

Title: Gender and the Representation of Ethnic Identity: Ukrainian-ness on the Canadian Praries  
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Abstract:

As Mehta and Belk point out, “there is little need to represent the country of origin when one lives there.” For immigrants, representing ethnicity is another matter. John Lie argues that Diasporas are more nationally conscious than citizens and, indeed, Ukrainians in Canada ascribe an almost sacred quality to being Ukrainian.

The objects that are most associated with Ukrainian identity are foods, embroidery, and pysanky (Easter eggs). Scholars have looked at the perception of emotionally significant objects (Stewart, Volkan, Belk, among others). The production of these objects has received less attention and the aspect of gender as regards production is virtually unexamined.

In the case of Ukrainian material in Canada, presentation to the general public takes the form of monumental objects created by men. These present a gentle femininity and an aggressive masculinity. Outside Canora, Saskatchewan, a huge statue of a woman dressed in Ukrainian costume and holding a bread on an embroidered rushnyk (ritual towel) welcomes visitors. In Mundare, the home of a renown meat plant, a huge statue of a sausage, painted red, looks like an erect phallus, if viewed from a certain angle. Vegreville’s statue is a huge metallic Easter egg, balanced on a fulcrum, which moves with the wind. Since, in Ukrainian, one of the euphemisms for testicles is eggs, it, too, can be seen as masculine display.

Presentation within the community is more complex. Most items are created by women and appropriated by men. Embroideries, foods, and pysanky are not presented in a gendered fashion. Women make these items and they are then disposed of by men who use them for fund-raising and other community-oriented purposes.

This paper proposes to examine issues of gender related to ethnic identity objects.