



WHAT MAKES A RESTAURANT ETHNIC? (A CASE STUDY OF ARMENIAN RESTAURANTS IN ST PETERSBURG)

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A b s t r a c t: Using restaurants in St Petersburg serving Armenian cuisine as a case study, the article studies the question of what makes an ethnic restaurant ethnic, what may be learnt about ethnicity by studying a restaurant serving a national cuisine, and to what extent the image of Armenian cuisine presented in Armenian restaurants corresponds to what Armenian informants tell us. The conclusion is that the composition of the menu in these restaurants reflects a view of Armenian cuisine from within the ethnic group itself. The representation of ethnicity is achieved primarily by discursive means. Neither owners, nor staff, nor customers from the relevant ethnic group, nor the style of the interior or music are necessary conditions for a restaurant to be accepted as ethnic. However, their presence is taken into account when the authenticity or inauthenticity of the restaurant is evaluated. Armenian informants, though, do not raise the question of authenticity: this category is irrelevant for them.

Key words: Armenians, ethnicity, ethnic restaurants, national cuisine, authenticity, St Petersburg.

To cite: Guliaeva E., 'What Makes a Restaurant Ethnic? (A Case Study of Armenian Restaurants in St Petersburg)', *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, 2017, no. 13, pp. 280–305.

URL: <http://anthropologie.kunstkamera.ru/files/pdf/eng013/guliaeva.pdf>

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What Makes a Restaurant Ethnic? (A Case Study of Armenian Restaurants in St Petersburg)

Using restaurants in St Petersburg serving Armenian cuisine as a case study, the article studies the question of what makes an ethnic restaurant ethnic, what may be learnt about ethnicity by studying a restaurant serving a national cuisine, and to what extent the image of Armenian cuisine presented in Armenian restaurants corresponds to what Armenian informants tell us. The conclusion is that the composition of the menu in these restaurants reflects a view of Armenian cuisine from within the ethnic group itself. The representation of ethnicity is achieved primarily by discursive means. Neither owners, nor staff, nor customers from the relevant ethnic group, nor the style of the interior or music are necessary conditions for a restaurant to be accepted as ethnic. However, their presence is taken into account when the authenticity or inauthenticity of the restaurant is evaluated. Armenian informants, though, do not raise the question of authenticity: this category is irrelevant for them.

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An ethnic restaurant (or a restaurant serving a national cuisine)¹ is a rewarding subject for research, allowing the study of the functioning of ethnic identity in the modern multicultural urban milieu, inasmuch as it is a place where a resident's ethnicity is actualised. Here, too, one may conveniently identify people's instrumental attitude towards 'their own' and 'other people's' ethnicities, since a restaurant serving a national cuisine is an example of an 'emic' category which includes the concept of 'ethnicity'.

So what makes an ethnic restaurant ethnic? And what can one find out about ethnicity by studying a restaurant that serves a national cuisine? What approaches have been taken to the study of ethnic restaurants? And what restaurants are represented in Russia? That is the circle of questions to which I shall attempt to provide answers in the first part of this article.

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¹ In the present article I take the terms 'ethnic restaurant' and 'restaurant serving a national cuisine' as synonymous; nor do I make any distinction between 'cafés' and 'restaurants', since for most ordinary people nowadays the difference between them has become totally blurred.

Originally my interest in restaurants serving a national cuisine, and specifically Armenian restaurants, came about in the course of my study of the way Armenian cuisine was presented in the personal narratives of the Armenians of St Petersburg [Guliaeva 2012; 2013]. To paraphrase Rogers Brubaker in the context of my research, I was not concerned with what a national cuisine actually did represent, but how that concept worked as a category of practice and an expression used in communication [Brubaker 2004: 116]. In this sense an Armenian restaurant is one way in which the concept of a ‘national cuisine’ is ‘current’, a place where it is represented, existing alongside informants’ stories, cookery books, journalism, etc. I was interested in how ‘Armenian-ness’ is created in an Armenian restaurant. To what extent does the restaurant image of Armenian food resemble what Armenian informants tell us? The second half of the article is dedicated to answering these questions.

The basic materials for my research were my own observations in the ethnic cafés and restaurants of St Petersburg, information about them in the press, on their websites and other websites, customers’ reviews on the internet, and interviews, mostly with the Armenians of St Petersburg,¹ and also with friends and acquaintances about their reasons for going to restaurants serving a national cuisine, their choice of dishes there, and also with the staff and owners of certain ethnic cafés. It should be pointed out that the questions of the categories into which the customers of ethnic restaurants may be divided, and where they go and why, are beyond the scope of the present work, since from the very beginning the research was oriented towards an analysis of Armenians’ ideas of Armenian cookery.

Ethnic restaurants as an object of study

Ethnic restaurants have as a rule aroused interest as classic examples of the ethnic economy,² therefore they have mostly been studied by specialists in management and the market. Attention has generally

¹ The majority of my thirty Armenian informants are people aged from forty to fifty-five who came to St Petersburg to work or study at the end of the 1980s or during the following two decades. Most of them were living in Armenia before they came, but some arrived from Georgia, Azerbaijan or Abkhazia.

² It is accepted that three criteria of the ethnic economy may be identified: self-employment by the representatives of a particular ethnic group, entrepreneurs from that group, and staff from that group (some researchers believe that a single parameter is sufficient) [Strüder 2003: 6]. I shall not go into detail about the discussions relating to criticism of this research framework (on which see: [Brednikova, Pachenkov 1999; Fong, Ooka 2000: 3–5; Voronkov 2000; Strüder 2003: 5–11]). I shall however note that opponents of this approach most often emphasise that ‘ethnic exclusivity’ is the result of a lack of the financial means to attract staff from outside. In other words, representatives of the same ethnic group are employed because they are family members, and those from different ethnic groups are not for lack of the money to hire them. Thus the criterion for employment is economic and not ethnic. Besides, it is unclear who determines these persons’ ethnicity [Brednikova, Pachenkov 1999].

been focused on the features of this sort of business (mostly small family businesses), its advantages for competition and its influence on the economy as a whole. An example of work of this sort may be Paul Strickland's article on the supposed influence of religion, inter-ethnic connections, marriage relationships and family support on the conduct of business in Vietnamese restaurants in Victoria, Australia [Strickland 2013: 491, 492, 495].

A theoretical framework for studying ethnic restaurants closer to anthropology has been borrowed from post-colonial studies. The restaurant serving a national cuisine has been seen as a hybrid phenomenon [Bhabha 2003: 209] resulting from the exploitation of the image of 'the other' when specific ethnic cultures are interacting under a standard model for conducting business 'in the Western manner'. J. G. Molz's research on Thai restaurants in Dallas has shown that one such instrument of exploiting 'the other' is an assessment of 'authenticity', which is always a category for evaluation. Owners of Thai restaurants orient themselves on the American perception of Thai culture (or rather on their idea of the Americans' idea of Thai culture), and not on a Thai vision [Molz 2004: 57].

In his essay on culinary authenticity, Arjun Appadurai was one of the first to draw attention to the fact that the content of the seemingly simple concept of 'authenticity' as a sort of norm is hard to 'pin down'. He asked where authenticity is localised and who has the right to evaluate it. He suggests that the concept should not be used, since it is impossible to establish criteria of authenticity in a constantly changing tradition. He held that to take a temporally transcendent view of historical processes is erroneous [Appadurai 1986: 25].

J. G. Molz, though, expressed a slightly different position, which suggests that authenticity should be seen as a subjectively defined quality which is a matter of agreement and which is constructed within the conditions of a particular social context [Molz 2004: 55]. While authenticity is a product of Western modernity, the customers of ethnic restaurants ascribe it to the practices of specific ethnic groups in the countries which they historically inhabited, and assess these practices according to their travel experience, images from the media, comparisons between different restaurants, and the ethnicity of the owners and staff [Ibid.: 72].

The practice of going to ethnic restaurants is certainly connected with self-identification: the customer obliquely reminds himself / herself of what his / her own cuisine is. Jeremy MacClancy has compared this process with the way cannibals eat a stranger in order to strengthen their own group identity (see: [MacClancy 1992: 204], quoted in: [Molz 2004: 66]). Dinner away from home, which began as a discovery of 'the other', becomes a re-evaluation and reinforcement of the

‘self’, which relates this practice to tourism¹ (the same oppositions of ‘us and them’, ‘here and there’ accumulate [Turgeon, Pastinelli 2002: 251]). It is no accident that the stories of customers of ethnic restaurants resemble the stories of tourists in their search for variety and authenticity [Ibid.: 259–60]. Moreover, for customers from the ethnic group whose cuisine the restaurant offers, it is also a journey, but a journey home. Many of them perceive the restaurant food as part of their own heritage [Lew 2013].

An ethnic restaurant is not only the result of public interaction between members of different groups, it is also the place where it occurs. In a certain sense it is an intermediate space: not there, but not entirely here. It may be divided into public and private spaces (the dining room and the kitchen). Thus the metaphor of the theatre, originating with Erving Goffman, may be applied to the restaurant too. This allows it to be viewed as a place where ethnicity and authenticity are presented [Molz 2004: 55].

Another paradigm within which ethnic restaurants may be examined is the study of nationalism. R. Wilk’s article on ‘Real Belizean Food’ deals with the question of the appearance and proliferation of Belizean restaurants. The first one was opened in New York, the second in Los Angeles. In fact, the concept of Belizean cuisine was invented outside Belize [Wilk 1999: 253, note 2]. Evidently the existence of other ethnic restaurants in the USA prompted the appearance of Belizean ones. The first Belizean restaurant in Belize appeared later. It was opened by a couple who had returned after living in the USA. The menu was similar to that of many other public eating houses in Belize, but this was the first time that the dishes on it had been represented as ‘national’. Over the next two years restaurants serving Belizean food became very numerous in the country [Ibid.: 246, 253, note 2]. It might be said that the category of ‘Belizean restaurants’ came into existence thanks to the concept of ‘national cuisine’. This in turn is an extension of the concept of ‘national culture’, which owes its existence to ‘unreflectively groupist language’, i.e. ‘the habit of speaking without qualification of “Hungarians” and “Romanians”, for example, as if they were sharply bounded, internally homogeneous “groups”’ [Brubaker 1998: 298].

In some parts of the world the number of ethnic restaurants is ever on the increase [Turgeon, Pastinelli 2002: 254; Strickland 2013: 483]. This is probably to be explained not only by processes of nation-building, but also by a shift in ways of ethnic identification at the individual level as a result of a change in the consumer characteristics

¹ A number of researchers have suggested the term *culinary tourism* — the practice of eating ‘other people’s’ food and perceiving it as a representation of them (not to be confused with *gastronomic tourism*). Without leaving one’s home one can safely cross over cultural and political boundaries and subsume this practice into one’s everyday life [Turgeon, Pastinelli 2002: 247; Molz 2004: 57].

of society, the enlargement of the market, globalisation, mass migration and tourism. Whereas hitherto ethnicity has primarily been an ascriptive category, now, in conditions of multiculturalism, people can choose not only the extent to which they identify themselves with their cultural group, but whether to do so at all. Overall, most of them prefer to continue to refer themselves to one ethnic group or another, determining for themselves how and when to bring this ethnic representation into being. The possibility of a selection of the means of expressing ethnicity furthers its commercialisation and commodification [Halter 2002: 194]. This in turn raises questions of how 'authentic' such manifestations of ethnicity might be.

The Russian context

The number of restaurants, particularly ethnic restaurants, in Russia, had been steadily rising at least until the recent worsening in the country's overall economic situation. This corresponded to global tendencies. Amongst the restaurants noted on the *Afisha* site on 1 July 2014, establishments offering Russian, Italian and Japanese food predominated in Moscow and St Petersburg. Fourth and fifth places were taken by those offering American¹ and Georgian cuisine, and sixth, seventh and eighth by Uzbek, Azerbaijani and Chinese. French restaurants were in ninth place. Armenian cuisine came tenth in St Petersburg, thirteenth in Moscow.²

In most Russian cities with over a million inhabitants the picture is similar: amongst the most frequently offered, Russian, Italian and Japanese cuisines, in varying orders, are in the top three. The order of the rest varies, but almost everywhere there are more Georgian restaurants than Armenian, more Uzbek than French, and more American than Chinese.³

It should be pointed out that the *Afisha* site classifies restaurants 'according to cuisine' and not 'according to ethnic cuisine'. There was a majority of restaurants offering national cuisines, but alongside them there were fish restaurants, vegetarian restaurants, pan-Asian restaurants and Mediterranean restaurants, and those offering steaks, pelmeni, khachapuri,⁴ wok dishes, and so on.⁵ The principle at work

¹ 'American cuisine' in Russia is effectively a synonym for fast food.

² <<http://www.afisha.ru/spb/restaurants/>> (last accessed 1.07.2014).

³ <<http://www.afisha.ru/spb/restaurants/>> (last accessed 1.07.2014).

⁴ Pelmeni are dough parcels with meat inside resembling ravioli or Polish pierogi, while khachapuri (Georgian *khach'ap'uri*) are pies made of bread dough stuffed with cheese and sometimes also egg, green vegetables, herbs, etc., not unlike an Italian pizza or calzone [Eds.].

⁵ It is obvious that pizzerias, *khinkali* restaurants, sushi restaurants, and certain other establishments are associated in the popular mind with particular ethnic groups, and in this sense cannot be called 'ethnically neutral'.

in this case is that of the homogenisation of distinctions, which places Mexican, fish, Asiatic and other cuisines under the same heading.¹

It is rare for a restaurant that specialises in a particular type of cuisine to offer nothing else, as the annotations bear witness. They are predominantly such as ‘Russian and Oriental’, ‘European and Japanese’, ‘Mediterranean and Caucasian’, and so on. Laurier Turgeon and Madeleine Pastinelli noted in the context of Quebec food culture that the number of ‘international’ restaurants is growing, which intensifies the tendency towards organising identity through the determination of ‘the other’ (and not the assertion of ‘the self’) [Turgeon, Pastinelli 2002: 263]. There is a considerable difference between public eating houses, even if we ignore the existence of different economic categories (*haute cuisine*, speedy service, and so on). For all of them, though, the background cuisine is ‘Russian’. So it is designated, rather, from outside the community. For ‘us’ this ‘Russian’ cookery is often indicated as ‘European’, sometimes as ‘local’ or ‘Soviet’. Thus according to the Zoon searching system, of the fifty-two restaurants offering Armenian cuisine, forty-one also advertised European cuisine,² but only twenty Russian.³

As for those peoples who were recognised as the primary populations of the Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia, their cuisine may be examined in the context of colonial relations. They enjoy the reputation, formed in the Soviet period (and to some extent even earlier), of being ‘Eastern’, ‘exotic’, ‘flavoursome’ and ‘spicy’ (particularly Georgian and Uzbek), but at the same time they are familiar and to some extent ‘the same as us’.

By no means the least important factor in the appearance of Central Asian and Caucasian businesses is the presence of a large number of people who have migrated from the relevant territories.⁴ People from the Caucasus and Central Asia find a suitable way of satisfying the demand for places to eat by offering their own cuisine. In addition, ethnic cafés may also answer a demand within the immigrant milieu and thus make up part of the migrant infrastructure.

¹ B. Readings has noted the essence of this principle, ‘that invokes the indigene as one name for difference, placed indifferently among a list of others (for fear of exclusion), gives voice to the indigene only at the price of a self-recognition as one immigrant among others. <...> I indicate the indigene as merely one victim of homogenisation in such listings. In general, the effect of multiculturalism is necessarily to homogenise differences as equivalently deviant from a norm’ [Readings 1997: 113].

² It is interesting that in Yerevan itself, such cuisine is more often advertised as ‘Eastern European’.

³ <<http://spb.zoon.ru/restaurants/type/armyanskaya/>> (last accessed 5.11.2014).

⁴ That said, it is interesting that there is no direct correlation between the proportion of such restaurants and the number of migrants from the relevant region [Turgeon, Pastinelli 2002: 254].

Restaurants with Caucasian cuisine

Armenian restaurants are most often assigned both by their owners and their customers to the overall category of restaurants with Caucasian cuisine, so we shall examine this in more detail.

A Caucasian restaurant may offer dishes characteristic of various Caucasian peoples, or else offer a particular cuisine as its main style, but nevertheless be described as a *Caucasian* restaurant. Thus the Apsheron restaurant, though Azeri in terms of its owners, staff, name and menu, advertises on the first page of its menu ‘Caucasian and European dishes prepared by the best chefs from Baku’ [AFM SPb: Diary 2 September 2015]. Evidently ‘Caucasian’ is used as a sort of ‘umbrella term’ intended for the orientation of customers unfamiliar with the cookery of Azerbaijan.

Georgian cuisine, as the best-known, is most often the leading cuisine in Caucasian restaurants, and there are indeed more Georgian restaurants than restaurants offering the cuisines of other Caucasian peoples. By offering Georgian dishes the owners of Armenian and Azerbaijani cafés certainly reckon on attracting a wider clientele.

I expected that there would be more or less equal numbers of Azerbaijani and Armenian restaurants, but it turned out that there are more than twice as many Azerbaijani as Armenian.¹ What is there to explain such an extensive offering of Azeri food in the restaurant sector?²

It is quite definite that this is not to be linked with a greater number of Azeris than Armenians in the population, because there are, if anything, more Armenians than Azeris in Russia, and particularly in St Petersburg and Moscow.

It may have to do with the institution of the *çayxana*³ in Azerbaijan, which played, and still plays the part of a sort of men’s club. In other words, there is in Azerbaijan a cultural basis for the development of the restaurant business, insofar as the *çayxana* assumes both the existence of a particular sort of public space, and also that the occupation itself — running a *çayxana* — is a usual one. This theory is supported by the fact that Azerbaijani restaurants remain a predominantly masculine space and, as a rule, are served by male waiters. One might also suppose that the lack of any traditional local alcohol in Azerbaijan has resulted in more attention being paid to the food.

It is hard to say that there is any phenomenon in Armenia like the *çayxana* of Azerbaijan — not because the favourite drink in Armenia

¹ According to *Afisha*, in 2014 there were in St Petersburg 254 Georgian restaurants, 92 Azerbaijani and 49 Armenian: <<http://www.afisha.ru/spb/restaurants/>> (last accessed 1.07.2014).

² I do not think that there are fewer Armenians in the restaurant business, but there are definitely fewer in the national cuisine sector.

³ Also transliterated (via Russian) *chaikhana*: a traditional tea house [Eds.].

is coffee, but because there are so few establishments of this type, especially in the provinces. Of course there is a vast number of restaurants and cafés in Yerevan, but this has more to do with the global tendencies of the development of the restaurant business.

A counter-argument might be the theory that the pedigree of Azerbaijani restaurants goes back to the urban and roadside *dükkan* (shop, inn, from Arabic *dukkān* ‘shop’) and caravanserai (from Persian *kārāvān* ‘caravan’ and *serāy* ‘palace’) of the Caucasus, itself founded on the urban culture of the entire Near East (and, indeed, the *çayxana* may also be regarded as part of this tradition). But this hypothesis supposes that the Armenians should have had similar or even more favourable conditions for developing the restaurant business, since the Armenians, who, historically, made up a significant part of the urban population of the Caucasus, often ‘had hold of’ the trade, craft and service sectors.

Furthermore, the *çayxana* is something that belongs to the present and the recent past, which the caravanserai is not, so that it is not clear to what extent it is appropriate to connect them with today’s realities. For example, Aysegul Kesimoğlu, describing the practice of frequenting cafés in Istanbul, concludes that the café is a modern urban space which, though many people associate it with traditional *kahvehaneler*, has in fact replaced them (evidence for which is the use of the term *café*, and not *kahvehane*). The fact that the café is perceived as an authentic and traditional phenomenon is, in her view, a symptom of the hybrid character of modernity [Kesimoğlu 2015: 6–7]. It seems reasonable to take the same view of Azerbaijani cafés and restaurants — as really having arisen in the recent past, but legitimised by reference to *dükkanlar* and caravanserais.

Nor must one fail to consider that in the case of restaurants offering a national cuisine, the impulse for development often comes from the diaspora, as in the example from Belize described above. It may be that restaurants were a business associated with the employment of immigrants from Azerbaijan in their niche in the retail trade in fruit and vegetables in the markets of large cities in Russia in the 1990s and the following decade.

All these suggestions require further research, which is outside the scope of the present work. Therefore as a preliminary finding we can only assert that conditions for the development of the restaurant business were advantageous within the Azerbaijani milieu. This is shown in particular by the observations of Varshaver and Rocheva, who identified ‘Azerbaijani business’ as one of the four ideal types of community that arise in the ethnic cafés of Moscow:¹

¹ Together with ‘fellow-countrymen’, ‘Islamic’ and ‘walking-distance communities’ [Varshaver, Rocheva 2014: 109–11].

Cafés and restaurants are one of the significant niches within which entrepreneurs from Azerbaijan do business, and such restaurants, at varying levels, are quite evenly spread around Moscow; it is logical to suppose <...> that taken together they represent the spatial basis in which this community functions. The manager of one of these restaurants, which belongs to a person born in Azerbaijan, told us that there are Azerbaijani businessmen meeting in the café every evening, but a somewhat different set of them each time. This pattern recurs from café to café. <...> The layout of the place is much the same: a bar, a white clock above it, cigarette smoke, Azerbaijani food [Varshaver, Rocheva 2014: 111].

The interesting thing about Varshaver and Rocheva's description of the layout of Azerbaijani cafés seems to be that the ethnic markers are practically confined to the food. This may explain why the large numbers of Azerbaijani restaurants are not particularly noticeable in the urban space of St Petersburg.

Considering Azerbaijani cuisine in Russia, it may evidently be said that in the minds of restaurateurs and their customers it is more easily and better combined with the popular Uzbek and Eastern cuisine and accordingly more often proffered. There is probably also a religious influence: being Muslim, Azerbaijan is also associated with the East. Thus the Apsheron restaurant already mentioned has, among other things, the words 'Caucasian cuisine' and 'Eastern cuisine' displayed on the fascia above its windows [AFM SPb: Diary 2 September 2015], and the Kuvshin has a large sign saying 'Eastern cuisine', with 'Azerbaijani cuisine' in smaller letters on the doors (it also, incidentally, serves Uzbek dishes) [AFM SPb: Diary 6 June 2016].

Despite the difficult relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, there are restaurants that serve both Azerbaijani and Armenian dishes. It is interesting that in them the discourses of 'ethnic differences' and 'cultural plagiarism', which are particularly acute in questions of the construction of nationality, are levelled out. One of my Armenian informants, who had experience of working in public eating houses, told me that the only difference between Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian cuisines was in the names [AFM SPb: Interview 10: m., 50, employed at a commercial centre, migrated from Tbilisi in the 1980s], that is, they are alike in the range of dishes that they offer. It is no accident that during the interview the menus of Azerbaijani and Armenian restaurants were often assessed as 'common Caucasian'. Another Armenian (a chef in an Armenian restaurant) said that his first job in St Petersburg had been at an Azerbaijani restaurant:

The Chinar [Plane Tree] on Prospekt Lunacharskogo... they opened a restaurant... asked me to work there. I thought it would be Armenian, but it was Azerbaijani. The owner is Azeri, but it was an Armenian

who asked me to work there, and then here... [AFM SPb: Interview 11: m., 50, chef, migrated from Yerevan in the 1990s].

At the Apsheron restaurant the chef included what he called Armenian *zhangyalov hats*¹ on the menu, explaining that it was the same thing as the Azerbaijani *qutab*, but bigger and stuffed only with herbs. The restaurant's wine list included pomegranate and blackberry wines from Armenia, together with wines from France, Chile, Azerbaijan, Georgia and elsewhere [AFM SPb: Diary 2 September 2015: f., 40, chef, migrated from Azerbaijan in the 2000s]. Thus the conflict in Karabakh and the negative attitude of Azerbaijanis towards Armenians and Armenians towards Azerbaijanis within the framework of the nationalist discourse is not articulated in the restaurant business.

Among Caucasian eating houses, Armenian businesses are the third most numerous. There are only one or two restaurants with Abkhazian or Dagestani cuisine within St Petersburg, and Ossete cuisine is represented by services delivering Ossete pies (who often also deliver pizzas, Russian pies and sushi). According to my information, there are no cafés of other Caucasian peoples in St Petersburg. It is evident, however, that the cuisine of the less numerous Caucasian peoples might well be served as an element of Caucasian cuisine generally, or the cuisine of the predominant ethnic majority in the region which they traditionally inhabit.

Which restaurants in St Petersburg may be considered Armenian?

There was a time when I took the existence of ethnic restaurants as self-evident. Existing analyses have allowed me to acquire sensitivity to them as an empirically observable phenomenon, but the definitions that I have come across have been rather vague and contradictory. For instance, one way of categorising 'the ethnic restaurant' is as a restaurant whose sign or advertising material offers the national or regional cookery of another country [Turgeon, Pastinelli 2002: 252]. The disadvantage of this definition is that it excludes such restaurants as a Russian restaurant in Russia or a French restaurant in France. Another definition regards as ethnic a business that produces and sells food which was geographically, historically, or ethnically connected with a culture that both its representatives and other people regarded as distinct [Strickland 2013: 484], which points to the fact that ethnic identification

¹ *Zhangyalov hats* is the culinary calling-card of the Armenians of Karabakh. It is unfortunately unclear whether the inclusion of this item on the menu was fortuitous or a deliberate assertion of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The latter might be like the inclusion of statistics on the numbers of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is not under the control of the Azerbaijani government, in the official statistics of Azerbaijan.

naturally involves dialogue. Finally, a third definition, and a narrower one, is offered by Varshaver and Rocheva. In their project they recognised a café as ethnic ‘if it satisfied three conditions: it served national dishes; there were representatives of visible minorities among the customers (at least on particular occasions or with a certain regularity); there should also be visible minorities among the staff of the café’ [Varshaver, Rocheva 2014: 108]. The last two conditions associate this definition with the criteria used to identify the ethnic economy.

Taking the above ruminations into account, I turned to the information available on restaurants in St Petersburg, and was unable immediately to answer the question which of them were Armenian. The field ‘Armenian cuisine’ on different search sites contains from fifteen to fifty-two establishments. Most of them offer several types of cuisine. It is not always clear who owns these restaurants and cafés, who works there and who frequents them. I could say that those restaurants that my informants regard as Armenian are Armenian, but there were too few judgments of this kind in my interviews with Armenians, and they usually have no need to reflect on the subject, given its background character. It is not usually Armenians who orientate themselves on the way a café officially presents itself. Asking this question is somewhat like looking for ‘authentic’ restaurants, but I needed not so much to establish how ‘real’ they were as to define my criteria and to select data for comparison with the material from interviews.

I decided to start by choosing those restaurants that offered Armenian cuisine as basic, with the addition of ‘Russian’ and / or ‘European’ and / or ‘Caucasian’ and / or ‘Georgian’ and / or ‘Eastern’. It seems to me that the said cuisines are mentioned as a consequence of being in Russia, since they are ‘background’ cuisines for Armenian restaurants.

Another criterion was the restaurant’s name. The vast majority of these provided no clue that Armenian food might be served there (for example Bakhroma [The Fringe], Dzhazofreniya [Jazophrenia], Ibo [Because], Kak ranshe [Like Olden Times], Kon-Koronel,¹ Prival okhotnika [Hunter’s Rest], U medvedya [The Bear’s Den] and so on). Therefore I decided to select those restaurants whose names could be read as Armenian from the point of view of the majority of Russian Armenians. The Apricot satisfied this condition, because that fruit is regarded as one of the symbols of Armenia, but such restaurants as Eli-Pili [Ate and Drank] and Lyubimyy Khabib [Dear Old Habib],² though they had a significant ‘Armenian

¹ This is a generic name for a restaurant — there are also examples in the Crimea and Sochi, etc. [Eds.].

² *Habīb* actually means ‘beloved’ in Arabic.

component' in their menus, served foodstuffs from Armenia and were owned by Armenians, could not. In this way the initial list of Armenian restaurants was reduced by two thirds.

In a study of the everyday practices of Armenian migrants, A. Tadevosyan writes that Armenian restaurants and cafés serve two purposes at once: they unite the migrants, and represent them in the receiving society by means of food [Tadevosyan 2014: 56]. In A. A. Pustarnakova's work on the representation of ethnic 'others' in the urban space of Samara, these two functions form the basis of dividing the restaurants into two groups: 'for their own ethnic group' (primarily immigrants) and 'for other ethnicities'. In the first group 'ethnic "otherness" is not represented for the achievement of economic ends' [Pustarnakova 2008]. As a rule such establishments are situated on the outskirts of town or in distant regions and are attractive thanks to their cuisine and the social circle they offer. In the other group, ethnic 'otherness' is commodified and in urban space the presence of 'others' is envisaged [Ibid.]. I do not suppose that a restaurant can always be assigned unambiguously to one category or the other. Varshaver and Rocheva have indeed concluded that communities in ethnic cafés are not formed on the basis of ethnicity [Varshaver, Rocheva 2014: 109]. However, the more the restaurant is orientated towards the 'outside' customer, the more markers of ethnicity are activated. If a restaurant is orientated towards 'their own', it is less important to be consistent in the contents of the menu, the interior or the way the waiters are dressed. Such businesses will certainly be seen as cafés owned by Armenians and / or with an Armenian chef, and therefore serving Armenian dishes alongside dishes which are not considered Armenian.

Nor can one ignore the economic component in the division of restaurants into these two categories ('for us' and 'for them'). It is obvious that the owners of an expensive restaurant are able to think more carefully about the correspondence between the items on the menu and the advertised cuisine, hire professional artists to create an 'ethnically coloured' interior, and order 'suitable' cutlery and uniforms for the waiting staff, etc. Cheap restaurants are left with their names, their cuisine and their regular customers in the form of relatives, friends and fellow-countrymen. The present work will focus on restaurants with various price policies.

The final selection was of five restaurants to visit in person and analyse the menu: in descending order of price, Amrots on the Nevsky, Erivan, Kilikiya, Ararat and U Gagika. I have also used material from the Gayane's restaurant in Moscow, the owner of which actively popularises Armenian cuisine on the television, taking part in various shows.

The menu

The presentation of Armenian cuisine is one of the tasks that restaurateurs and chefs take upon themselves. The target audience consists not only of ‘the others’, but of ‘their own’ too:

Our Armenians who have not been to Armenia for a long time... wanted them to know that we had something of our own. Indeed... And it is true, they are surprised that we've managed to do this... [AFM SPb: Interview 2: m., 50, chef, migrated from Yerevan in the 2000s].

Ideas of the traditional nature of the national cuisine influence the way chefs simultaneously rely on tradition and deviate from it. In certain cases they supplement ‘famous Armenian dishes’ with their own recipes ‘with an Armenian twist’ [AFM SPb: Interview 11: m., 50, chef, migrated from Yerevan in the 1990s]. In other cases there is a ‘break’ with tradition:

Sarkisyan: *But this may be the first Armenian restaurant with any sort of philosophy or concept.*

Munipov: *What concept? How is it different from the others?*

Nakhapetyan: *In that it breaks with tradition. <...> Or steak tartare. The Armenians don't have such a dish. In our menu it's called 'Stolen dolma'.¹ Zhirik told us that when he was a child, when his mother was making dolmas, he used to steal the meat straight out of the mincer and eat it <...>*

Gukasyan: *I was told about that dish from Dolmama — a dolma that isn't cooked. I didn't realise that it was simply steak tartare wrapped in vine leaves and slipped to very conservative people under the name of dolma. Obviously no one in Armenia would eat raw meat just like that [‘Inspektsiya...’ 2014].*

In the end, tradition can also be revived or invented:

Obviously he re-cast old things in a European style, a new style in order to... In a word, they brought back things that had been forgotten... Old forgotten things are the best...

<...>

¹ In formal Eastern Armenian as spoken on the territory of modern Armenia and in other post-Soviet countries, and in Iran, this dish is spelled with a *t* — *tolma*. In Azerbaijani, on the other hand (and internationally), the current spelling is *dolma*. It is usually argued that the word derives from the Turkic / Turkish verb *doldurmak* (‘to stuff’), though the comparable dish in Turkey is more often termed *sarma* (‘wrapped’). Obviously, the argument relating to etymology also implies an argument about the Turkish origins of the dish. In turn, Armenian commentators of a nationalist turn have made efforts to generate an Armenian etymology for the name. While in this quotation the term *dolma* was used, mostly my Armenian informants used the term *tolma*. However, for the sake of consistency and familiarity, I have used the international term *dolma* here.

Armenia used to stretch from sea to sea. We had a vast number of dishes made from marine fish, but since there's no sea nowadays, it's hard to make them. <...> Yes, we had, it was traditional for us. <...> Dolma with mussels. Yes, <...> because I think that we had sea... Because there were mussels even then <...> Yes, that's simply what I think, that possibly... that's what they did before... <...> why do the Indians, the Chinese, and we [don't]? If we had the sea, why didn't we? If we had the sea, that means, we had it... so, it's disappeared, but it was once. And what did the warriors, the warriors feed on, eh? [AFM SPb: Interview 2: m., 50, chef, migrated from Yerevan in the 2000s].

The structure of the menu in Armenian restaurants is 'classical' (from cold starters and salads to the dessert and the wine list), but everywhere additional sections have been included (as in many other Caucasian establishments): 'dishes cooked on charcoal' (kebabs, roasted vegetables, etc.) and 'cooked in a tandoor' (from *lavash* to roast lamb).

It should be noted that at least half the total number of dishes are 'Armenian'.¹ The dishes that my informants mentioned most often were present on every menu, both as holiday foods (kebabs, dolmas) and as everyday foods (*spas*, *aveluk* [sorrel] soup, tomato omelette, etc.). In this sense restaurant menus give an impression similar to that created by a summation of what has been said by the informants. One might even speak of the invariant of the Armenian menu. But, obviously, the informants never mention the dishes in the order that corresponds to the structure of the menu.

As for the contents of the sections, they are not standardised. Not all the dishes that some restaurants serve are prepared in others (*taroni*²); one and the same dish may figure as a main course in some restaurants, and as a hot starter in others (*dolma*³). Or in some restaurants it will be called *arishta*, and in others *Armenian vermicelli*.^{4,5} *Piti*, the widely-used name of a soup (also used by Azerbaijanis)⁶ is not replaced everywhere by the 'more Armenian' *putuk*.⁷ The names of dishes are

¹ Interview materials provided general points of reference for analysing the menu, and the provisional standard was the cuisine of Armenians from Armenia. This is what it was for most of the people I spoke to, and it was evident to me too that in their milieu there was a greater continuity of culture and language than among any of the Armenians of the diaspora.

² The web-site of Erivan restaurant <<http://erivan.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

³ The web-site of Kilikiya restaurant <http://kilikia.spb.ru/>; the web-site of Gayane's restaurant <<http://gayanes.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁴ More often *arishta* is translated as 'noodles'.

⁵ The web-site of Amrots restaurant <<http://www.amrots.ru/>>; <<http://gayanes.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁶ <<http://kilikia.spb.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014). Ararat restaurant, photographs of menus and interiors from the author's own archive, 2007.

⁷ <<http://gayanes.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

transliterated into Russian differently in different places (*khaurma*¹ and *kavurma*^{2,3}). It is interesting to note that unlike Armenian cookery books, menus do not avoid words like *kebab*, *kofta*, *kavurma* or *khashlama*⁴ (see, for example, the web-sites of Erivan and Kilikiya restaurants⁵), while on the other hand, the alternative terms *tehaal* (*kavurma*) and *kololak* (*kofta*) do not figure at all on menus. Evidently the restaurant menus, in comparison with cookery books, are a more accurate reflection and translation of the ordinary knowledge of Armenians (both housewives and chefs).

The names and descriptions of the dishes are the main ways in which they must be identified as 'Armenian'. The restaurateurs are always faced with the dilemma of what to call a dish, for example *lobkhashu*⁶ or *bean soup*.⁷ For the 'outsider' customer the first name is more 'authentic', but the second is more informative. But dishes without an equivalent in Russian cuisine (in Russian or in 'international' culinary terminology) retain their Armenian names (*spas*, *matsun*, *tzhvzhik*). In addition to the use of the epithet 'Armenian', four of the most typical discursive strategies for 'nationalising' the set of foods may be identified.

The first supposes the use of Armenian names, both as simple translations (*lezu* 'tongue', *sunk* 'mushroom', *lobi*, 'beans'), and invented ones, such as 'Tigran Mets' ('Tigranes the Great') for something resembling a Caesar salad,⁸ or 'Im Gyukh' ('my village') for a salad of tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet peppers, red onion and leaves.⁹

The second strategy, which is also characteristic of cookery books, is the use of geographical names: *Dilijan mushrooms*,¹⁰ *Etchmiadzin omelette*, *Yerevan bozbash*,¹¹ *Sevan salad*.¹² Moreover, in the menus of the restaurants that we have examined, toponyms from within modern Armenia (including Karabakh) predominate, and not those from within its historical frontiers¹³ (though I admit that there are

¹ <<http://www.amrots.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

² Potted meat preserved in its own fat.

³ <<http://kilikia.spb.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁴ A beef and potato soup, also served in Georgia [Eds.].

⁵ <<http://erivan.ru/>>; <<http://kilikia.spb.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁶ <<http://www.amrots.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁷ <<http://erivan.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁸ <<http://www.amrots.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁹ <<http://gayanes.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

¹⁰ <<http://erivan.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

¹¹ <<http://www.amrots.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

¹² <<http://gayanes.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

¹³ True, the toponyms of modern Armenia refer to the history of people who have migrated from Western Armenia.

more historical references at other restaurants). Among the latter, the city of Van is mentioned (as is Vaspurakan, the region of historical Armenia of which Van is the centre) and Cilicia (the latter only in the Kilikiya restaurant). There is one dish named after Muş, and another after Kars. Restaurants often bear the names of geographical locations: Ani, Kilikiya (from Cilicia), Erebuni, Erivan.¹ Some of them are also connected with ideas of the key points in Armenian history. Here constructed history meets imagined geography.

The adjective 'Armenian' may be considered geographical as well as ethnic, especially when it is stressed that foodstuffs come from Armenia and that what is being cooked is more important than how it is cooked (e.g. *green beans from Armenia*,² *jam from Armenia*,³ *Armenian cheese*.⁴

The third strategy is to refer to the experts. Restaurants offer *Granny Afiyan's khashlama*, *Mother's dolma*⁵ (compare 'Dolmama', the name of a chain of restaurants in Yerevan and Moscow), *Uncle Vilik's kebabs*,⁶ *dishes by the chef Armen Pinachyan*. The names of the restaurants U Gagika and Gayane's follow the same principle.

The final strategy relies on having extensive commentaries on the dishes in the menu. These stress above all the antiquity of the dishes, their traditional nature, the meaning of their Armenian names and their provenance from Armenian territory. These are the very subjects that are also identified by informants speaking of Armenian cuisine.

There is also an element of a different ethnic origin in the menu. Most noticeable is Georgian cuisine, with its *khachapuri*, *khinkali*, *satsivi*, *pkhali*, *kharcho*, *tkemali* etc.⁷ It is sometimes announced (for example, 'New! the gifts of Georgia'⁸). Viewed from inside, the terminologically 'Turkic' element goes largely unnoticed: *buglama*, *börek* and *qutab* are perceived as 'ours', as are the 'debatable' *kofta*, *khash* and so forth.

¹ Compare the Azerbaijani Gyandzha (from Ganja), Shirvan, Staryy Baku, and the Georgian Staryy Tbilisi and Kolkhida (from Colchis).

² <<http://www.amrots.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

³ <<http://erivan.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁴ <<http://kilikia.spb.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014). Ararat restaurant, photographs of menus and interiors from the author's own archive, 2007.

⁵ <<http://gayanes.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁶ <<http://www.amrots.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

⁷ Respectively, pies stuffed with cheese etc. (see also above), stuffed boiled pasta dumplings formed in a gathered sack shape, chicken in walnut sauce, vegetables dressed with walnut sauce and formed into patties, spicy meat stew, and sour plum sauce. These are the most recognisable standard dishes of the Caucasian repertoire for urban Russians [Eds.].

⁸ <<http://erivan.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

The menu at the Kilikiya has a strong Mediterranean component (pizza, pasta...), which may be easily explained by the Mediterranean location of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia. The second half of the menu at the Ararat is devoted to 'European cuisine' (see above). As for 'Russian cuisine', on the one hand, the definition 'Russian' is not used, but on the other, Russian culinary terminology is brought into play, and although it may appear ethnically 'neutral' (for example, *zharkoe* [braised meat], *oladyi* [dropscones], *baranyi rebra*, *zapechennyye s kartofelem* [roast breast of lamb with potatoes], *kotlety s kartofelnym pyure* [meatballs with mashed potato] and so on), it may influence the perception of the food as 'Russian'.

The wine lists of the chosen restaurants demonstrate a tendency opposite to that of the menus: they offer drinks produced in different parts of the world. However, in practically every section of these essentially 'cosmopolitan' wine lists there are Armenian products: white, red and sparkling wines, beer, brandy, fruit vodka, herbal tea, mineral water, lemonade, juice and compôte. This 'Armenian' component looks very impressive, but 'Armenian-ness' is the structural nucleus of the food, and not of the drink.

The interior, atmosphere and rules of behaviour

Visual signs have great importance in the representation of 'what is Armenian'. One may note several general principles.

Stone — or imitation stone — is typically used in the decoration. It may be stylised in imitation of mediaeval Armenian church architecture or masonry, or simply an emphasis on the stone used for the decoration (for example, literature about the Erivan stresses that the fireplace is faced with the celebrated Armenian tuff¹ ['Izyskannost...' 2004]. Other Caucasian restaurants also often use stone, which refers to the image of a mountain country. A peculiarity of Armenian restaurants is the use of an image of Mount Ararat, and this helps to distinguish an Armenian café from any other.

Another motif is that of the grape vine, both in the form of artificial plants² and wrought-iron gratings.³ This, however, may also be found in the interiors of other Caucasian cafés.

The ethnographic style is one of the most typical styles for ethnic restaurants. In the case of Armenian restaurants (or, more broadly, of Caucasian restaurants), its elements comprise carpets on the walls, copper and ceramic utensils (both antique and modern hand-made

¹ Volcanic rock, cf. tufa [Eds.].

² The official web-site of restaurant U Gagika <<http://www.ygagika.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

³ <<http://kilikia.spb.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

items, i.e. those made using ‘traditional’ crafts), national musical instruments, patterns on the tablecloths and curtains, carving in wood and stone on the doors and bars, etc. All these are predominantly signs of ‘rural’ culture, as it says on the Erivan site: ‘The small ethnic room is decorated in peasant style’.¹ The walls often bear pictures of people at table and other genre scenes in the style of Oskar Schmerling or Niko Pirosmani.²

It is interesting that the ‘ethnic’ rooms at the Amrots would be more accurately described as ‘historical’, since the stylisation on archaeological sites and the architectural forms of ancient and mediaeval Armenia is so evident. In my view, it is no accident that archaeological antiquity is equated with ethnic culture: it is part of the visual representation of the antiquity of the Armenians themselves.

Restaurateurs often reject the ethnic style in favour of a more ‘modern’ and neutral interior,³ which might, in principle, offer any other cuisine.

In none of my chosen restaurants did I notice the use of stylised national costume or even elements of this. There are notices in Armenian, but not often. Armenian music is to be heard, but, it is quite evident, by no means all the time. Just as the menu does not consist exclusively of Armenian dishes, neither does the playlist of exclusively Armenian compositions.

As well as the interior and the music, great significance in the creation of the atmosphere is ascribed to the interaction of the staff with the clientele, and of the latter amongst themselves. I have found two interesting fragments relating to this in the materials from conversations at Dolmama:

Sarkisyan: *In a classic Armenian restaurant the waiter decides for you: he is a sort of distributor of food, he is the man who feeds you. You don't even have to tell him anything, he knows for himself. There is a well-known story about a customer who says ‘That's not what I ordered,’ and the waiter replies ‘I can see that you need to eat something else today’ [‘Inspektsiya...’ 2014].*

In all restaurants the waiter acts as an expert, but in this case it is expected that he will not only explain the services offered, but take on the role of a person who knows how the meal ‘ought’ to be organised and conducted. Moreover, in the chosen restaurants there were both waiters and waitresses. It was not noticed that there were more of the former, as there are in Azerbaijani restaurants.

¹ <<http://erivan.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

² <<http://www.ygagika.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

³ Ararat restaurant, photographs of menus and interiors from the author's own archive, 2007.

The second quotation typifies the relationships between customers:

Nakhapetyan: This is how it happens: I came a couple of weeks after it was opened, three tables were occupied, and nobody knew anybody else. It began after half an hour: ‘Have you been to Dolmama in Yerevan?’ Then we moved the tables together... It ended with me paying the bill. But we had a great conversation [‘Inspektsiya...’ 2014].

This style of behaviour is often ascribed to men from the Caucasus,¹ for whom restaurants and bars are ‘the homes of male camaraderie expressed in the form of *supras* [dining together. — *E.G.*]’ [Manning 2012: 205], where it is the done thing to demonstrate one’s generosity and extravagance. L. Yalçyn-Heckmann, who studied stories of the Soviet past in rural Azerbaijan, relates her informant’s words of how in Soviet times men could visit one restaurant after another with their friends practically every evening. Nowadays many of them are embarrassed to meet people they know in a *çayxana*, lacking the means to buy them tea. They prefer to remain at home in order to avoid awkward situations [Yalçyn-Heckmann 2005: 431, 432].

Both of these situations are perceived both from within and without as part of the culture of the peoples of the Caucasus, though discursively, in various contexts, they may be assessed as specific features of the Armenian tradition.

Overall the interior, atmosphere and rules of behaviour in an Armenian café have no specific features to distinguish them from other Caucasian cafés, apart from the depiction of Mount Ararat.

Are Armenian restaurants authentic?

Judging by reviews on the internet, the discourse of ‘authenticity’ is highly characteristic of evaluations of Armenian restaurants.

[About the Kilikiya] *It does not reach the standard of a good Armenian restaurant for a variety of reasons: the menu is inauthentic, half of it is Italian <...> certain interesting traditional dishes and drinks are missing (zhengelev hats, for example), there are traditional dishes that have been too much adapted (ker-u-sus with French fries, to name but one). The tan seemed to be ordinary kefir, without any of the characteristic taste that it had in Yerevan. <...> The excellent interior loses its national flavour because of the musical background — Russian pop!*²

¹ Compare the restaurant scene in Georgiy Daneliya’s film *Mimino* (1977) [a hugely popular film comedy about two young men from the Caucasus in which every cliché about the area and its inhabitants is expertly geyed. Eds.].

² <<http://www.afisha.ru/spb/restaurant/22480/review/333105/>> (last accessed 1.07.2014).

In order to determine how ‘genuine’ a restaurant was, customers found it important to know the ethnicity of the chef and / or the owner. For example, I was advised in Yerevan not to go to the Kilikiya in St Petersburg, because the spit there was turned by Tajiks [AFM Armenia: Diary 25 October 2010]. But in a review of U Gagika café, a ‘real’ chef guaranteed the authenticity of the food:

*I liked U Gagika very much. Here they have great Armenian food, which you won't find everywhere. The chef here is a real Armenian. Therefore his dishes turn out very refined and tasty.*¹

The restaurants' owners and personnel also announce their business in terms of ‘tradition’ and ‘authenticity’:

*The Amrots is a restaurant whose doors are open to everyone who values traditional Armenian hospitality and the delights of the national cuisine bequeathed to us by the ancient culture of Armenia. The Amrots is a fortress of the genuine Armenian spirit.*²

*Would you like to know what real Armenian cooking is? The best dishes of Armenian national cuisine in St Petersburg are always ready for you at the Kilikiya café!*³

Authentic cuisine is localised in the past, and real foodstuffs in Armenia.

For most of my Armenian informants going to Armenian restaurants was not an everyday practice, nor an exotic one. Most often their reason for going there was their non-Armenian friends' interest in Armenian cooking:

I've taught all my friends to like Armenian cooking... I found an Armenian café on Moskovsky Prospekt... [AFM SPb: Interview 6: f., 40, teacher, migrated from Gyumri in the 1980s].

Another reason is to meet people from their own circle. For example, one of my informants told me, that for gatherings of the whole extended family they go to a restaurant, since none of them has a home big enough to contain them all. For the sake of economy they go to the one where they know the people who work there, and this happens to be a restaurant owned by Armenians [AFM SPb: Interview 7: f., 50, beautician, an Armenian from Baku, migrated from Yerevan in the 1990s]. Events organised by the Armenian diaspora often take place in restaurants (New Year, Genocide Memorial Day, Armenian beauty contests, and so on). The main location for such events in St Petersburg (which may be advertised over social networks

¹ <http://traveltipz.ru/trips/restaurants/id/11903_otzyvy-u-gagika-saint-petersburg-russia>.

² <<http://www.amrots.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

³ <<http://kilikia.spb.ru/>> (last accessed 28.10.2014).

and for which tickets are sold to those who wish to attend) is the Amrots¹ [AFM SPb: Diary 15 May 2016: f., 30, anthropologist, migrated from Yerevan in the 2010s].

Replying to the question why she would go to an Armenian restaurant, one informant supposed that she might do so for the sake of foodstuffs from Armenia. The restaurant makes them relatively more accessible: there is no need to fly to Yerevan and back [AFM SPb: Interview 1: f., 40, scientist, migrated from Yerevan at the end of the 1980s]. It may thus be asserted that for an Armenian, going to an Armenian restaurant in St Petersburg is to some extent based on Armenian self-identification.

It would be interesting here to recount the words of an informant who compared restaurants in Yerevan with the Amrots and the Erivan. The Amrots reminded her of those restaurants which were situated as a rule on the outskirts of Yerevan and intended for weddings, wakes, school-leaving celebrations and similar banquets, with a fairly typical menu. If it were transported to Yerevan, the Amrots would hardly be considered an ethnic restaurant: it would be a 'typical' restaurant in Armenia. It became Armenian in St Petersburg, and strengthened its position by becoming the place where various events among the diaspora took place, a space 'for Armenians who want to spend time together'.

The Erivan is a completely different sort of establishment. It fulfils representative functions (its owner was for a long time the president of the Armenian community in St Petersburg), and this is where influential visitors are invited, not to the Amrots. If the Erivan were in Yerevan, it would most likely be in the centre of the city, and would continue to be regarded as ethnic, but would hardly be used for 'ritual' purposes at all [AFM SPb: Diary 15 May 2016: f., 30, anthropologist, migrated from Yerevan in the 2010s]. The paradox is that the category of 'ethnic restaurant' corresponds best to those businesses that are orientated towards the 'ethnic other', while those 'others' are inclined to look for authenticity in ethnic restaurants in the extent to which they are orientated towards 'their own people'.

I was surprised that 'their own people', evaluating their 'own', did not criticise Armenian restaurants for a lack of authenticity, as might have been expected. After all, *khashlama* at a restaurant will never be the same as it is at home. How can this be explained?

¹ According to the same informant, the Amrots is the preferred meeting-place for Armenians from Yerevan / Armenia, and is not frequented by the old Armenian community of St Petersburg, nor by those from Georgia, Karabakh, etc. The Armenians from Tbilisi meet in some other restaurants, notably the Urartu near the Frunzenskaya Metro Station; those from Baku go to Azerbaijani restaurants such as the Staryy Baku near the Sennaya Ploshchad [AFM SPb: Diary 17 May 2016: f., 30, anthropologist, migrated from Yerevan in the 2010s].

As a rule, the fear that the restaurant is not ‘genuine’ enough appears when practices change and there is a sense of loss. My informants (who are mostly immigrants¹) evidently do not have any sense of a loss of Armenian culinary traditions; they follow them alongside others and are not worried about any ‘only correct’ cooking methods, realising that everyone cooks in their own way. What the chefs produce is familiar to them. Although it is not familiar to people who do not come from Armenia, it is legitimised for insiders by the expert knowledge of the chefs of Hayastan.² In other words, Armenian restaurants correspond to the expectations of my Armenian informants.

In the end, the sphere of eating is not so significant³ for the process of Armenian self-identification as history, religion and language, and most importantly, it seems, it can easily be supplemented or reinstated. In this respect the Armenians are different from the Georgians, for whom their national cuisine is an object of particular pride, understood as the gift of the Georgian land,⁴ and the Azerbaijanis, who make more use of their cuisine to represent their ethnic culture (consider, for example, the magazines *Yerevan* and *Baku*: the first has no culinary section, the second does).⁵ This may explain why there are fewer Armenian restaurants than Georgian and Azerbaijani ones.

Conclusion

In this article, based on research on Armenian restaurants in St Petersburg and on interviews with Armenians living in St Petersburg about Armenian cuisine, I have examined what makes an ethnic restaurant ethnic, what can be learned about ethnicity from such

¹ Compare the way immigrant restaurant owners stressed the adaptation of the dishes in their ethnic cafés to local tastes, while those born in Canada insisted on the authentic culinary traditions of their historic homelands [Turgeon, Pastinelli 2002: 256, 257].

² Hayastan is the term for Armenia in the Armenian language, cf. Suomi among Finns [Eds.].

³ Some informants do not even consider that Armenian cuisine is suitable for restaurants, particularly in comparison with Georgian cuisine.

⁴ This understanding on the part of the Georgians is probably derived from the folk tale about how God gave the Georgians the land that he had been keeping for himself: ‘When God was distributing the land to the peoples, the Georgians were late and arrived after the distribution was finished. “What have you done? Why are you late?” asked the Almighty. “We have been drinking wine, drinking to you,” replied the Georgians (“farmers” in translation). Then God said, “I will give you the lands that I have kept for myself.”’ The guides tell everyone this legend on their first arrival in Georgia [Kovalchuk 2008].

⁵ Victor Schnirelmann writes in his *Memory Wars* that ‘for a long time both the constantly waged war on Islam and the Soviet authorities’ mistrust of the Turkic peoples excluded their religious and linguistic adherence from those foundations on which the Azerbaijanis could build their ethnic identity. Therefore the territorial factor acquired a hypertrophied significance for them as the only criterion which allowed them to proclaim their separateness’ [Schnirelmann 2003: 189–90]. It seems to me that another consequence of the limited resources for constructing an Azerbaijani identity was the attention paid to traditional culture. The folkloric quality of their ethnicity was a sort of compensation, and food fits into this paradigm very well.

restaurants, and how the representation of Armenian cuisine in Armenian restaurants relates to narratives of Armenian informants.

The evidence overall suggests that it is difficult to determine what type of restaurant can be identified as Armenian, since the criteria used for the denomination of a restaurant as being ethnic are ambiguous. The definition ‘Armenian restaurant’ largely owes its existence to the presence of the category of ‘national cuisine’. The parameters according to which this cuisine is imagined are common to the majority of cuisines (starters, soups, desserts, etc.), and its realisation follows ideas of ‘their own’ dishes. The representation of ethnicity is achieved primarily in a discursive way (from the restaurant’s names and the dishes they serve to extensive annotations in the menu: they allow one to form an idea of the basic topics of the Armenian nationalist discourse).

Neither owners and staff, nor the visitors of the relevant ethnic group, nor indeed interior style or music are considered to be necessary elements for the restaurant to be recognised as an ethnic one. However, their presence is taken into account when judgments are reached on its authenticity or inauthenticity — which are universal concepts when the degree of tradition and ethnicity of various manifestations of culture, especially the food served in the restaurant, are assessed. The Armenian restaurants in St Petersburg meet the expectations of the Armenian community, therefore ‘their own people’ do not raise the question of the restaurants’ ‘authenticity’; this category is relevant mostly for customers ‘from outside’.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my colleagues Iqbal Abilov, Dmitriy Baranov, Evgenia Zakharova and Evia Hovhannisyan for their help in writing this article.

Abbreviations

AFM Armenia — Author’s fieldwork materials, collected during an expedition by the Russian Museum of Ethnography to the Republic of Armenia, October–November 2010.

AFM SPb — Author’s fieldwork materials, collected in St Petersburg, 2007–15.

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Translated by Ralph Cleminson