

**FOOD CULTURE, GLOBALIZATION, AND  
NATIONALISM**

**ZEPPELINS IN THE LITHUANIAN IMAGINATION**

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## **Executive Summary**

This project focuses on a Lithuanian national dish—a potato dumpling—known as the “zeppelin.” What is peculiar about zeppelins is that neither its key ingredient (the potato) nor its name (originating from the German airship built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) have much to do with what one expects to constitute “authentic” Lithuanian foods and traditions. Through this project, I examine the contradictions implicit in the construction of zeppelin as a national dish by exploring the construction and consumption of Lithuania’s national food at two different historical moments—the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. This research exposes nation building as an everyday practice that is embedded in global cultural, economic, and technological transformations. In analyzing national meals in Lithuania, I pursue two arguments.

First, I argue that the birth of national food in the 1920s and 1930s was deeply embedded in the experiences of modernization that allowed new ways to imagine and experience the world outside of local settings. Second, my research demonstrates that in today's Lithuania, the zeppelin serves as a conduit between global markets and local economies, which are in turn dominated by the small-scale semi-subsistence farms and informal distribution systems. The proliferation of this national dish in a globalizing Lithuania reveals on-going negotiations in regards to national identities, and also reveals contradictions between these economic systems and market rationalities.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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

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

In addition to the obscured historical origins of zeppelins, it is also puzzling why this dish

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is experiencing a revival in today's Lithuania. Often described as an unhealthy "peasant food," zeppelins continue to occupy an important place in the globalizing diets of both the elite and the "common" citizens of Lithuania. Indeed, one may expect that mushrooming global food restaurants—including American steakhouses, French bakeries, Spanish tapas bars, Italian pizzerias, Thai, Mexican, and Japanese restaurants as well as McDonalds—and the growth of international food sections in the supermarkets would pose a serious challenge to the old style potato dumpling. Yet zeppelins have carved out an important niche in the local diets as well as identities in Europeanizing and globalizing Lithuania.

This project interrogates the contradictions implicit in the marketing and consumption of zeppelins as a national dish in Lithuania. Specifically, I focus on how national identities are (re)produced and experienced through food culture and what transformations in the social field these consumption practices signal. Following Daniel Miller, I ask whether the contemporary revival of zeppelins in Lithuania "signif[ies] a larger shift in social and cultural relations" or it is "simply a result of fashions in food marketing" (Miller 2001, 113).

Since consumption works as a marker of social status, this project also investigates how the consumption of zeppelins intersects with the production of class identities. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of distinction, I ask what kinds of social differentiation—specifically, ethnic, cultural, and social exclusion and/or inclusion—are implicit in the marketing of zeppelins in today's Lithuania. In broader terms, by exploring the consumption of national food at two historical moments—beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries—this project reconceptualizes nation-building as an everyday practice that is deeply embedded in global cultural, economic, and technological transformations.

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Through the analysis of national meals in Lithuania, I pursue three arguments. First, I argue that the birth of national food in the 1920s and 1930s was deeply embedded in the experiences of modernization that allowed new ways to imagine and experience the world outside of local settings. Second, I develop the term of “embodied nationalism” to denote the significance of body politics in national ideologies. While scholars agree that the body played an important role in imagining nationalism, data collected for this project suggests that the everyday experiences were central in defining and guarding the boundaries within imagined communities. Third, my research shows that in today’s Lithuania, the zeppelin serves as a conduit between global markets and local economies that are dominated by the small-scale semi-subsistence farms and informal distribution systems. This suggests that the proliferation of the national dish in globalizing Lithuania reveals on-going negotiations in regards to national identities, but also contradictions within the economic systems and market rationalities. More broadly, this project contributes to the debates on globalization of food culture by linking the emergence of global economic networks with nation building in East Europe.

Organizationally, the paper is composed of six sections. The following section presents the methodological approach and data. I then proceed to elaborating on how this project contributes to the ongoing debates on globalization, nationalism, and food culture. The following three sections—“Cooking up a Revolution: The History of Zeppelins in Lithuania,” “Global Economies, Local Divides: Zeppelin and the Politics of Urban/Rural Nationalism”, and “The Potato Republic: The Political Economy of Zeppelin Making in Contemporary Lithuania” focus on zeppelins as a national food from historical, political/economic, and social inequalities perspectives. The concluding section in this paper offers some tentative conclusions.

## **Methodology, Data, Analysis**

The primary methodology employed in studying the construction and consumption of zeppelins in globalizing Lithuania is multi-sited research (Marcus 1998, 2000, Gustavson 2003). George Marcus' (1995) foundational article on the ethnography of the globalizing world distinguishes between two modes of multi-sited ethnography. The first utilizes multiple research sites to reconstruct and analyze processes taking place in specific locales from multiple perspectives. This mode of ethnography is called multi-sited because ethnographers use multiple research sites and approaches to examine the specific locale and the (re)production of global power systems in it.

The second mode of multi-sited ethnography is less concerned with placing ethnographic sites in the larger global systems rather than exposing how the new economic, political and social systems are produced in specific contexts. The second mode of multi-sited research explores new connections, traces down the circulation of things, humans, and discourses and exposes the production of new global sites.

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

Data for this project came from three primary sites. First, to conduct the historical

analysis of zeppelin construction as a national food at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I studied Lithuanian popular press and recorded oral histories from eight respondents.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, data on national food consumption in today's Lithuania comes from 30 in-depth interviews with consumers from Lithuania's four regions—Aukštaitija, Zemaitija, Dzūkija, and Suvalkija and its major cities.

Throughout the interviews, I asked why informants consumed zeppelins, on what occasions they ate them, how they classified zeppelins among the variety of other foods, what values guided their consumption, and whether food ideologies and nationalist sentiments are reflected in the consumption of zeppelins. These interviews provided data for understanding how consumers interpreted and reacted to the nationalist undertones implicit in marketing of the zeppelins.

To explore these questions I also conducted unstructured, person-centered, open-ended interviews (Levy and Hollan 2000), collected life histories, and conducted participant observation in joining various situations where food is being bought, exchanged, prepared, served, and consumed. I also carried out contemporary media analysis specifically in journals on food and food consumption (*Geras skonis (Good Taste)*, *Mitybos žurnalas (Nutrition Magazine)*).

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<sup>2</sup> Circulated widely in villages, the Lithuanian newspapers were instrumental in raising national consciousness among the rural population. The newspapers include the following: the *Varpas* (the *Bell*; monthly; published 1889-1905; 1913-1914; 1920-1921; 1931-1932), the *Ausra* (the *Dawn*; biweekly; published 1911-1915, 1919), the *Tevynes Sargas* (the *Guardian of the Motherland*; monthly; published 1896-1904) and the *Ukininko Patarejas* (the *Farmers Guide*; bi-weekly; published 1925-1944). Of all the newspapers, the *Ukininko Patarejas* turned out to be most useful. First published as an insert in the *Ausra*, it became one of the most popular newspapers. It focused on educating Lithuanian peasants about the newest agricultural technologies, surveyed international food markets and food commodity prices, and propagated new animal breeds, plants, and food cooking/storing techniques. Among other topics, the newspaper also had a section “Women’s Household” and later “Hostess” (1937-1940) where recipes, cooking tips, and food preparation technologies were introduced. The *Ukininko Patarejas* along with other newspapers were helpful for discerning connections between the construction of Lithuanian nationalism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the industrialization and modernization of East Europe. With the help of collaborators, I also investigated the contents of cookbooks published in the region and more specifically, collections of recipes that were



Finally, I interviewed marketing departments of five restaurants serving national foods. I also conducted interviews with the officials from the Tourism Department that supervise the allocation of the European and Lithuanian funding for tourism. Implicit in the agendas of this state institution is the promotion of nationalism through consumption of national lifestyles. Exploring these official sites will enable me to contextualize the construction of national foods in today's Lithuania from the perspective of the nation state and the EU.<sup>3</sup>

To analyze the obtained data, I employed classical interpretative techniques used by ethnographers such as the “grounded theory” approach and analytic induction that are foundational in the Extended Case Study (Miles and Huberman 1994, Burawoy 1998, Burawoy *et al.* 2000). This methodological approach moves between inductive and deductive analysis by first identifying a pattern or a theme in the data, then switching into verification of the theme by confirming it or qualifying and then starting a new inductive cycle. The themes identified in the first round of analysis were confirmed by the second and third iterations.<sup>4</sup>

### **Theoretical Contribution: Globalization and National Cuisine**

The idea that national foods—and identities—are a product of global processes is not new. Stuart Hall, for example, has powerfully shown us that English tea—a quintessential marker of “traditional” English society—bears a mark of colonialism. Paradoxically, produced in

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published first in Polish, Russian, and only later in Lithuanian.

<sup>3</sup> All the interlocutors for these projects were selected according to principles of diversity in order to study a wide range of perspectives from various socio-economic, educational, religious, and political backgrounds. To enroll the informants, I relied on the classic “snow-balling” technique where one interview leads to meeting other potential interlocutors.

<sup>4</sup> While this project seeks to move beyond positivist assumptions about universality of laws/theories, I sought to ensure validity of findings relying on my prolonged and persistent engagement in the field, participant observation, triangulation of research sites, and especially reflexivity in interpreting the data.

England's colonial "margins," the tea leaves, the sugar and china have played a central role in re-inventing the national identities of the metropolis and the practices of Englishness in the everyday (Hall 1991, 27).

Similarly, Richard Wilk (1999, 2001, 2006) demonstrates that what appears as a "local" or "traditional" Belizean/Caribbean food is a mix of products of local subsistence economies, imports and industrial diets brought about by centuries of trade, slavery, colonialism, migration, and more recently, tourism. Many others—Sidney Mintz (1985, 2006), James Watson (1997), David Goodman (1997), Lawrence Busch (2004), George Ritzer (1998), Lien Marianne (2004) and Bridgette Nerlich (2003) have shown that local culinary practices and "dietary" imaginaries are deeply embedded in global history and economies.

Simultaneously, in Russian, East European and Eurasian area studies, Melissa Caldwell (2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2006), Jessica Patino (2002), Gediminas Lankaukas (2002), and Elizabeth Dunn (2004, 2005) have made a case that foods have become a profound medium for renegotiating local practices and identities—including national and religious affiliations—in the globalizing East and Central Europe. By focusing on new commodities such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, McDonald's fast food, or the introduction of leaner, genetically uniform pigs in Polish farms and "European" style pork onto the tables of the new elites, the authors have provided rich ethnographic and historical data to demonstrate that food consumption is entangled in the production of new social hierarchies, gender roles, and the geographic imagination of the region.

Such an approach to local identities as produced through the globalization of food chains is consistent with the growing literature on global systems. A number of scholars have argued that globalization does not mean homogenization of experiences, practices, and commodities. In this literature connections between the local and the global have been theorized through the

concepts of creolization<sup>5</sup> (Hannerz 1987, 2000, Friedman 1994), fragmentation<sup>6</sup> (Huntington 1996), localization<sup>7</sup> (Brenner 1999), glocalization<sup>8</sup> (Robertson 1996, Kraidy 1999) and especially hybridization (Nederveen-Pieterse 2003, 1994, Appadurai 1990, 1996) to emphasize the on-going reconstitution, mixing and transformations of global practices, commodities, and institutions as they are introduced locally.

This project builds directly on this scholarship, but rather than focusing on how “global” foods are domesticated into local culture, I examine the remaking of the “local,” the “traditional,” and the “national” in the context of changing global economic, political and technological domains. By exploring cultural and material practices through which potato dumplings were transformed into the national food as well as the strategies of marketing national foods in today’s Lithuania, this project situates local kitchens in what Edward Said calls the “global imagination” and the world’s economic and political structures.

This approach to the social life of Lithuania’s national food is based on the assumption

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<sup>5</sup> Ulf Hannerz (2000) is critical of theories of cultural homogenization. He argues that actors in periphery (meaning global South/East) do not simply adopt practices and cultural products brought to them from global North/West. Rather, they creatively modify—*creolize*—new artifacts to fit local conditions and, by so doing, develop new syntheses or hybrids.

<sup>6</sup> In scholarship on globalization, fragmentation is often referred to in three contexts. First, in the literature on globalization of culture, fragmentation relates to the surfacing of new “cultural wars” that are propelled by the strengthening of broad cultural identities such as racial, ethnic, or religious affiliations (Huntington 1993, 1996, Barber 1995). Second, fragmentation also refers to the erosion of national identities, the process that is often referred to as “balkanization” of cultures. Finally, for Marxist geographers, fragmentation relates to breaking of communities along class and racial lines (Massey 1999, Duncan and Savage 1991, Ger and Belk 1996). More broadly, this term emphasizes growing differences, inequalities, and conflicts emerging between various ethnic and social groups.

<sup>7</sup> The concept of localization or localism emphasizes the growing political, cultural, and social significance of smaller-than-national spatial units. In this context, local governmental institutions are argued to have a larger impact than the more distant state government (Brenner 1999, Keating 1998).

<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, the term “glocalization” was used by the Japanese marketing practitioners to refashion products so as to match them with the local markets and their cultural, political, social, and economic contexts. Robertson (1996) and Kraidy (1999) introduced this concept as part of the theory that explains how global culture is appropriated and transformed locally.

that foods constitute a material medium for the expression of social distinctions, reconfirmation of social relations and rearticulation of national/ethnic belonging. As a material culture of a social group, generations of anthropologists have defined food as a social mediator and a cultural symbol (Douglas and Isherwood 1996, Appadurai 1986, 1990). I also recognize that foods are not simply vehicles for the expression of social and economic relations but, even more importantly, operate as structuring agents in the production of these very social and economic realities. In this sense, this project follows a post-structuralist approach by taking seriously the agency of food in the process of construction of new geographies, identities, and bodies.

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

While the connection between the airship and food seems dubious from today's perspective, Count Zeppelin's machines occupied a special place in the popular imagination of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the fast-paced advances in engine technologies, the airships captured the minds and hearts of the entire generation who experienced unprecedented technological progress, the rise of nationalist sentiments across the continent, and the materialization of revolutionary ideas about social transformations. Advertising, newspaper articles, radio programs, pictures, drawings, caricatures, novels, and real-life accounts depicting zeppelins, all fed the imagination of the masses.

In Germany, for example, images of zeppelins could be found not only in books, toy stores, or shop showcases, but also in the postcards used as promotional materials for specialty food shops and restaurants as well as in the names of food such as "zeppelin bread" in Vienna and "zeppelin wurst/sausages" in Frankfurt. As Guillaume de Sayon in his book on the politics and culture of zeppelin production in Germany states: "While relatively few people flew in the

‘flying cigars,’ the masses adopted them as their own” (Syon 2002: 3).

In Lithuania, a country that had been under the yoke of Russian Empire since 1795, zeppelins were made familiar through local newspapers as well as underground publications.<sup>9</sup> But it was not until 1916 that the first zeppelin landed in Lithuania as part of Germany’s military strategies in the Eastern front. As social unrest spread through the Russian Empire, Germany decided to “set in motion the avalanche of revolution” (Lehman 1923, 202) by sending zeppelins loaded with arms to the capital of Imperial Russia, Petrograd.

While little is known about the circumstances of the zeppelin arrival in Lithuania, it is clear that the LZ-98 piloted by the commander Lehmann landed in Kaunas in November 1916 on its way to Petrograd. At the time, Kaunas was a provincial city in the Western borderlands of the Russian Empire and it boasted of its newly built airport. The stationing of zeppelins in Kaunas and then later in Wainoden, Estonia, had a deep impact on the inhabitants of the cities and their vicinities. For the vast majority of its observers in the Baltic borderlands, this was the first encounter with the flying machine that “enchanted millions” around the world.

Even more important than the fascination with new technological capabilities, zeppelins were also part of major social changes taking place in the region. While it is difficult to gauge exactly what impact the zeppelin had on the Bolshevik Revolution, in Lithuania foreign airships and the ideologies about technological progress contributed to fermenting popular sentiments for national liberation. Less than two years from the zeppelin’s first visit, in February 1918, Lithuania announced its independence from the Russian Empire and emerged as a modern nation-state.

In 1930, two Lithuanian émigré pilots—Darius and Girenas—set out to break the world

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<sup>9</sup> In 1911, for example, a popular calendar ran a series on Graf Zeppelin and his invention.

record in flying without refueling crossing the Atlantic, from New York to Kaunas. After crashing in Germany, the two pilots became symbols of Lithuanian nationalism and a source of national pride. However superficial and humorous were the connections between the shape of the potato dumpling and the airship, the meanings of these two cultural artifacts became deeply intertwined in the emerging national food, the zeppelin.

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

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

It is during the decades of socialist rule in Lithuania that the potato dumpling gained the taste and meanings of the zeppelin we know today. Industrialization of agricultural production made meat and dairy available throughout the year and enabled the spread of pure-bred potatoes

on collective farms leading to the emergence of contemporary zeppelins made out of starchy potatoes and filled with either meat or cheese. Additionally, with the introduction of new household appliances in the 1960s, the grueling manual labor of grating the potatoes was replaced by mechanical kitchen devices. In most cases, Soviet Lithuania's consumers were unable to get a hold of the graters, so they used their creativity, resourcefulness, and engineering skills to transform any devices with small engines (e.g. juicers) into potato graters. As the zeppelins became easier to make, they were turned into the quintessential family meal in the homes of the urbanites.

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

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

Despite the fact that the potato dumpling was included in the canon of Lithuanian cuisine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the dish was primarily prepared and consumed in the homes of the elite well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The primary reason was that zeppelins were labor and time intensive, a luxury that peasants did not have. To make just five portions of zeppelin, one had to grate six pounds of potatoes; prepare the filling; roll the dumplings; and cook them for almost an hour. Not surprisingly, only those who could afford cooks or servants in their homes were able to eat them. Diets of the peasants embodied the logic of subsistence and labor efficiency, as peasants

continued to eat soup (often twice a day), porridge, dairy products, eggs, and on occasion, meat.

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

Along with these major changes in rural landscapes and societies, Lithuania's government started developing an institutional, economic, and informational grid that connected local agriculture into the global economy.<sup>10</sup> By introducing the Chamber of Agriculture and five powerful economic organizations<sup>11</sup> that actively propagated growing cash crops, and by aggressively investing in technology imports and agricultural education, the Lithuanian state reinvented itself as a global player. Even in the most remote settlements, Lithuania's farmers grew Rhode Island chickens, English white swine, pure-bred Holstein-Friesian cows, and East Prussian Trakener horses along with prominent German and Dutch potato varieties such as

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<sup>10</sup> What is meant here is that Lithuanian agriculture has always been global in the sense that various agricultural technologies have interacted with local agricultural practices throughout the entire history of this region. Additionally, in terms of exports, food produced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century traveled long distances to be consumed in the Russian Empire.

<sup>11</sup> These were the following: 1) the Association of Lithuanian Agricultural Cooperatives, Lith. *Lietukis*, operated as a consumer cooperative that, among its many functions, organized exports and imports of various agricultural products, fertilizers, and machinery; 2) the Union of Dairy Cooperatives, Lith. *Pienocentras*, provided consultations and helped with establishing and running dairies; organized local and export sales; and supplied accountants and quality monitoring specialists; 3) the Union of Meat Processors, *Maistas*, was a conglomerate of meat processing factories and other facilities including slaughter houses and refrigeration facilities; 4) the Union of Cooperatives of Linen and Flax, *Linai*, invested in improving flax fiber preparation and propagated flax exports; 5) the shareholder company Lithuanian Sugar, Lith. *Lietuvos Cukrus*, was owned by various organizations, the government, and individuals. It helped in the founding and establishing of sugar production in Lithuania.



Boehms Odelwaelder Blaue, Kamekes Laurus, Richtes Prinzess, Rhein, Schmidt's Praesident Krueger, Kamekes Hindenburg and others. Lithuanian bacon reached England; butter traveled to Denmark; eggs went to Germany; and flax was shipped to Switzerland. In such a context, agriculture emerged as the largest and strongest area of Lithuania's economy: in 1939, 73.2% of the population lived in the countryside and worked in agriculture, and 78% of all Lithuania's exports consisted of agricultural products.

In such a manner, on the eve of the Soviet occupation of 1940, Lithuania emerged as a strong nation-state integrated into global markets. These major shifts in the agricultural sector transformed the lives of the farmers by making them the subjects of the global economy as well as these of the state institutions. Yet there is little data to suggest that the farmers saw themselves as the subjects of this nation. Oral histories demonstrate that nationalism continued to be defined by the urban elites who acted; spoke; dressed; and ate very differently from the rural inhabitants. Even though in the popular press the farmers formed the core of the nation, there was little overlap between how the urbanites and farmers experienced their belonging to the nation.

Zeppelin consumption embodies the social boundaries that emerged in this period. For urbanites and the upper echelons of rural society, the national question rested in solving the tensions implicit in the building of "closed" national communities (Schwartz 2006) in a world where nation-state borders were opening to global market exchanges; where transportation technologies were remaking experiences of distances; and where radio commentator voices and images from remote places were becoming a part of everyday experience. By endowing the local potato dumpling with the name of the most impressive German airship and the meaning of modern progress, the national elite found a venue for negotiating tensions between nationalism and globalization. Prepared by servants and cooks, and on rare occasions by poorer stay-at-home

women living in Lithuania's towns, zeppelins enabled the new urban elites to experience a membership in the modern, technologized, and globalized world as well as to proudly perform their Lithuanianess.

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

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

While Lithuanian cities lived in ebbs and flows of nationalism and patriotism, the farmers remained outside of these movements. Even though arguments were made that the predominantly peasant populations were remade into ethnic subjects of nation-states in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm 1990), in Lithuania, the newly founded farmers were preoccupied with their sustenance and farming. In another interview, a former teacher says:

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

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

planting new seeds; tending pure-bred animals; and working with new machineries. In their world, tensions between the national and the global were resolved through economic relations.

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

While national liberation movements drew strongly on agro-nationalism and defined the farmer as the ultimate steward of the nation, the ideals and ideologies of nationalism gained little traction with rural populations in the early 1990s. As urbanites—both of the working class background and educated elites—took to the streets to protest the Soviet occupation and make a statement about the political aspirations of Lithuanian nation, most of the rural inhabitants remained distant observers. More broadly, if we consider food consumption as an embodied act of identity making, then Lithuania's rural populations were other kinds of bodies within the nation.

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

In today's Lithuania, the zeppelin serves as a conduit between global markets and local economic culture and practice. On the one hand, zeppelins are successfully competing in an increasingly globalizing food market. On the other, zeppelins are deeply embedded in the political economy of local agricultural production, which in turn is dominated by small-scale

semi-subsistence farms and informal distribution systems. This suggests that the proliferation of this national dish in a globalizing Lithuania reveals on-going negotiations in regards to national identities, but also contradictions in economic systems and market rationalities.

During the first wave of privatization of the food industry in Lithuania in the late 1980s and early 1990s, zeppelins became the centerpiece of local restaurant menus. Like most of the other national dishes, they were soon incorporated into fast food restaurants; introduced into delis; and made available in frozen food sections at supermarkets. Zeppelins have also been the subject of multiple widely-publicized eating competitions, and they are highly valued and sought after in Lithuanian diaspora communities spread out around the world. Additionally, zeppelins have appeared in advertising, songs, fiction, newspaper articles, and TV shows, as well as on T-shirts, and in political campaigns and art galleries.

For example, a recent art exhibition in Vilnius featured Coca-Cola advertising where the name of the brand “Coca-Cola” was replaced with “Cepelinas” (zeppelin).<sup>12</sup> Written in small print and matching design, the picture made it difficult to distinguish between the two, so some viewers missed the replacement. For those who noticed, the image offered a powerful critique of an on-going commercialization of national cuisine as well as exposing the connections between the global food industry and the zeppelin’s McDonaldization.

Despite the commercialization of zeppelins being mediated through global markets, they still remain a distinctly local product. As a country where potatoes are grown in virtually every farm and where potato consumption per person is almost 120 kg per year (compared to 122 kg in Ireland), Lithuania’s political economy of agricultural production is deeply implicated in the current popularization of zeppelins.

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<sup>12</sup> Thanks to my collaborator, Neringa Klumbyte, for bringing this to my attention.

Recent reports indicate that potatoes are grown on 85% of all farms in Lithuania, by far the highest rate in the European Union (Eurostat 2008, 14). In UK, for example, only 4% of all farms grow potatoes, while in Germany the proportion is 16%. Even in post-socialist EU member states such as Poland (55%), Romania (26%) or Hungary (12%) where farm structures are similar to those in Lithuania, fewer farms are producing potatoes. Only in neighboring Latvia, where 80% of all farms grow potatoes, is the situation similar (Eurostat 2008, 14).

Such a high dispersion of potato farms in Lithuania indicates that unlike in other countries where potatoes are produced as cash crops on large-scale specialized farms, potatoes in Lithuania are still grown mostly in subsistence or semi-subsistence contexts. Indeed, as my visits to Lithuanian farms attest, households in the village had set aside land for growing food for their own consumption, such as carrots, beets, onions, or tomatoes, in addition to cash crops. Potatoes usually occupy a large part of these local farms, and they play an important role in the lives of the farmers. While often criticized as inefficient, these fragmented and small-scale potato farms supply the farmers with a steady source of food and fodder and often cash. In other words, the potato has become a safety net in small-scale farms that makes them independent from fluctuations in global food prices and the EU's agricultural policies.

Statistical data also suggests that most of the potatoes produced in Lithuania come from small-scale farms under 5 ha (Eurostat 2008, 16). This means that, at a fundamental level, zepelins in Lithuania are a local food. Despite the fact that more and more zepelins are produced industrially, the explosion in zepelin production and consumption became possible through the labor of small-scale farms that often operate outside of the margins of the formal economy. As small-scale farmers tend to sell their produce directly to urban consumers and by so doing, forego formal markets as well as state taxes and inspection, zepelins draw heavily on

“gray” economic transactions and semi-subsistence culture. Paradoxically, produced at the margins of Lithuania’s agricultural economy, the potato is at the center of Lithuania’s national identity and cuisine.

### **Summary/Conclusions**

Data collected through this research reveals deep connections between new technologies and the spread of nationalism among mostly peasant populations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Baltic States. I argue that the birth of national food in the 1920s and 1930s was embedded in the experiences of industrialization that allowed for new ways to imagine and experience the world outside of local settings. Through this paper I also argued that zeppelin consumption marked the fault line between rural and urban populations and their participation in nation-building. By not making; cooking; and eating the zeppelins, the rural inhabitants did not consummate in the material culture and the body of the Lithuanian nation.

Today, zeppelins have bridged the major socio-economic divides that once separated urban and rural lifestyles as well as social class boundaries. By plugging semi-subsistence potato producers into major food distribution networks, the potato dumpling in Lithuania opens a site for negotiating local economic practices and identities within global systems of food production, consumption, and distribution.

Despite the popularity of zeppelins in contemporary Lithuania, the question remains what the current changes undergoing in the local and global economies will bring. First, in the new EU member countries, small-scale farming has come under attack both from the local government and the EU as inefficient and backward. As a result, a number of political tools and funding mechanisms have been set up to consolidate agricultural production by aggressively driving

semi-subsistence agriculture out of Lithuania, and with it, eliminating the self-sustaining potato producer.

Secondly, European experience shows that the potato is losing its place in local diets leading to a reduction in potato production. In less than two decades, 1990 through 2007, the area of potato cultivation in Western Europe fell by 38%, while the drop in potato cultivation area among the new EU member states in the same period was even more precipitous—by a staggering rate of 60%. There are multiple reasons for such a change, but one of the plausible explanations is that European consumers have acquired new tastes and began moving away from potato-based diets to diverse international foods delivered through long chains of supply.

These numbers also indicate that increasingly, more local animal feed—such as potatoes—is replaced by global feed traveling long distances. But as these global trends are setting in, and Lithuania is deliberately pushing the potato out, we are beginning to see the contours of new global systems defined by food shortages, energy crises, global warming issues, and economic downturns. It is in the whirlpool of these changes that new connections between the national and the global will be cast.

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