined Soviet past and the European present in people’s imaginations to produce a distinctive fantasy of their reconcilability.

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NOTES

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1. Lithuania was integrated into the USSR in 1940. It was occupied by Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1944. From 1944 to 1990, it was a Soviet Socialist Republic.
2. Feminine tarybinė, plural masculine tarybiniai, plural feminine tarybinės. I use the English term Soviet in this article. I use the general term “Soviet brands” following consumers’ understanding; the actual brand names were longer, such as “Soviet Salami” or “Soviet Milk Wiener.”
4. On consumption and the state, see Dunn (2008), Patico (2008), Özürek (2006), and Verdery (1996); on consumption and nationalism, see Caldwell (2002) and Foster (2002); on consumption and citizenship, see Berdahl (2005) and
Porter (2008); and on consumption, democracy, and political belonging, see Greenberg (2006). Nationalism and citizenship have been more explicitly addressed by anthropologists who study marketing and advertising, rather than consumption per se (see Dávila 2001; Foster 2008; Manning and Uplisashvili 2007; Mazzarella 2005).

5. In anthropology, the interconnections between consumption and political history have been most thoroughly discussed in studies of political economy and globalization. (See Foster 2008; Miller 1998; Watson 1997; and Wilk 1999 on consumption and globalization. See Kaplan 2007 and Mintz 1985 on consumption and political economy.) The issues of power and identity have been addressed by numerous studies. Consumption is discussed as an expression of ethnicity (Gronow 2003; Toomre 1997); gender (Counihan 1999); class and status (Bourdieu 1984; Roseberry 1996); nation (Cwiertka 2004; Pilcher 1998; Wilk 1999); kinship (Howard and Kirkpatrick 1989); or, generally, identity (Friedman 1994).


7. Wieners in Soviet times were less prestigious than some other foods, such as caviar, smoked eel, exotic fruits such as pineapples and bananas, or the expensive smoked sausage “Serve-latas.” In Soviet Lithuania, many other foods were in short supply; thus, they were not consumed regularly and can be considered “luxuries.” Chicken is an example of this type of luxury food.

8. Other meat dishes, such as steak, were more appropriate at birthday parties. In general, unprocessed meat products ranked higher than processed ones.

9. “Soviet” sausage is a type of nostalgia branding. On nostalgia and consumption in East Germany, see Berdahl (2001), Boyer (2001), Buechler and Buechler (1999), Merkel (2006); in the former Yugoslavia, see Velikonja (2008) and Zivkovic (2007).


11. Personal communication with Rimgail˙e Vaitkien˙e, former director of marketing for Samsonas, July 12, 2007.

12. Personal communication with Rimgail˙e Vaitkien˙e, former director of marketing for Samsonas, July 12, 2007.


15. Vilnius District Court. Case No. 3K-3–461.

16. In the socialist era, Western commodities and images were important for self-value and dignity (see Feherváry 2002 on Hungary).

17. Personal communication with Rimgail˙e Vaitkien˙e, former director of marketing for Samsonas, July 12, 2007.

18. Personal communication with Rimgail˙e Vaitkien˙e, former director of marketing for Samsonas, July 12, 2007.


20. See Vilnius District Court. Case No. 3K–3–461 for representative survey and linguists’ analyses data.


22. Personal communication with Artūras Skairys, the director for marketing of Biovela, August 8, 2007.

23. In Lithuania, most people do not suffer from hunger; however, they feel what Melissa Caldwell (2004) called subjective hunger.

24. On consumption, prosperity, and exclusion, see also Berdahl (2005) and Humphrey (2002).

25. I call people’s relation to post-Soviet history “nostalgia” because they long for a place and time that no longer exist; this longing embraces feelings of romance, pleasure, loss, irreversibility, and displacement as well as grief and stasis in some cases (see also Klumbyt˙e 2008).

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Merkel, Ina  
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Munn, Nancy  
Ortner, Sherry  
Oushakine, Serguei  
Özyurek, Esra  
Patico, Jennifer  
Pilcher, Jeffrey M.  
Porter, Amy  
Ries, Nancy  
Roseberry, William  
Rouse, Carolyn, and Janet Hoskins  
Samsonas  
Soper, Kate, and Frank Trentmann  
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Toomre, Joyce  
Vaitkienė, Rimgaile  
FOR FURTHER READING

(These selections were made by the American Anthropologist editorial interns as examples of research related in some way to this article. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author.)

Foster, Robert

Heath, Deborah, and Anne Meneley

Kalb, Don

Mintz, Sidney

Ries, Nancy

Rivkin-Fish, Michele

Vizcarra Bordi, Ivonne