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"Consuming" national identity in Western Ukraine

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This paper represents an attempt to study national identity in the post-Soviet context through the lens of everyday life practices. Building on ideas of banal nationalism and consumer citizenship, and with support of empirical evidence collected in L'viv, Ukraine, this paper demonstrates how national identity becomes materialized in everyday life through consumption practices and objects of consumption. While exploring objects and practices that are not originally national in scope but infused with national meanings by ordinary people, it will be shown how consumption becomes an arena for the expression and renegotiation of national self-portraits. Differences in national meanings among residents of L'viv belonging to two different language groups will highlight the diversity of ways and means by which people express their national sensibilities. By exploring national meanings in everyday consumption practices of Ukrainian citizens, this study aims to provide an alternative perspective on post-Soviet nation-building and contribute to the current debate on the position and identity of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine.

Keywords: consumer culture; post-Soviet; national identity; banal nationalism; Ukraine; Russian speakers

Consumers do not simply buy national commodities; they constitute national sensibilities, embody national pride, negotiate national meanings, thus making nationhood a salient feature of their everyday lives. (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, 551)

Introduction

The literature on nation-building and, to a certain extent, national identity formation across the former Soviet Union has tended to emphasize the role of political elites of a country. Accordingly, most literature has focused on macro actors and processes, and their impact on national identity formation in society on a meso level (Kolstø 2006; Tishkov 1995). A critique of this approach is found in some studies on Ukraine, where a growing number of scholars have been looking at the role of non-state actors and actions. Mostly using case-study-based evidence, authors such as Polese (2009b), Rodgers (2007), and Kulyk (2014) have examined the way non-state actors and their agency have contributed to shaping or renegotiating the national identity project, one that often does not seem to

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take into account the needs of a certain segment of the population or of a region. The immediate consequence is that Ukrainian identity is (partly) rejected or at least renegotiated (Richardson 2004; Rodgers 2007) to better fit the way certain local populations see themselves. This is echoed by some local authors taking the 2013–2014 Ukrainian crisis as evidence of the fact that Ukrainian national identity needs to be rethought in alternative ways, to go beyond the existing top-down political approaches in which micro processes are usually overlooked (Kulyk 2014). Furthermore, the developments of nationalism during the Orange Revolution in 2004 and then during the Euromaidan protests and subsequent military conflict in East Ukraine demonstrated that nation-building in Ukraine at various times appeared to be spontaneous[1] or informal (Polese 2009a, 2009b), here drawing from Giddens' structuration processes (1989), which suggest that ordinary people are not only bearers of national identity, but also participate in its production.

Building on the above literature, this paper endorses the idea that the construction of national identity happening at the bottom level has the power to reshape the national discourse; it also provides two distinct contributions to the debates on identity formation. First, the case study presented here illustrates how the formation of national identity is a realm where citizens are not just passive actors who merely accept or reject national markers conceived by the political elite, but are rather active actors who can interpret or renegotiate those markers and supply some new elements of national identity by embedding national meanings into new objects and practices in a spontaneous way. Second, the role of citizens and their everyday practices of consumption are examined, suggesting that consumption helps create a symbolic arena for the performance of national sensibilities.

The choice to consider the role of consumption and consumer culture in the process of national identity formation within a post-Soviet context was inspired in large part by a dearth of research on the interplay of two important processes that started in 1991, namely, the entrance into the market economy and the building of a nation. As these two processes were happening simultaneously, their interrelation at both public and personal levels seemed inevitable, and posed challenges not only to the new governments, but also to former Soviet citizens who needed to acquire skills that belong to both consumers and citizens of a nation.

The diversity discovered in the data collected for this work reveals that objects and practices embedded with national meanings might differ among representatives of the two different language groups, though not substantially, and could not be uniform even within one language group. However, since the majority of informants perceived their choices as being "typical" expressions of their national identity, the presence of such differences should not be automatically interpreted as an expression of cultural or ethnic distinctions. It instead suggests that a multitude of different ways and perceptions are used to perform a common identity category. In other words, even though the Ukrainian-speaking group might be considered to be in possession of a greater national cultural capital in relation to the Russian-speaking group, it will be suggested that both groups perceive their behavior as culturally "Ukrainian" and, therefore, participate (equally) in the formation of Ukrainian identity.

The theoretical basis supporting the main argument – the mutual dependence between national identity and consumption – mainly draws on works using the concepts of "banal" nationalism (Billig 1995; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Skey 2011) and consumer citizenship (Foster 2002; Foster and Özcan 2005; Gurova, forthcoming). These ideas give an important, if not leading, role to consumption as a means to understand sociopolitical engagement in the nation-building process. By introducing the notion of banal nationalism, Billig (1995) shifted attention from the official narrative of national identity to everyday practices that

materialize a nation. Later, Foster (2002) proposed to apply the approach of banal nationalism in non-Western contexts and expanded the list of "various means" through which a system of references for national identification could be established. He coined the phrase "consumer citizenship," and defined it as the "production of national identity by way of shared consumption practices" (Foster and Özcan 2005, 5). In line with Foster's work, this paper addresses two limitations of Billig's work: limiting the consideration of the practice of national symbols to those promoted by the state, and applying the idea of banal nationalism only to established nations of the West. In addition, in order to demonstrate the interrelation of formation of identity and consumption, this paper integrates into its theoretical framework research emerging from the relatively recent body of literature known as consumer culture theory (CCT) (Ahuvia 2005; Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk 1988; Elliott 2004; Joy and Li 2012). Previous studies on CCT have showed that objects can become extensions of the self (Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988; Dunn 2008) and have suggested a more integral way to analyze consumption practices, using the factors of cultural realm and marketplace conditions. CCT views consumers as active participants in culture production insofar as they infuse various objects of consumption with symbolic meanings and thereby contribute to the creation of commonly recognized values and perceptions.

L'viv, which is generally considered to be a cradle of Ukrainian nationalism, and where nonetheless a large Russian-speaking community resides, was selected as a research setting because it was assumed that linguistic and probably cultural distinctions of its population could lead to a greater variety in research data. However, the goal of this research was not to show possible differences between the two groups, but rather to explore how both of them perceive their national identity. While questioning and interpreting the identity of Russian speakers, this work relies completely on their national self-perception, starting from the assumption that while an ethnic group is usually defined by others, a nation should be treated as self-defined (Connor 1994). In the course of interviews, Russian-speaking respondents identified themselves as Ukrainians and, therefore, are considered here to be participating in the construction, reconstruction, and performance of Ukrainian national identity.

The empirical material presented in this study comes from 35 interviews, conducted in L'viv over two periods during 2014–2015. Online and print media analysis and interpretation of notes from participant observation conducted in L'viv's retail shops during summer 2014 are also included when considering consumption practices related to food products. The sample for interviews comprised urban Ukrainian citizens residing in L'viv for no less than five years prior to the interview,[2] who could be defined as representatives of either the educated middle class or the lower-middle class. The informants were divided into two groups according to the language they identified as their native tongue: either Ukrainian or Russian. The age of the informants varied between 25 and 63 years old. The snowball method was used to contact potential respondents, with the caveat that only one extra contact per respondent was chosen in order to minimize the probability of having respondents from the same social circles. The end result of the sample had several limitations and should, therefore, not be considered as representative of Ukrainian society. However, it still served its purpose: to provide an illustration of how everyday consumption practices are interwoven with the processes of national identity formation.

The rest of this paper is divided into three sections. The next section engages with current debates on consumer citizenship and everyday performance of nationhood, and on the development of the role of consumer culture in identity studies. It also introduces the development of such discussions within the post-Soviet context. The following

section presents and elaborates upon the collected data, before providing some conclusive remarks. It focuses on three spheres of consumption: home, food, and national objects. Home would appear as a central theme, to which food and national objects are connected, as food is cooked at home and national objects are usually found inside of homes. Practices and attitudes within such spheres will be analyzed as factors that "serve to anchor the nation in the everyday life" (Foster 2002, 64). This work demonstrates that these domains of consumption are representative of the main argument, but acknowledges that they are not exhaustive and other spheres of consumption could also be useful for further exploration of the current topic.

Theoretical insights: from consumption to national identity and back

The role of consumption is not by any means a novel choice of focus in the study of socio-cultural and sociopolitical processes. The topic of consumption has been gaining increased attention beyond its economic significance. In particular, it has been given special weight in the analysis of identity formation in the postmodern era (Bauman 1998; Belk 1988; Bocock 1993; Dunn 2008; Elliott 2004; Miller 1995). Initially, identity formation through consumption was studied mostly within the discipline of anthropology (Douglas 2002; Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Miller 2001). The initial interest of anthropologists in relations of people with objects and how objects could be used to communicate symbolic messages informed a number of substreams, one of which is now known as CCT, and attracted the attention of scholars from other disciplines as well (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Works that refer to CCT examine identity formation and, rather than focusing on economic and psychological aspects of consumption, "highlight the cultural and social complexities" (Joy and Li 2012, 143) of it. The central idea of this body of literature is that the process of social identity formation and the expression of cultural values can be seen in the ways people use material and non-material objects of consumption[3] (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Kozinets 2001). Very often objects are analyzed as extensions of the self (Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988; Dunn 2008) and thought to "give expression to how we think others will see us" (Haug's argument in Dunn 2008, 86). The particular insight of CCT is the significant role it gives to the market, which is perceived as the main context in which social identities are formed. People look for and establish their self-identities within social and cultural frameworks, which nowadays are very much interconnected with the marketplace and influenced by such phenomena as globalization and consumerism.

Relating consumption to such broad parts of identity as nationality and ethnicity could be considered a relatively recent direction in academic thought, from which three main research branches have emerged: ethnic consumption (Chytkova 2011; Kalmus, Keller, and Kiise 2009; Pechurina 2015; Peñaloza 1994), consumer citizenship (Foster 2002; Foster and Özcan 2005; Gurova, forthcoming; Klumbytė 2010), and branding the nation (Aronczyk 2013; Kaneva 2011). While the main goal of research on ethnic consumption is to answer the question regarding how ethnicity can influence consumption patterns, studies of consumption practices and material culture of migrant communities discovered that the influence can also happen in the opposite direction. Participation in consumer culture away from one's homeland can affect the way ethnic/national identity is perceived, and contribute to its renegotiation or to the construction of an entirely new identity (Pechurina 2015; Peñaloza 1994). Consumption as a practice also began being addressed by studies of everyday life, including those originating from the idea of everyday nationalism, introduced by Billig in his book *Banal Nationalism* (1995). Billig sees consumption as one of the daily practices through which it is possible to materialize a nation and "evaluate" the

success of nation-building strategies. Consumption becomes a visualization tool of the ideological habits of citizens, transforming the narrative of a nation into something "tangible" and mundane. However, his examples of how banal nationalism could be explored are limited to the Western world.

Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) developed a more complex approach to the study of banal nationalism and introduced four ways in which one can learn how a nation is formed and enacted: through symbolic performance, national decision-making processes, the use of language, and consumption of national products. Another prominent contribution to the study of everyday nationalism was made by Foster (2002), who focused on media consumption and commodity consumption and defined the aforementioned concept of consumer citizenship. With his case study of nation-making in Papua New Guinea, he showed that Billig's concept could be applicable virtually everywhere. He also demonstrated that one should pay attention to the everyday use not only of official national symbols or nationally marked products, but also of those that are not national in scope, but are consumed in a way particular to that nation. In his paper on Cola Turka together with Foster and Özcan (2005), he shows how the Turkish state promoted consumer citizenship via its advertisement of a commercial product (the Turkish equivalent of Coca-Cola). This is where a citizenry is constructed through the formation of a community of loyal consumers. Following this logic, consumption should be regarded simultaneously as a manipulation tool the government uses to influence people's perception of nationhood and as a "politically charged arena" for people's expression of positive or negative nationalism (Foster 2002, 9; Gurova, forthcoming).

The post-Soviet context

When it comes to analyzing how nations were conceived and developed, the post-Soviet space is a unique context for testing social constructivist paradigms. In the large body of debates on nation-building and the ethnic/civic origin of nations (Deutsch and Foltz 2010; Smith 1991), post-Soviet nation-building has centered around two major positions: the nationalizing state (Brubaker 2011) and civic nation-building (Kuzio 2002). According to Kuzio (2002), the Ukrainian government initially chose the second path, giving access to citizenship to everyone who resided within Ukrainian territory and promoting values that could be accepted by representatives of different ethnic groups. Later, the Ukrainization process showed that values promoted by the state were very often oriented toward the interests of its titular ethnic group – Ukrainians.

In the academic literature during the first two decades after independence, the discussions of processes in Ukraine have mainly used a political lens to analyze the phenomenon of nation-building. Various tools contributing to the construction of national identity were explored: construction of an official narrative on national identity passed through citizenship policies (Barrington 1994), school and educational policies (Janmaat 2000; Richardson 2004; Rodgers 2007), language policies (Arel 1995; Janmaat 2000), party and party system consolidation (Kuzio 2002), and foreign policy (Shulman 2004). Due to its focus on the official narrative of national identity, however, this literature was not able to provide a complete understanding of the process of national identity formation in Ukraine, as it was neglecting such questions as how this identity was perceived and enacted by ordinary people. This echoes Hobsbawm's idea (1990) that even though nationalism is constructed top-down, it cannot be properly understood unless also analyzed bottom-up.

Such a gap, existing not only in the literature on the Ukrainian context, could be partially filled by establishing links to the body of works focusing on different practices

through which former Soviet citizens were renegotiating their self-identities after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The exploration of the construction and reconstruction of individual and group identities was approached via studies of material culture (Gerasimova and Chuykina 2004; Gurova, forthcoming), consumption practices (Eglitis 2011; Kalmus, Keller, and Kiise 2009; Oushakine 2000; Patico 2008), and other strategies of adaptation to conditions of the market economy and new political order that were observed among post-Soviet populations (Humphrey 2002; Morris 2012; Patico and Caldwell 2002). The main idea in such works was often that identity in the post-Soviet space, including its national/ethnic element, was located between two points of reference: the West, and the Soviet past. By accepting new values and trying to imitate Western lifestyles, people were rejecting some parts of their Soviet identity and at the same time incorporating other parts of it into their new identity. For these and other reasons, a lot of attention was dedicated to the Soviet everyday life, in which scholars aimed to find some causes of current dynamics. It is generally thought that Soviet everyday life continues to influence cultural engagements, including those with the West (Humphrey 2002; Wanner 1998). While presenting a significant amount of material on the processes of social identity construction and reconstruction through consumption and attitude to material objects, the above-mentioned works rarely focused specifically on the interrelation of the roles of consumer and citizen. Exceptions are a recent work by Gurova (forthcoming) in Russia, where she considers consumption to be a "tool of expressing citizenship and civic concerns" (1), and the research done by Klumbytė (2010) on the consumption of Soviet sausages. Gurova analyzes consumer citizenship both as a top-down strategy that was launched by the Russian political elite to consolidate the Russian nation, and as a platform for citizens to perform their national identity or to express concerns about it. In Klumbytė's study (2010), the consumption of Soviet sausages in post-Soviet Lithuania becomes a form of political engagement. Popular consumption of sausages associated with Soviet times goes against the official narrative of national identity promoted in Lithuania. She concludes that consumer behavior can also show the way in which ordinary people perceive their role as citizens and, if noticed by the government, could even impact the official narrative of national identity.

Home as the cradle of local nationalism?

Home has always been a very symbolic place, telling much to its visitors about the historical and cultural context in which it is situated. At the same time, home is often considered to be a mirror of its inhabitants. It can reveal not only their individual characteristics, but also characteristics of social groups to which they belong. Several studies of migrant communities showed that home and its possessions serve migrants as a location for keeping their original national/ethnic identity and for (re)constructing a new one (Boym 1998; Pechurina 2015). For instance, Pechurina (2015) analyzes how ethnic Russians living in the UK keep or renegotiate their Russian identity through home-making practices and possessions. Interpreting meanings of objects and practices in their homes which mainly reproduced images of life in the homeland, she was able to define to what extent a person was willing to integrate into his or her new environment, and how particular interior home objects became points of reference to the native ethnic/national identity of those who had emigrated.

   In order to better understand current values attributed to homes at a national level in any post-Soviet society, it is useful to go back to the Soviet period to see how the perception of home was distorted by Communist party politics. This is at least partially possible due to

abundant literature focusing on the domestic aesthetics of the Soviet home (Buchli 1997; Humphrey 2005; Utekhin 2004). Since Soviet ideology was not only linguistic, but also material (Humphrey 2005), the Soviet government repeatedly manipulated the minds of citizens through its control over material culture, particularly over their dwellings. The concept of home was key in the implementation of the industrialization program. This entailed moving masses of people from rural to urban areas and establishing complete control over housing, while for the citizens it meant losing the status of houseowner and acclimating to the new experience of communal apartments (Utekhin 2004). The housing reform of the Khrushchev period supported the provision of new apartments and also aimed to promote new standards, styles in home décor, and routine habits connected to the organization of the living space. Consequently, Soviet urban homes started to look even more uniform and more socialist from inside. Home was very often a museum of possessions (Chernyshova 2013), a place to show off belongings commonly recognized as prestigious across the Soviet Union. Scarcity of home-ware, a party-dictated style, and a lack of variety in available furnishings made Soviet apartments look more or less the same. Eventually this contributed to the spread of common aesthetic norms and values and their widespread recognition across the Soviet area. People wanted to display their home possessions, but had at their disposal only a scant variety of them, which resulted in a display in most households of the same set of objects, now easily recognizable as attributes of the Soviet everyday life. This contributed to the development of the traditional look of Soviet apartments, followed by the development of the feeling of belonging to one Soviet nation. Home and home possessions thus became strong markers of the Soviet identity, which people who lived under the Soviet regime are easily able to revive in their memories even now.

The breakdown of the Soviet order and arrival of the new opportunities and values of the market economy required an establishment of new aesthetic codes, values, and meanings. The change of status from tenants to owners in the beginning of 1990s due to the privatization process not only entitled people to the freedom to manage their real estate properties according to their personal needs (Struyk 1996), but also attributed a new symbolic meaning to their homes. A private home or apartment finally became a potential means to solve socioeconomic problems, as well as a place where one could finally realize previously "cultivated" dreams about a better material life. It became a place for aesthetic self-realization and, as will be demonstrated in this work, a place for visualizing national identity. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the values considered as belonging to the concept of "home" for Ukrainians residing in L'viv. Some of the narratives presented will show a significant degree of divergence depending on the linguistic background of the respondents. Resting on the idea that "national cultures are not repositories of shared symbols to which the entire population stands in identical relation" (Schlesinger 1991, 174), these visible differences should not be interpreted as features of different national identities. Rather, the variety of symbolic meanings as mentioned by the interlocutors from the two main language groups (Russian and Ukrainian) might point at the existence of contrasting ways to "perform" one's own national identity.

The home as castle. Looking for security in an unstable environment

Security and responsibility are usually the most important symbolic meanings that home ownership provides to its master. In a post-Soviet context, the desire to own a home was aggravated during Soviet times, when, at least in theory, to own a real estate property was not possible for an ordinary Soviet citizen (Struyk 1996). Nowadays, purchasing an

apartment or, if one is more ambitious, building a house seems to be an ordinary aspiration. Such a common aim automatically makes topics such as home selection, home purchase, and home renovation practices central in many everyday conversations. In fact, as the quote below demonstrates, the idea of being a homeowner sometimes runs to the extremes.

> Conversations about houses are always in the air … It looks like a paradox, but in this region there are many people, especially women, who have left L'viv and gone to work abroad just in order to earn money for a new home. They leave their families, agree not to see how their children grow up, but they hold onto the idea to earn money to buy a house, which they ultimately only rarely end up living in. Normally they continue to work abroad, so the house remains only half-constructed or the apartment is rented out to strangers. (Marichka, Ukr, 33)[4]

Moreover, the centrality of the idea of ownership serves to establish connections between people, and thus, being an owner or even just aspiring to become one becomes part of one's social identity, a reference with which many are able to associate themselves.

While it is not novel that ownership matters, in Ukraine it is further aggravated by the fact that home is usually viewed as a castle, the function of which is to protect its inhabitants from the unstable political and economic environment. The majority of my respondents mentioned that one of the most important symbolic functions of home is protection – protection from the outside world and the instability that it presents. Almost always the functions of security and protection were mentioned by respondents before speaking of home as being a place to practice family values, a place for self-fulfillment and the realization of material aspirations.

> An ideal house should be built like a fortress, with solid walls and windows and a very good door. Doors and probably windows are very important. The only thing is that this fortress ends with such doors and windows - what is outside of them is of little interest. (Olga, Rus, 30)

The idea of home being a castle refers especially to the exterior look of private houses and some features of apartments: massive metal doors, and PVC windows with locks and iron grids – especially on properties situated on the ground floor – are recognizable features of an average Ukrainian home.

"What will our neighbors say?" The demonstrative function of home

While being considered primarily a private space, home also has a demonstrative function. Despite the quality of "shutting the world out" that these "castles" possess, their owners are still concerned about how the final result will be judged by their neighbors or guests. The interior aesthetic of a home, including its cleanliness, becomes an important aspect for an owner to consider, first and foremost in order not to be judged negatively, and only second for their own comfort and satisfaction.

> Our homes should always look clean and proper, as we really care about what others will say. At the same time, I can't say that we invite a lot of people inside, but we still live feeling dependent on others' opinions. (Oksana, Ukr, 28)

When asked whether they show their homes to others, several respondents spoke about demonstrative "rituals" that they perform every time someone new comes to their place.

> When new guests come to my house there is like an unwritten rule to show all the rooms, including bedrooms, and normally, after going through the whole apartment, we will sit and discuss some technical details, maybe experiences concerning some features or renovation that we did in the past. (Larysa, Ukr, 65)

Current home-making practices of Ukrainians consist of a mixture of imitation of Western lifestyle practices (Bulakh 2014; Sztompka 2004), practices taken from the Soviet past, and folk culture elements. What people interpret as Western elements very often become central points of attraction and therefore sources of their owner's pride.[5] What were initially seen as exotic elements of Western culture became deeply incorporated into the local context over time. As a result, instead of being perceived as foreign, together with Soviet and Ukrainian features they are seen as "national" aesthetic features of Ukrainian interiors. While constructing markers of national identity in daily life, people still use Soviet cultural engagements, mixing them with new ones which acquire local interpretations that are often different from their original meaning (Sztompka 2004). As Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008, 553) state, "it is not the inherent national qualities of the products consumed but the consumption of non-national products in nationally discernible ways that contribute to the emergence of nationally defined communities [of consumers]."

Rural houses or national aesthetics of Ukrainian homes

Homes and home possessions can reflect a particular traditional image of home or the prevalent national aesthetic of the time (Pechurina 2015). In L'viv the look of the traditional rural Ukrainian house is often projected to various extents onto urban dwellings – especially by Ukrainian speakers originally coming from the region of L'viv. Very often the Ukrainian-speaking respondents would mention the decorating techniques of their parents and grandparents, originally performed in rural houses, and show how they had applied them in their current L'viv apartments.

> I remember that from inside, our homes were very simple, but what was special was the presence of white embroidered cloths everywhere and ideally, white walls. Walls were painted and repainted before every holiday … every Saturday my father would check our walls for any defect and if necessary, repair them. Now I do the same with my walls – my children laugh at me, but I still prefer to whitewash them myself rather than using these modern paints. (Mariya, Ukr, 67)

According to Douglas (interpreted and cited by Corrigan 1997, 102), an excessive emphasis on whiteness and cleanliness can allude to the idea that "anxieties about pollution arise when the external boundaries of a society are threatened." Given the territorial crisis that Ukraine experienced at the time of these interviews (and continues to experience in 2016), such an interpretation could lend insight into the ways in which worries about external factors could influence the set of values that people manifest in their homes.

A home to raise Ukrainians, or how home decoration can contribute to national identity formation

There is nothing unusual about the fact that the presence of a child in a family influences the consumer practices of his or her parents. However, it is interesting to see that a new type of consumption practice related to child rearing can also change some aesthetic features of home interiors. Besides becoming a safe and warm place for a child, home acquires the symbolic role of being a cradle of first national sentiments for future generations. Young parents, compared to other respondents who were childless or whose children were already grown up at the time of the interview, paid much more attention to the decoration of their homes, using objects that, according to them, bore a national meaning. Several respondents explained this by the wish to avoid their children experiencing the lost or blurred sense of identity that they themselves had gone through in the post-Soviet years. They believed that if their households were "more Ukrainian" (Mariya, Rus, 27) in

appearance from the very birth of their offspring, then those children, once grown up, would constitute a stronger nation than Ukraine has currently. To illustrate this, I provide a full citation of a Russian-speaking mother describing how she links the atmosphere of home with national self-perception.

> I want my daughter not to have all those questions that I had when I was 15-16 years old. Not knowing who I am – a Soviet, a Russian, a Ukrainian – had a negative impact on my self-confidence. I felt like an uprooted plant, in my parents' apartment, always looking the same since Soviet times. That is why I try to decorate our apartment with things that will tell our child who she is and to which culture and nation she belongs, even though with some of those things, to be honest, I do not feel any connection, they do not evoke any feelings for me. Probably because I was not raised with them and I am still learning to be Ukrainian. (Natasha, Rus, 33)

Among things which could "help" her child feel Ukrainian, Natasha mentioned *motanki* – Ukrainian traditional cloth dolls, some Ukrainian ceramics, and a map of Ukraine hung on the wall. This underpins Miller's statement that "the simple idea that one's home is a direct expression of one's taste is false" (Miller 2001, 111). By decorating her apartment in what she perceives to be a "Ukrainian way," this young mother is not actually trying to expose her aesthetic preferences, nor express her own identity. What she wants is for her home to fit into commonly accepted aesthetic norms of national character.[6] Thinking of the future of her child, she looks for sources of such norms, and by interpreting them, potentially creates new ones. It is not only individuals who decide which objects to put into their homes, but it is also the common sense of the nation that incites them to establish and maintain the ideal of national home-making.

National meaning of things. Official and unofficial national symbols

Insofar as they help to create images of a nation, material national objects are "evidence of an essential national cultural identity" (Foster 2002, 66). Such objects are not, however, necessarily exclusively those that represent national symbols established by the state. Objects that are infused with national meanings by ordinary people are equally important to consider when analyzing how national identity is performed. Following Billig's (1995) idea of banal nationalism, this section reveals how national self-images are expressed through attitudes toward and the use of the Ukrainian flag, as well as items with national characteristics that emerged from a cultural context, such as traditional clothes and decorative objects.

The majority of my respondents, both Russian and Ukrainian speakers, mentioned having at least some of these objects in their homes and admitted that their possession was very meaningful. However, the symbolic meaning usually varied among representatives of the two groups. Symbols are believed to be constantly contested, being dynamic in their nature; their meanings change with time, change of place, and type of group or individuals exposed to them (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Kolstø 2006). In line with this, objects with pre-assigned national meanings, such as the national flag and the state coat of arms trident, showed more variation in their interpretation among Russian and Ukrainian speakers than other objects and consumption practices discussed in this work. Russian speakers did not usually mention having official national symbols in their homes; they preferred to talk about national objects with aesthetic features, such as ceramic dishware, linen cloths, or pieces of traditional Ukrainian clothing. Ukrainians, in most cases, though probably also possessing such objects in their homes, would not mention them first. To indicate their loyalty to Ukraine, they would first mention things like the red and black flag of UPA,[7] the novel *Kobzar*,[8] and religious icons – and only after that would they mention also having an official flag of Ukraine. Such objects were familiar to Russian speakers, but they would

avoid association with them (apart from the national flag) and would describe them as being too nationalistic. Some Ukrainian-speaking respondents would stress that they kept the *Kobzar* or the UPA flag in their homes but not for demonstration functions, and that state national symbols like the flag should be displayed not only during special events, but also in daily life.

> I would like to have a big Ukrainian flag – then I could put it on my balcony [meaning its facade]. You know, before, it was considered as "*selo*" [meaning low cultural, narrow-minded people from rural areas], and now, I do not know, whether it is me or society, but because of some changes it is considered to be normal, even appreciated. (Sergiy, Ukr, 31)

The presence of different shapes and sizes of the Ukrainian national flag in car interiors, as a ribbon or a pin attached to someone's bag or coat, or a big flag hung on the balcony, overtly indicated the special moment that Ukraine and its citizens were going through in 2014, when the material for this paper was collected. The showing off of that particular Ukrainian national symbol was not only an expression of empathy and patriotic feelings, but also a marker of political preferences and engagement in the political life of Ukraine. Especially in L'viv and especially among young people, not having any visible national Ukrainian symbol could be seen as suspicious and interpreted as indifference, or in the worst case, as affiliation with what was considered to be "anti-Ukrainian"[9] in that particular moment.

> Since I am living in L'viv's city-center, in the winter of 2014 I started to wear a Ukrainian flag ribbon – primarily for security reasons, not for ideological ones. (Svetlana, Rus, 60)

Even though later in the interview Svetlana confessed that her "heart is also in pain for what is happening with Ukraine and Ukrainian people," she did not feel the need to expose her patriotic feelings via some material national symbol. It was rather her desire not to be perceived negatively in her native city, which ultimately made her put a blue and yellow ribbon on her bag in the midst of Euromaidan events. In such situations, consumption of national symbols and their use in everyday life become not only an expression of national self-imagination, but also a tool required by that particular context, used to comply with what is considered appropriate, with a desired social category that overlaps with the local perception of a nation.

Very often objects are not simply objects, but rather the meanings that are attached to them, which could change depending on the context (Douglas 1991). Different interpretations of symbolic meanings of some objects also defined differences in the ways they were treated in the course of everyday life. For Russian speakers, it did not seem to be a problem to mix objects with Ukrainian national features with other decorative interior objects, while among many Ukrainian speakers the attitude toward such things tended to be almost sacred. Several of them expressed the desire to have a special room or at least a special corner for objects with Ukrainian symbolism, like an altar where they could arrange them in an appropriate way (Bogdana, Ukr, 34). Some informants even preferred to keep such objects hidden until they had the possibility to create a special space for them in their apartments. At the same time Olga, a Russian speaker, while also appreciating Ukrainian ceramics, expressed a more neutral attitude to the same type of Ukrainian traditional objects and this was also noted among some other informants.

> I like buying Ukrainian ceramic dishware, I like its colors and the fact that they are produced in my country, and we try to use such dishware everyday … It is good for everyday needs since it is quite solid … For special occasions I have a beautiful German porcelain set. (Olga, Rus, 45)

Very often attitudes toward objects such as pottery or textiles are impacted by tastes and values that are shared collectively. However, it appears that once such values and tastes

start to be shared by a larger group of people, or once they become mass market products and not unique pieces of cultural heritage, for some people the initial symbolic meaning gets lost. A similar process seems to be manifest in the consumption of Ukrainian *vyshyvanka*.[10] In 2007, Ukrainian student Lesya Voronyuk launched an annual celebration of *Vyshyvanka* Day: in 2014, the government turned this into an official nationwide festivity. This promotion of the *vyshyvanka* helped to turn it into a more mainstream attribute of everyday life. However, for many of those who owned and appreciated one even before 2014, it lost its core purpose of expressing their Ukrainian identity. Several respondents complained that they are no longer willing to wear *vyshyvanka* because it no longer represents "a person who loves Ukraine and feels Ukrainian in his heart" (Olga, Ukr, 31), but a person who just wants to follow a trend and does not want to be an outsider. In contrast to this opinion, a couple of informants who never had this type of shirt and who finally bought it said that they were proud to wear it, as besides its aesthetic value, it represented for them an element that could connect people in a kind of fraternity, helping to understand and materialize their belonging to the Ukrainian nation.

> I know that it [*vyshyvanka*] is very popular. I also bought one of them for myself [laughing], and surprisingly, it made me feel like I had done something important. With all these events, I finally started to have a clear image of who I am, and the fact that I finally have this shirt just proves it to me. (Bogdan, Rus, 38)

In this case, the clothing was the element that was changing the self and not vice versa, as Miller also observed: it is not always people who change objects and imbue them with new meanings – objects can also help us realize some parts of ourselves. In particular in the case of demonstrative things such as clothing, people could "use clothes to find out who they are at that particular moment of time".

The objects with national symbolic meanings discussed above definitely do not represent the full list of material things that could act as tools for the materialization of Ukrainian national identity. However, collections of such things, the content of which might vary across the country but always have common elements, "replicate(s) the conceptual form of the nation itself" (Foster 2002, 66). Consumption of Ukrainian flags, fashionable dresses with Ukrainian traditional patterns, or the proudly advertised as Ukrainian sunflower oil for cooking could all equally give citizens a feeling of belonging to one national community. Moreover, it can work in both directions: while it is clearly "the consumption of national commodities that nationalizes the person" (Foster 2002, 66), as Edensor (2002) suggests, ordinary people can also attribute national meanings to objects or commodities and through the creation of symbols produce national sensibilities for themselves.

Expression of patriotism through food consumption practices[11]

There is a popular opinion among Ukrainians that L'viv is not only a great place to explore Ukrainian traditions, but it is also a mecca of tasty food at affordable prices. During Soviet times and in the early 1990s when in the rest of Ukraine the working class could only afford such places as *stolovye* (canteen or mess), *pelmennye* (snack-bar serving only meat dumplings), and *zakusochnye* (a very simple snack-bar serving appetizers and alcohol drinks), L'vivans, probably thanks to previous colonial legacy and traditions left by the Polish and Austria-Hungary periods, were able to enjoy cozy cafés with nice atmosphere and food made according to traditional recipes. Currently, the restaurant industry of L'viv is considered to be one of the main tourist attractions and features of the city. At the same time, a special attitude to food is noticeable in practices of daily food consumption

and home cooking. If the dish is local or made from fresh local products, it will always have an extra value for Ukrainians and will be mentioned or advertised on the packaging or, for example, in the text of menus of L'viv's restaurants. Such an attitude toward food, together with their proactive position in political life and the generally nationalist views of L'vivians, resulted in L'viv being the first Ukrainian city supporting a large-scale boycott of Russian products, launched via social networks by the Ukrainian civic movement Vidsich[12] during and after the Crimean crisis in 2014.

While talking about food practices in the majority of interviews, the topic of the boycott emerged spontaneously from the respondents, which made the author take it seriously and try to gather more information from additional sources. While Russian products in the Ukrainian market can be found on all the shelves, not only in the food department, the focus of the boycott was specifically on the consumption of food from Russia, since according to informants' experiences, rejecting Russian food products was more difficult for them than rejecting cosmetics or print media.[13] Russian food brands also started to be singled out more than other products due to the efforts of activists who were circulating informative leaflets in social networks and spreading print copies of them in local supermarkets. The act of boycotting products "made in Russia" automatically started to stimulate the consumption of local products, an act which was also promoted via slogans and images on agitation posters and leaflets. Consuming things "made in Ukraine" started to be perceived as "a duty of a real Ukrainian patriot" (Andriy, Ukr, 36).

> As a Ukrainian I feel responsible to take part in the boycott; it constitutes my personal sanctions against a country whose actions I do not understand anymore. Moreover, thanks to this, I discovered several Ukrainian products that I like and that I was not noticing before at all. (Sergey, Rus, 45)

After only one month, the boycott spread first throughout Western Ukraine and then through Kyiv. Some large supermarkets, being attentive to consumer behavior, decided to limit their range of Russian products or entirely quit selling merchandise produced in Russia.[14] Some smaller retailers started to facilitate the identification of Russian and Ukrainian products by placing small flags of the producing country on price labels. Following the news transmitted in the media of that period on the topic of the boycott, L'viv was one of the most actively participating cities and also a "pioneer" in various "tools" to be used for further boycotting of Russian products.[15]

According to Internet research done by TNS[16] in September 2014, 46% of Ukrainians were participating in the boycott and 57% expressed support of it. L'viv's city council was the first to uphold a decision on media security in L'viv and its region that obliged retail shops to mark Russian products with a clearly visible sign of a Russian flag. In August 2014, Ukrainian journalist Vershitskaya (2014) noted that the boycott of Russian products served primarily as a way for Ukrainians to express their patriotism and feelings toward their country. As a result, in a period of just six months, a civic campaign that was initiated by several activists in March 2014, receiving popular support in L'viv and beyond (especially in the largest cities of Western and Central Ukraine), manifested some changes in Ukrainian legislation, first on a regional and then on a national level, restricting the import of Russian products.

The case of the boycott clearly depicts the principle of consumer citizenship, as defined by Foster (2002). Being responsible consumers constituted one of the ways for Ukrainians to show their loyalty to Ukraine. In this case, there were no particular objects with national meanings, but practices of protest of consumption. While for some people, being a model Ukrainian citizen would entail, for instance, joining Ukrainian territorial defense battalions

or becoming a volunteer, helping internally displaced people from the eastern parts of Ukraine, for others (and probably also for the same ones), it would be joining the boycott of Russian products. It became so widespread primarily because it was part of the everyday act of shopping, and did not demand much effort: it was easy to understand and relatively easy to perform, given the large choice of alternative products that the Ukrainian market provided at that time.

Foster and Özcan (2005), analyzing the consumption of Cola Turka in place of Coca-Cola, argued that consumption of a local equivalent to a well-known American drink represented not only a protest against American influence, but also an act of construction of civic identity. The practice of choosing a national product over a foreign one for ideological reasons started to be shared relatively quickly by a large community of Turkish consumers. In a similar way, the spread of the boycott of Russian products in Ukraine, first among ordinary people and then among businesses and to some extent the government, could also be considered as an establishment of new norms in the national identity discourse of Ukraine. In other words, this case study not only represents a way ordinary people can express their national sensibilities and thereby create new references for national identity, but it also shows how national meanings conceived at the grassroots level could potentially affect the official narrative of national identity, which in this case started once authorities (even just regional ones) reacted to consumer behavior of those who were participating in the boycott of Russian products.

Conclusions

Consumption practices and patterns are likely to be something most of readers are aware of. Each of us has a preferred supermarket, cuisine, style that we follow, as well as our own consumer habits. Consumer culture has developed around the idea that it is possible to analyze how we behave as consumers and that, beyond marketing and advertising analyses, our choices and consumer practices can shed some light on social phenomena. All in all, consumption is symbolically more telling than previous generations of scholars would admit.

In the Ukrainian case, a significant number of informants showed a tendency to associate given products and consumer practices with some national sentiments. Differences in symbolic meanings and in the variety of objects and practices to which national sentiments are attached were noted among Ukrainians of different ages and natively spoken languages. What the respondents had in common, however, was their way of performing national identity through everyday consumption practices. Despite sometimes giving different meanings to the same objects and practices, they were all genuinely asserting themselves as Ukrainians. Sztompka (2004) has already suggested that different social groups may choose different symbols and narratives, but that those differences should not be interpreted in all the cases as expressions of otherness.

In line with this statement, the different consumption patterns and associations (how emotions and things are valued) should not be taken as evidence of national/ethnic distinction. They are different approaches and ways to perform one single national identity that, represented and perceived in many different ways, was common to all the respondents.

Some accounts of Ukraine seem to point at two conflicting and competing identities (Russian and Ukrainian) existing in one territory. In real life, however, even in the most nationalist places, the differences between these two identities are not that dramatic. This study was an attempt to show that the situation might be more nuanced, that there are

several points of contact between the two identities, and that the boundary between them is more flexible than one might expect. After all, even Russian speakers from one part of Ukraine sometimes perceive Russian speakers from other areas as possessing a distinct identity and culture.

The main focus of this paper has been the discovery, or rather rediscovery, of consumer patterns that affect the way national identity is perceived, constructed, and reproduced in L'viv by people who claim to belong to diverse language or ethnic groups. Beyond language and self-perception, the nation seems to materialize in a spontaneous and informal way, through a mechanism that passes through aesthetic appreciation and the use of different commodities. It thus becomes possible to see the political symbolism of the aesthetics, insofar as political views are reflected via the rejection of products or lifestyles associated (according to personal reflection that is often subjectively biased) with a given country, people, social status, or political attitude. This contributes to creating and consolidating a national narrative for citizen-consumers.

Studies of competition over the production of a national or state narrative have already demonstrated that national elites do not have a monopoly over nation-building processes (Navaro-Yashin 2002), but rather that national identity construction is a matter of synergy between elites and ordinary citizens, be they generated on purpose, by chance, or even by mistake, thus leading to effects that were not planned or expected (Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan 2013; Polese and Horák 2015). National symbols conceived at the state level are never immune from criticism or contestation (Kolstø 2006), which may lead to the emergence of alternative symbols with national meanings, produced and shared at the bottom level by ordinary people. Billig had already suggested such a phenomenon in his work on banal nationalism. This research has shown that consumption practices and patterns can often reflect how these new symbols are conceived and how they, along with the official ones, are practiced in everyday life. In a post-Soviet context, prompted by the legacy of "post-Soviet materialism," the role of objects is possibly crucial in making the concept of nation move from the ideological to the tangible sphere as a way for people to experience the feeling of belonging to the nation on an everyday basis. A more systematic application of the theories of banal nationalism and consumer citizenship can thus contribute to a more structured approach in the study of the production of national identity at the mundane level. It may also be a useful way to interpret the practices of consumption as performed by the people to express the way they see themselves attempting to draw their national self-portraits.

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Notes

1. The word "spontaneous" has been used by Polese (2009b) to describe the bottom-up nation-building processes happening through people's mobilization during the Orange Revolution in 2004. Following this line of reasoning, the changes that happened in Ukrainians during and after the events of Euromaidan and then during military conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine – the escalation of patriotic feelings in different forms – were to some extent spontaneous elements of nation-building.
2. This paper does not include opinions of Ukrainian citizens who moved to L'viv during two major displacement waves that followed the events of 2014 in Crimea and in the eastern part of Ukraine.

3. In consumer research in general, objects of consumption are usually called commodities; however, since the form of commodity is not fixed and any object can receive or lose that form (Appadurai 1988) at any given moment, the author prefers to stay with the more general term of "object."

4. Hereafter I use "Ukr" as the abbreviation for native Ukrainian speakers and "Rus" for native Russian speakers.

5. Home continues to be one of those spheres that were deeply influenced by people's imagination of the West, especially in the beginning of the 1990s, which resulted in a widespread renovation style called *Evroremont* (Eurorepair) (Patico 2003). Western elements were usually represented by objects which, despite having been produced locally or for instance in China or Turkey, were nonetheless seen as symbols of the West, and believed to be found in Western homes.

6. A similar behavior was observed by Clarke (2001) while studying the assimilation of Chilean families in the UK. Her respondent, a Chilean mother, was furnishing her house in a way that would facilitate her child to develop a British identity, despite it not being familiar to herself.

7. The red and black flag of the Ukrainian People's Army in 1917–1921, is usually used by Ukrainian nationalists even now.

8. A book written by the great Ukrainian writer Taras Shevchenko, which became a symbol of Ukraine's national and literary revival.

9. According to what was communicated by my respondents, being "anti-Ukrainian" or indifferent usually meant the same thing (indifference at such a critical time was only slightly tolerated), as being a supporter of the Viktor Yanukovich regime would later also imply being a supporter of Vladimir Putin's actions.

10. Traditional Ukrainian shirt with embroidered patterns.

11. This section is largely based on the analysis of print and online media, interviews, and participant observation in L'viv's supermarkets and markets conducted during June–August 2014.

12. For more information on this nonviolent civic movement, check their official website: http://www.vidsich.info/.

13. According to L'viv's activist from "Ekonomichny boykot. L'viv," Oleh Radyk, the possible advantage of Russian food products was their low price compared to their equivalents imported from European countries.

14. For boycott coverage, see http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3363518-bolee-polovyny-ukrayntsev-podderzhyvauit-boikot-rossyiskykh-tovarov-opros.

15. For instance, in 2014 L'viv IT specialists developed an application for Android called "Boycott Scanner" that scans logotypes to recognize whether a product comes from Russia or not.

16. A worldwide market research group, present also in Ukraine. For further details, see: https://www.tns-ua.com/ua/ and for research results: http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3363518-bolee-polovyny-ukrayntsev-podderzhyvauit-boikot-rossyiskykh-tovarov-opros.

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