

## The Significance of the 'West' in Processes of Post-Soviet Russian Identity Formation (Societal and Cultural Perspectives)

Tina Momtaz\*

Division of Arts and Culture, University of Tehran, Iran

\*Corresponding author: Momtaz T, Division of Arts and Culture, University of Tehran, Iran, Tel: +982161113411; E-mail: [tinamomtaz@gmail.com](mailto:tinamomtaz@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

This article discusses to what extent the "West" has been successful in reshaping the Russian identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The article aims to acquaint the reader with various issues and challenges in dealing with the western effect on the Russian culture, such as the misunderstanding of the western culture by the Russian youth, and also how the recent relationship between Russia and the "West" has again changed the western impact on the formation of the culture and identity of the Russia's recent generation.

**Keywords:** Post-Soviet Russian identity; The west; Culture; Identity formation

### Introduction

The influence of the West and outside culture can be seen throughout the history of Russia, from Peter the Great in the 17th century to the contemporary period under Putin. From the historical view, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 can be regarded as another "Revolution" as the country opens its doors to the outside world, and more precisely, to the West again. Therefore, the main goal of this article is to explore to what extent the influence of the West has reshaped or reformed the post-Soviet Russian identity.

Several scholars have investigated the Western influence on the Russian culture and society, such as Paramonov, Mc Daniel, Smith. One question that comes to mind while facing more modernized western societies is that: should we follow the same values of these modernized western countries in order to promote the country or should we stick to our traditional cultures and values? This question put the Russian intelligentsia into two contradictory situations: 'According to one, Russia was backward, ever catching up with the 'West', while the other believed in Russia's special path and spiritual light and contrasted it to the morally decadent 'West'<sup>1</sup>. Vera Tolz notes that the comparison with the 'West' has been 'the most important ingredient of modern Russian identity'<sup>2</sup>. Hall believes that each

individual and society can fill the gaps in its wholeness by the help of outside the self. 'Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference, through the relation to the Other'<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, it is suggested, Western politicians exploit Russia's own sense of having a "unique path" as an argument for keeping Russia out of Europe<sup>4</sup>. 'Those who point to Russia's difference from the West focus on the absence of civil society in Russia and the development of Russia as a "closed" as opposed to "open" society'<sup>5</sup>. Zdobov argues that attempts to create Russia in the Western image according to the recommendations of "Western experts". He claimed, that "the West has been received, always and at all times, negatively by the public"<sup>6</sup>. Nicolas Berdyaev has used the word "a Western and Eastern world" for defining Russia and Russian people: "The Russian people is not purely European and is not purely Asiatic. Russia is a complete section of the world – a colossal East-West. It unites two worlds, and within the Russian soul two principles are always engaged in strife-The Eastern and the Western"<sup>7</sup>. Sassatelli emphasizes the uniqueness of the Russian culture and quotes that "The salvation of Russia lies in the vital moral strength of Russia's culture and its intransigent values, which ensures deservedly dignified place in the world"<sup>8</sup>. Guseinov believes that Russia does not position itself as a "peripheral receiver" of Western cultural messages but rather as the embodiment of alternative cultural values. Russian spirituality and sublimity are contrasted to Western "ordinariness, down-to-earthness and rationality"<sup>9</sup>. Both groups have arguments for their ideas. However, the current situation complies more with the opinion of the first group who does not deny the western influence on the

<sup>1</sup> Ryazanova L (2012) The West in the linguistic Construction of Russianness in Contemporary Public discourse, in 'Understanding Russianness' ed. by Alapuro R., Mustajoki A., Pesonen P., published by Routledge, London, p: 17.

<sup>2</sup> Tolz V (2001) 'Russia'. London: Arnold, p: 69.

<sup>3</sup> Hall S (1996) "Who needs identity". In: Hall S, Du Gay P (eds), "Questions of Cultural Identity", London: SAGE, p: 17.

<sup>4</sup> Maksimchev I.F (1997) "Rossiia kak sostavnaia chast' obshcheevropeiskogo tsivilizatsionnogo prostranstva." Obshkhestvenni nauki I sovremennost', p: 86.

<sup>5</sup> Bergson A (1994) "Dva Istocnika Morali I Religii", Moscow: Kanon.

<sup>6</sup> Zdobov RA, Kelašev VN (1995) "Mify rossiiskogo soznaniia I puti dostizheniia obshchestvennogo soglasiia", St. Petersburg: Sankt Petersburgskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, Sankt Peterburgskii Iazykovi tsentr.

<sup>7</sup> Berdyaev N (1948) "The Russian Idea", New York, p: 2.

<sup>8</sup> Gubman BL (1994) "In Rossiia I Zapad: dialog kul'tur.", Sbornik nauchnikh trudov, ed. B. Gubman. Tver': Tver' gosudarstvenni universitet

<sup>9</sup> Guseinov A (1996) "Slovo ob intelligentsii" Novaia Rossiia, p: 22.

Russian culture, because as one of the participants in the current globalization process, Russia, like all other countries, inevitably, has been under the influence of the Western values. Though, this does not imply that Russia has lost its cultural uniqueness, but it goes along with the world's cultural development; it integrates its cultural values with the world's values. Thus, at the same time that maintains its unique 'Russian' way, does not move away and act isolated in the modern global world [1-8].

This article, first of all, theorizes the concept of "the West" in Russia. However, considering the main question of this article, instead of defining this term as an entity and territory, it is been defined from the view of the Russian writers and also other writers from different countries, who have done research on Russian identity. Later on, the Russian identity is conceptualized. This section, however, only offers a general explanation, since a detailed definition of "Russianness" is quite broad and is beyond the scope of this article. Third, by looking at the Russian fashion and style, music and food practices the Western influence on the culture of the Russian youth is examined. The reason why these factors are chosen is that material culture, for instance clothes, food, music and so on, can demonstrate the perception of a country's identity, and in this article, the Russian identity. They can exhibit the global image of Russians showed in media and other social networks. As an example, potato and cabbage, fur coat and some forms of Soviet songs and music are such items and material culture that recall us of Russians, and therefore, they serve as representatives of 'Russianness' and 'Russian identity'. There are several other elements of material culture such as religion, language, literature and so on, that represent the cultural values of a country, but due to the word limit of this article, only three elements have been studied [9-12].

### Theorizing "the West" in the Russian Mentality

Defining "the West" in the Russian mentality is a complicated task, since we have Russia as a single country and therefore can identify it forthrightly, while defining the West in the context of Russian society and culture can be quite confusing. Here, the focus is on the concept of the "West" from the Russian view. The term "the West" has been used frequently in many books and articles, such as Russia and the West, The end of the West: the once and future Europe, Islam and the West. "The West" is being seen as "other" in the eyes of many countries, cultures and beliefs like Islam, Russia and the East. Several Russian politicians have declared that Russia is Europe and as a goal Russia should move forward to achieve development and modernity. At the

same time, the 'West' in Russia has mainly been imaged as a contrast to Russian unique identity, culture and values. By looking at each period of post-Soviet Russian history, we encounter the West as 'the 'Other' in defining Russia's identity'<sup>10</sup>. However, the influence of the West on Russian culture is a truly undeniable phenomenon throughout the Russian history. As Bonnet has mentioned: 'the notion of "the West" was developed in Russia, from the mid- eighteenth century on, as one of the key terms in an ongoing debate on the country's destiny and identity'<sup>11</sup>. The time of Peter the Great can probably be best considered as the starting point of the relationship between Russia and the West. Peter 'wanted to Westernize and modernizes all of the Russian government, society, life and culture'<sup>12</sup>. During the Soviet Union, the West was mostly defined as a 'non- Communist and an anti- Soviet' place<sup>13</sup>. Later on, after becoming more open to the outside world, by looking at the Mikhail Gorbachev's period, we can see how he 'looked on Western Europe as providing the model for a political and economic system'<sup>14</sup>. During his time, as Pilkington has mentioned, the West was considered to be "normal" and an "ideal life"<sup>15</sup>. After Gorbachev, in 1997, Boris Yeltsin came up with the idea of Novaya Rossia 'New Russia'<sup>16</sup>. Tregubova has defined this term as 'capitalism with equal opportunities for all'<sup>17</sup>. Also, in one of his speeches, Yeltsin has declared that 'the spirit of the Cold War in relations between Russia and the West has been overcome once and for all'<sup>18</sup>, which denies any kinds of potential enmity between Russia and the West. After all, Vladimir Putin has repeatedly said that Russia is a European country, and has asserted that 'historically Russia has shared common values and experiences with the other European countries'<sup>19</sup>. This resembling of Russia and the West could be seen as Russia's attempt to end its isolation from the world's civilization during the Soviet Union. Regarding this matter, Utkin has used the term "Catch-up modernization"<sup>20</sup>, where he equates "modernization" with "westernization". Moreover, Buyandelgeriyn identifies the West as a "single modernity"<sup>21</sup>.

Here, it can be concluded that "the West" in the mind of Russian intellectuals is a concept equal to "modernization", "development", "moving away from isolation", "normal and ideal life", "Europe", at the same time accompanied with the concepts like "the Others" and "the threat towards Russian "unique" identity, culture and values". Also, "the West" here includes Europe, not the U.S., since Russia is being introduced constantly as a European country [11,12].

<sup>10</sup> Tolz, V. (1998), Forging the Nation: National identity and nation building in post-Communist Russia, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50, 6, September, p: 995.

<sup>11</sup> Bonnet, A. (2004), "The Idea of The West: Culture, Politics and History", N.Y., p: 44.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 5th ed., New York: Oxford University press, 1963, 1993, p: 227.

<sup>13</sup> Bonnet A (2004) "The Idea of The West: Culture, Politics and History", N.Y., p: 40.

<sup>14</sup> Stent A (2007), 'Reluctant Europeans: Three centuries of Russian Ambivalence toward the West', in Legvold, R. (ed) p: 394.

<sup>15</sup> Pilkington H, Omelchenko E, Flynn M, Bliudina U, Starkova E (2002) "Looking West?//Cultural Globalization and Russian Youth Cultures". The Pennsylvania State University, p: 7.

<sup>16</sup> Rymar S (2013) "Russian Idea". *Bulletin of the Chelyabinsk State University*, No. 23, Political science, Vol. 14, p: 56.

<sup>17</sup> Tregubova E (2003) "Tales of the Kremlin digger", Moscow, p: 69.

<sup>18</sup> Yeltsin BN (1992) "Vstupleniia El'tsina na VI s'ezde narodnikh deputatov 21 apreliia 1992", *Diplomatičeskii Vestnik* 9-10, p: 73.

<sup>19</sup> Putin V, Gevorkyan N, Timakova N, Kolesnikov A (2000) *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait of Russia's President Vladimir Putin* [Translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick] (New York, Public Affairs), p: 169.

<sup>20</sup> Utkin AI (1995) "Rossiia I Zapad: Problemy vzaimnogo vospriiatiiia I perspektivy stroitelstva otnoshenii", Moscow: RAN Institut Istorii, p: 8.

<sup>21</sup> Buyandelgeriyn M (2008) "Post-post-transition theories: Walking on multiple paths, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, p: 238.

## Russia and Russians

In order to measure the degree of the Western impact on the formation of Russian identity, we need to know what Russia is, what "Russianness" is and who Russians are. However, each of these questions requires a long and detailed answer. For example, defining Russia itself can be as long as an article, since one can look at many factors such as geography, technology, customs, history and so on, to define a country. This also applies to defining "Russianness" and "Russian identity". Consequently, in this article a general definition is provided and further, the focus will be on the main question of the article based on the theoretical part.

In order to identify Russia, we do not need to know how Russia is being perceived from the Western perspective. What we need to know is what perceptions Russians have of themselves. Many Russian writers have seen Russia as a territory, such as Kliuchevskii, Dunaevskii and Grigorii Aleksandrov. There is a very popular Russian short poem by Fyodor Tyutchev that describes the vastness of Russia: 'Russia cannot be measured by common arshin, just as she cannot be understood by mere rationality. Her spirit, like her space, defies limitation: in Russia one can only believe'<sup>22</sup>. Emma Widdis has defined this "vastness" as 'openness and freedom in the Russian psyche'<sup>23</sup>. Since the focus of this article is on the post-Soviet Russia, here I have tried to look at definitions of the "Russian people" after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The word 'identity' can be seen quite often in most of the social science papers. Burbaker and Cooper have particularly criticized this term. They have questioned this concept by considering "identity" both as a category of analysis and category of practice. According to them this term is used by social actors 'in some everyday settings to make sense of themselves {...}, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others'<sup>24</sup>. Considering this definition, belonging to a specific nation, one can make the 'sense of himself' from that identification, that is, each person may identify himself with a certain nation and population living in a certain geographical region. Further, by comparing and contrasting the values, culture, religion and other factors with other nations, we can gain a still stronger sense of our own national identity. In the case of Russia, we can argue that being under the sovereignty of Soviet Union for over seventy years and then the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union and becoming open to the world makes us to analyze 'Russianness' in this globalized world and this globalized situation, where all cultures and ideas are in the consistent interaction with each other. So, in order to provide an accurate understanding of post-Soviet Russianness and to realize to what extent it has been under the influence of the 'West', we have to bring Russia and West together. This notion is based on Hall's idea that we have mentioned earlier in this article, as he believed that identities are constructed through difference, and through the relation to the Other

(in this article the Other implies the West), and therefore, the differences, explored by the comparison with the West can help us to measure the influence of the West on the Russian's identity and culture. In accordance to Hall's idea, Olga Malinova has also mentioned, that 'Focus on external Other [...] makes it possible (for the community) to 'overlook' its own inner cultural, social, ethnic and religious heterogeneity'<sup>25</sup>.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian youth started to lose their sense of, as Rabodzeenko calls it, "real culture"<sup>26</sup>. The term 'real culture' has been defined in anthropology as 'society's actual behavior [and norms], the way a culture really is'<sup>27</sup>. In searching for their new identity, the West started to play a significant role in reshaping the Russian culture. The way that the West started to impact on other cultures was through expanding its values, especially by media and different advertisements; and this procedure became possible due to the globalization process. Thus, the Russian society's actual norms, like any other country, started to change under the influence of the West. Becoming more open to the outside world and as a result of the cultural globalization, the Russian youth found an opportunity to reshape a part of their "uniqueness" and "own way". Further in this article, the elements of the cultural life of the Russian youth are examined, such as their fashion and style, music and food consumption. By studying these elements it is been shown how the Russian youth draw on global culture while maintaining their own style at the same time [13-16].

## Style and Fashion Practice

The study of consumption lets us accept the processes of individualization, the formation of identities and modernization. Fashion can simply demonstrate a country's national identity. By the impact of the mentality of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the desire to wear Western clothes was so huge that 'Soviet factories began to produce clothes bearing Western commercial logos in an attempt to pass them off as Western products'<sup>28</sup>. However, such characteristics as 'uniformity and similarity' accompany the Soviet's consumption practices and they symbolized the socialist values<sup>29</sup>. In post-Soviet Russia, consumption bolded the differences between the socialist East and the Capitalist West and the consumer culture gained a more complicated form. According to practices of consumption, Pilkington has divided post-Soviet youth in two groups: 1- "Progressives", who sought 'Western designer items' to demonstrate both 'subcultural belonging and maintaining an individual stance within the group', and 2- "Normals", who wore imported clothes (not necessarily Western-made) that 'confirmed to local fashion looks'<sup>30</sup>. We use these two terms again further in this article to make a distinction between two groups

<sup>22</sup> Tiutchev FI (1987) "Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii", Leningrad, p: 229.

<sup>23</sup> Widdis E (2004) "Russia as space", in "National identity in Russian culture", edited By Franklin, S. and Widdis E, Cambridge, p: 40.

<sup>24</sup> Brubaker R, Cooper F (2000) Beyond 'identity'//Theory and society, Vol. 29, Netherlands. p: 4.

<sup>25</sup> Malinova O (2013) "Russia and 'the West' in the 2000s", in "Russia's identity in International Relations: Images, perceptions, misperceptions", Ed. By Taras R, NY, p: 74.

<sup>26</sup> Rayport Rabodzeenko J (1998) "Creating Elsewhere, Being Other: the imagined spaces and selves of St. Petersburg young people, 1990-95", Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago, pp: 35-56.

<sup>27</sup> <http://study.com/academy/lesson/culture-and-the-individual-real-culture-vs-ideal-culture.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Shlapentokh V (1989) "Public and private life of the Soviet people: Changing values in post-Stalin Russia", Oxford: Oxford University Press, p: 151.

<sup>29</sup> Gradska Y (2007) "We were very upset if we didn't look fashionable": Women's beauty practices in post-war Russia, in R. Kay (ed.), "Gender, equality and difference during and after state socialism", pp: 21-40, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: palgrave Macmillan, p: 15.

of the Russian youth with different beliefs. Accordingly, 'Progressives' are the ones, who tend to be more western, and 'Normals' are the ones, who tend to stick more to their local and traditional values. Pilkington also notes that 'this peer pressure restricted still further the stylistic practice of "alternative" youth, already limited by the specific positioning of provincial Russia in the global-local flow of commodities'<sup>31</sup>. Polhemus has argued that this "style surfing" was something that existed in the practice of the western style<sup>32</sup>. This dependence on the western commodities was moving the Russian youth away from their "own" and "unique Russian" style. Along with Normals and Progressives, Gurova has distinguished another group, who has a 'hybrid look'<sup>33</sup> and demonstrates the 'casual look' (progressives) and 'social look' (normals) at the same time. Dwyer has defined "hybridization as a 'style repertoire created through the cultural mixing of previously existing styles with new patterns and a denial of bounded dichotomies'<sup>34</sup>.

As an example for the impact of the West on the Russian fashion consumption, the change of Russian-style markets and fashion media in post-Soviet Russia can be considered. By the beginning of the 2000s, the fashion retail market and also the fashion media started to develop in Russia<sup>35</sup>. As a result, many Western journals, such as *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan* entered the media market in Russia and even the Russian versions of the magazines that were under the influence of the former socialist culture demonstrated a combination of the 'Western meanings' and 'post socialist dress'<sup>36</sup>. The 'former socialist women's magazines, such as *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka*, had to negotiate their approach to fashion and style according to the newly-brought Western patterns'<sup>37</sup>. Patico identifies two tropes that represent the consumption culture of the Russian youth: "culturedness" and "civilization", where "culturedness" 'relies on Soviet norms and modesty' and "civilization" as a result of 'globalization and the desire for greater access to consumer commodities from the West'<sup>38</sup>. However, moving to "westernization" does not mean that Russians have totally moved away from their past and their national identity, as still some symbols of the Soviet past like 'the cartoon hero Cheburashka [...] and the portrait of

the first Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin can be seen printed on t-shirts'<sup>39</sup>. As another example, Russians living abroad, still use some special clothes, such as fur coats, in order to show that they are Russians and therefore use clothes as an instrument to show their national identity<sup>40</sup>.

As a conclusion, the influence of the West is something completely evident in the formation of the Russian post-Soviet consumer culture. The change of open-air markets into big, Western style malls and the expansion of the Western magazines and therefore Western styles and fashion clearly demonstrate the shift of the Russian style to the more "civilized", "modern" and thus Western style. However, at the same time, we can see some traces of socialist and post-socialist culture in the consumer culture of the Russian youth and the use of clothes as a tool for demonstrating the national identity by the Russians living abroad [17-20].

## Music Practice

National music is one of the representatives of a nation's culture. There are countries that have used music as an instrument to contrast with the West. As Anna Lis has given an example of the Free Monks in Greece, who used its music in order to protest against atheism or treaties with Europe<sup>41</sup>, or Hieromonk Jovan Culibrk in Serbia, who mobilized anti-Western opinion using rock music<sup>42</sup>. In Russia, music consumption has an interesting story. As Gorsuch mentions: 'Russian interactions with popular Western and global music, moreover, had a history dating back at least to the early twentieth century'<sup>43</sup>. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western music became more involved with the everyday life of the Russian youth. Instead of moving away from their "own" music, the Russian youth implemented creative ways to domesticate the Western form of music into their own, as Pilkington calls it: "authentic"<sup>44</sup> music. Increasing exposure to the Western art and music and the globalization process, the Russian youth, inevitably, had to make a connection between their "authenticity" and the "West". The Western and global music has produced such subgenres as "Soviet" or

<sup>30</sup> Pilkington H (2002) "Reconfiguring "the West": Style and music in Russian youth cultural practice", in "Looking West? Cultural, Globalization and Russian Youth Cultures", ed. by Pilkington, H., Omel'chenko, E., Flynn, M., Bliudina, U., and Starkova, E., Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, p:167.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p:175.

<sup>32</sup> Polhemus T (1997), "In the supermarket of Style", In *Redhead* 1997.

<sup>33</sup> Gurova O (2015) "Fashion and the consumer revolution in contemporary Russia", UK, p: 157.

<sup>34</sup> Dwyer C (1999) "Veiled meanings: Young British Muslim women and the negotiation of difference, Gender, place, and culture: A journal of Feminist geography", p:14.

<sup>35</sup> Gurova O (2015) "Fashion and the consumer revolution in contemporary Russia", UK, p: 2.

<sup>36</sup> Barlett, D. (2006) In Russia, "At last and forever: The first seven years of Russian Vogue", *Fashion Theory*, 10: 175-204.

<sup>37</sup> Gurova, O. (2015), "Fashion and the consumer revolution in contemporary Russia", UK, p: 2.

<sup>38</sup> Patico, J. (2005), "To be happy in Mercedes: Tropes of value and ambivalent visions of marketization", *American Ethnologist*, pp: 488-491.

<sup>39</sup> Gurova, O. (2015), "Fashion and the consumer revolution in contemporary Russia", UK, p: 161.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p:96-115.

<sup>41</sup> Lis J (2014) "Anti-Western theology in Greece and Serbia today", in "Eastern Orthodox Encounters of identity and otherness: values, self-reflection, dialogues", ed. by Krawchuk, A. and Bremer, T., NY, p: 159.

<sup>42</sup> Anna Di Lellio, "The Missing Democratic Revolution and Serbias Anti-European Choice:1989-2008, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22 (2009), 382. The following is an example of the Free Monks lyrics: "Hold on tight to the faith, hold on to the great ideals / We wont sell the fatherland off / The church will not die / History won't be forgotten / This atheist civilization signs treaties and agreements / You're not a person anymore, just a bar code number." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGTepB-dups> (accessed March 04, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Gorsukh, A. (2000), "Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents", Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p: 38.

"Russian rock" and Russian "pop"<sup>45</sup>. Pilkington looks at the different uses of music between two groups of Russian youth, that is, "progressives" and "normals", and shows different approaches towards music consumption by these groups in post-Soviet Russia. As progressives try to 'create a "new commercial Russian" by using the commercialism of Western culture'<sup>46</sup>, while normals 'find it hard to even concrete Western cultural phenomena'<sup>47</sup>. A good example is an article about the famous group "t.A.T.u" in Russia. The performance of these two faux-lesbian teenagers has been interpreted as a misunderstanding of the Western culture. The open demonstration of homosexuality by this teenage group was supposed to show their 'tendency to mock the presumed cultural hegemony of the West'<sup>48</sup>. However, their show in Eurovision in 2003, not only contradicted the Russian national identity, but also indicated the misunderstanding of the Western culture by the Russian youth.

By looking at these articles, it can be concluded that the Russian youth is facing an ambiguity in both their national identity and the Western culture and values. They strive to catch up with the "developed", "civilized" West and want to put themselves on the same line with them, while at the same time, they attempt to maintain their own "Russianness" and their "pure" national identity. They show their historically formed beliefs that shape encounters of "Russianness" with the "Western-ness", and meanwhile recommend that "we" retranslate "their" conducts to fit "our" norms, mores and culture, and therefore, they fail both in imitating the "correct" Western norms and demonstrating their "unique Russianness".

## Food Practice

The cookery of one country plays an important role in formation its nation's identity. In search for the Russian identity and the impact of the West through the food consumption, Glen Mack and Asele Surina have made a distinction between the Russian haute cuisine that symbolizes the Western food style and the Russian peasant food which represents the simplicity and shows the contrast of the traditional against the modern<sup>49</sup>. Here, I have looked at the way how Russians approach to their own (nashi) foods and foreign (ne nashi) foods in order to demonstrate their national identity and to what extent the Western food has influenced their cuisine [21-23].

During the Soviet period in the 1980s, fast food, such as Pepsi-Co., Pizza Hut and in the early 1990s McDonald's arrived in the Soviet-bloc<sup>50</sup>.

However, most of the imported food products could be found in specific shops and not everybody could afford to buy them<sup>51</sup>. In the post-Soviet period, imported food products appealed to Russians more than the domestic ones<sup>52</sup>. The growing popularity of the foreign foods caused the fear of losing the distinctive culture. So, as a Russian nationalist movement, Russkoe Bistro was established, which offered "traditional" Russian fast-food, instead of Western ones, like hamburgers and French fries<sup>53</sup>. Also, a "Buy Russian" campaign was launched by officials to encourage people to buy Russian traditional foods<sup>54</sup>. Many producers started to produce the same products as Western ones, but with the Russian brand and quality. The interesting fact is, many Muscovites preferred to buy these products, even if the price was higher, because they claimed that the Russian food has the "Russian soul"<sup>55</sup>. They started to categorize the foods as "ours" (nash/ svoi) and "not ours" (ne nash/ chuzhoi)<sup>56</sup>.

The experience of food consumption demonstrates the same experience of fashion and music consumption among the Russian youth. As a member in a globalized world, Russians cannot completely resist the flow of the Western taste and culture in their society. As already mentioned, after the collapse of the Soviet period, they were passionate about trying the new foods and experiencing the Western brand restaurants and cafes. However, at the same time they refer to their national brands of products to show their loyalty towards their nation and identity. In the context of food consumption, Russians have hired a quite interesting way, as they try to apply the same products as Westerners in order to keep going with the "modern" West, but with the Russian brand. This is what we have earlier called "the domestication of the Western culture", that can be seen in all kinds of Russian's cultural consumption.

## Current Situation

In addition to all the points mentioned, it should be noted that the relation of Russia and the West had changes from time to time due to the political and foreign relation issues. In accordance to what we have analyzed, Russia has approached the West in a negative way throughout its history. However, after the Ukrainian crisis in 2013 and due to the following sanctions from the West against Russia, this relationship has deteriorated even more. Several newspaper articles show Russia's reaction to the western policy in the current period. As an example, we can refer to the Russia's food import ban due to the sanctions. In an article on the BBC website, it is mentioned that Russia

<sup>44</sup> Basingstoke, Hampshire: palgrave Macmillan, p: 15. Pilkington, H., "Reconfiguring "the West": Style and music in Russian youth cultural practice", in "Looking West? Cultural, Globalization and Russian Youth Cultures", ed. by Pilkington, H., Omelchenko, E., Flynn, M., Bliudina, U., and Starkova, E. (2002), Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, p: 176.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p: 175.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid: p: 199.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p: 199.

<sup>48</sup> Heller D (2007) "Popular music: t.A.T.u. you! Russia, the global politics of Eurovision, and lesbian pop", Cambridge University Press, p: 198.

<sup>49</sup> Mack G, Surina A, (2005) "Food culture in Russia and Central Asia", Greenwood Press, London, p: 2.

<sup>50</sup> Caldwell M (2009) "Food and everyday life in the post-socialist world", Indiana University Press, p: 13.

<sup>51</sup> Caldwell M (2010) "The taste of nationalism: food practice in post-socialist Moscow", *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, p: 299.

<sup>52</sup> McChesney A (1999) "Boost quality or lose sales. Local firms told", *The Moscow Times*.

<sup>53</sup> Caldwell M (2009) "Food and everyday life in the post-socialist world", Indiana University Press, p: 18.

<sup>54</sup> Caldwell M (2010) "The taste of nationalism: food practice in post-socialist Moscow", *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, p: 307.

<sup>55</sup> Caldwell M (2010) "The taste of nationalism: food practice in post-socialist Moscow", *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, pp: 300-310.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

destroys banned western-produced products imported to Russia from the western countries, which have imposed sanctions against Russia<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, groups of girls in t-shirts with the slogan "eat Russian" have supported the banning of the western food<sup>58</sup>. This banning, however, is not only limited to food, it also applies to importing western clothes to Russia. This decision is made based on the idea that European partners are more dependent on Russia for a number of non-agricultural products and in order to keep the Russian youth away from the western values<sup>59</sup>. So, as a response to the sanctions, they have decided to ban the western products.

Hence, foreign relations play an important role in shaping a relationship between two countries. Before the sanctions, although there was an attempt to keep both local and western values and make them integrated with each other, after the Ukrainian crisis and the western sanctions against Russia, it was believed that the western values should be completely banned and being kept away from the Russian youth. However, this does not imply that this won't lead the Russian youth to be entirely against the western culture, but the more negative perception of the West can be an element for encouraging them more and more towards the 'unique' Russian products and material culture.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, by surveying the culture practices of the Russian youth in the post-Soviet era, it is hard to deny the West had a significant influence on reshaping the post-Soviet Russian identity. However, it cannot be said that this impact has changed the nature of the "Russianness" or the "unique" Russian identity, nor can be said that Russians are being imitating the Western values and becoming totally "westernized". Instead of the word "Westernization", it is better to say "domestication of the Western culture", and instead of considering Russians as "imitators" of the Western values, it is better to call them "participants of the ongoing globalization". This means, like any other nations, Russians are also experiencing cultural modernization. As the West is playing a crucial role in the world's cultures, Russia has been inevitably affected by its values as well. As Panarin noted in 1998 'Western modernizing missionaries are hard at work in every country, showing the local authorities and intellectuals how to eradicate traditional Eastern mentality and how to civilize peoples and continents as quickly as possible'<sup>60</sup>. In addition, by looking at some cultural practices in this article, like fashion and style, music and food consumption, we can clearly see how Russians still respect their traditions, social values, and their national identity, how much they are proud of their "Russianness" and how much they believe in the "Russian soul". At the same time, the desire to become more "modern", "civilized" and more "Western" is something inevitable. Thus, instead of fully imitating the Western rules, Russians have implemented creative ways in order to maintain their "uniqueness" while accepting a part of Western influence in their culture. In this way, they have domesticated the Western values and thus, we can say that they have

made their own "Russian west" or "authentic West" in the cultural practices.

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