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## Young, educated and shopping. Clothing, consumption and difference among the educated young in Krasnodar, Russian Federation

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This paper deals with questions of social inequalities in the post-socialist Russian Federation and how young, educated people (university students or young graduates) position themselves within these inequalities. It also addresses how the social stratification of the contemporary Russian Federation affects their actions as consumers. The way they dress and shop for clothes can be seen in a relation to the way they position themselves in society – as intelligent, creative, modest and so on. Their images of other social groups such as ‘the rich’ or ‘the average’, and others, is something they have in mind when putting together their own outfits or choosing places to shop for clothes.

Key words: Shopping, Consumption, Clothing, Russia, Youth, Education, Social Inequalities

### Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were tremendous changes that influenced all aspects of everyday life. In the post-socialist Russian Federation, very important changes occurred in the area of social stratification and in consumer infrastructure and behavior. In the Soviet Union, social and economic equality had been propagated. The changes of the early 1990s led to the development of a small group of *nouveaux riches* while the majority of citizens became impoverished. This development was seen as unfair, as people were used to worshipping the notion of equality. Regarding consumption, the early years of the post-socialist transformation were marked by the unavailability of goods for most people. At this time it was the ‘New Russians’ who had access to the newly emerging consumption infrastructure and who were seen as irrational, mindless consumers by the rest of the Russian population (Humphrey 2002: XVII; Althanns 2009: 116; Hann 2002: 15). Only in the early 2000s did shopping malls and shopping streets become available to a wider group of consumers, but the notion of unfairness had not disappeared from public discourse yet. This article deals with consumption patterns and social stratification from the viewpoint of highly educated young Russians. It is based on the results of my Master’s-degree thesis *Clothing, Consumption and Difference* (Reiter 2012),<sup>1</sup> which resulted from my field research in 2009/2010 in the city of Krasnodar, in the Russian Federation. The main question I try to answer in this article is how young, highly educated Russians define and differentiate themselves from other social groups through their clothing and shopping practices. How do they shop and dress? What are the main socio-economic groups they try to differentiate themselves from? How do they describe those groups and their dress and consumption patterns? How do they put their own dressing and shopping behavior and their own opinions on these topics into relation with those that they assume these other groups have?

Analyzing clothing is an ideal means of showing patterns of differentiation in this context. I chose this particular aspect of material and social life in order to outline where those young educated Russians try to position themselves in society, and because, as other authors have mentioned before, clothing is very closely tied to people’s self-perception (Crane/Bovone 2006: 321). Furthermore, it is worn on the surface, which means that other people have an unhindered view of it. This is why people base their choices of clothing on judgements they

expect from others when they are dressed in a certain way. Moreover, status is commonly displayed through clothing (Schneider 2006: 13; Woodward 2005: 21).

As a sample I chose people with higher education (students and recent graduates) currently living in Krasnodar who were born around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. People of that age have practically no memory of the Soviet regime. This makes them an ideal group for observing the continuities deriving from Soviet living conditions and propaganda which are still present in people's minds – as others also have argued before (e.g. Oushakine 2000: 98f). The group of interviewees consisted of highly educated Russians of age 17 to 27. Most of the students and graduates were introduced to me by university teachers and friends. I also got to know some of them randomly through spending time on the university campus and at a language school. However, I made sure that different fields of study and different social backgrounds were represented within my sample. As the fieldwork was conducted over a period of 11 months, I was able to collect very detailed information about all of my interview partners. This research consisted of semi-structured interviews and informal methods of data collection such as going on shopping trips with interviewees or simply spending time with them on the streets or at their homes. The combination of formal and informal investigation methods is very common in the field of social and cultural anthropology. Interviews with 22 students and graduates were based on questions about identity, position in society, and shopping and clothing preferences. The interviews usually lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. Each of the applied methods was equally important for successful data collection, interpretation and analysis. Particularly the informal part of the research made it possible to gain a very intimate knowledge of strategies and attitudes concerning clothing and consumption, as well as of general living strategies of the students and graduates. It also offered insights that helped me in developing the interview concept. The sample for the informal research was larger than the one used for the interviews. Students tended to bring friends to the shopping appointments we made, and I could thereby discuss related topics with many other individuals who differed from the interviewees in age, education and/or ethnic identity. This strategy was very useful for collecting information on wider perceptions of clothing and shopping current in public discourse. As my interview partners knew that I was collecting data on shopping and clothing, some of them frequently 'updated me' on their recent purchases.

The field research was conducted in the city of Krasnodar, located in the south of Russia in the northern Caucasus. Officially, Krasnodar has about 850,000 inhabitants (Website of the City Administration of Krasnodar and City Duma of Krasnodar). Moscow and the Russian regions have an ambivalent relationship. While some people from Moscow say they perceive Krasnodar as the periphery of Russia (some of my interviewees from Krasnodar did too, in fact), a lot of people from Krasnodar see Moscow as inhabited by rich people of weak morals. Krasnodar is represented by its inhabitants as a regional centre with one of the most important universities of Southern Russia. As the ethnic diversity in Krasnodar and the influx of population from inside and outside of Russia is very high, this view seems justified. However, though the city of Krasnodar resembles an urban center in many respects, there are not excessively many possibilities there for spending free time, particularly on the limited budgets of most students and new graduates.

The paper is structured as follows. In 'Social background, education and attitudes towards gender roles' I present detailed information on the students' family backgrounds, university studies and opinions regarding gender roles, sexual orientation and marital age. In 'Economic situation' I go on to discuss the students' socio-economic situation and position in society. In 'Strategies for "saving"' I discuss the impact of limited budgets on shopping behavior. In 'Being like everybody else or different', the division of Russian youth into 'alternative' and 'normal' lifestyles is discussed with examples provided by my interview partners. In the final parts of this paper, 'The question of where to shop' and 'How do they and don't they dress', I present in detail the clothing and shopping strategies of my interviewees. I show how clothing and shopping provide options for positioning themselves in society. In this way I show the relation of clothing and shopping to the construction of a personal self and a kind of 'group

identity' (as educated youths), but also its importance in the construction and differentiation of 'anti-groups' (for instance 'the rich' or *bogatye*).

### Social background, education and attitudes towards gender roles

In discussions about taste and distinction, it is fruitful to consider Pierre Bourdieu's work 'Distinctions' (1982). Though Daniel Miller (1998: 140) and Christopher Tilley (2006: 68) describe his concepts as too static and therefore unfit for describing the complexities of social realities, for my research Bourdieu's statement has proved especially valuable that, to understand people's different lifestyles and the evolution of differences in taste, it is important to take into account their social origins and education. Therefore I adopted Bourdieu's focus on the significance of social origins and education for economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1982: 145-146, 194) and for the formation of the 'systems of dispositions' that shape the particular 'habitus' of a person (Bourdieu 1982: 171 and 405). Looking at these two factors made it possible for me to comprehend differences within the interview group.

What are the social backgrounds and educational choices of the students and graduates in my sample? All of them have either a working-class background, come from families who run small or middle-size businesses, or from families of teachers and medical doctors. Those with an academic background are often called the 'mass intelligentsia' (Patico 2005: 481 – for this term she refers to Vladimir Shlapentokh (1999)). In my field research I noticed that particularly students whose parents belonged among this group shared very similar world views and tastes, regardless of their actual subject of study at university. Most have a very strong desire to see themselves as 'cosmopolitans' or 'Europeans'. The students and young graduates were then specializing in a broad variety of subjects (accounting, management, economy, psychology, education, physics, design, German, English or Russian philology, East-Asian studies, and law). Some wanted to graduate in two different fields in order to improve their chances of getting a well-paid job. The most common combination was economics or law with a foreign language. Certain students said that their parents had forced them into choosing their particular major field. This was mainly stated by those studying economics, accounting and management, but also by one of the language students. In some cases this means that they were not really 'into' their subjects, but were focused more on other aspects of life. On the other hand, some were very happy with the guidance of their parents, and worked very hard to achieve good marks. All Russian universities offer tuition-free studies to a limited number of students. Students applying for these study-spots have to go through a selection process in which their previous school grades and the incomes of their parents are taken into account. Those who don't qualify for one of these spots can still study at the university as long as they can afford the tuition fees. One interviewee who did not qualify for a cost-free spot because of her father's high income, said that she hid this fact from others and let them think she occupied a free spot in order to avoid drawing attention to the fact she could afford tuition fees, which might have caused envy.

Various opinions on gender roles, sexual orientation, family and marriage were freely given by the interviewees and often also discussed in day-to-day conversation outside the formal interviews. While the positions of students and graduates are divided on the issue of the 'best' age at which to marry and have children, for most of them it is a very important question. Traveling around Russia and talking to people on the train or just in everyday conversation, I frequently heard the opinion that everyone, particularly women, should marry by the age of 25. It is common to finish university by the age of 21 or 22, and I met people who married during their last years at university. Marrying and having children before the age of 25 is a very important ideal for a lot of people. However, not all agree about it and there are many who complain about this attitude, with some who want to marry only later in life accusing those following this particular marriage pattern of being 'typically Russian' or 'backward'. Among the interviewed students and graduates only one was already married.

This is surely uncommon within the context of Russian society (and since that time additional interviewees have married). But in fact there is a tendency among those who consider themselves to be especially 'European' or 'international' to marry later than those who don't. Choosing the right age to marry and raise children is important to the heterosexual members of the interview group. To the homosexual students and graduates within my sample the main challenge is leading a life that lets them live out their sexuality without being recognized (because of the strong homophobic tendencies in Russian society). Clothing in these cases seems to have the function of 'hiding' one's sexual orientation. About half the students and young graduates have very negative or rather negative attitudes towards homosexuality, while the other half has positive or very positive attitudes towards it.

It is important here to elaborate on gender-specific expectations regarding appearance. Most interviewees stated the female body should be very slim and tender, while the male body should be slim but also muscular and athletic. Most of the female students and graduates were constantly trying to lose body weight, as were some of the male students and graduates. Pressure to dress in a style in accordance with gender norms is high. Male interviewees with long hair said that they feel discriminated against and in fact I once witnessed a security guard make insulting comments on the long hair of one of my interviewees. Female interviewees said they felt under pressure to lose weight or dress more 'fashionably'. One young (in my opinion slim) woman for instance noted that her grandmother and mother urged her to lose weight, while another complained about other students' commenting that she dressed like an 'old woman' – not fashionably enough.

## Economic situation

The economic situation of the students and graduates is one of the main factors through which social inequalities are experienced. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the 'mass intelligentsia' (mainly teachers and medical doctors) lost status and suffered declines in income (Patico 2005: 481). Many members of the mass intelligentsia who had formerly worked as school or university teachers or medical doctors – but also former employees in industrial sectors – moved to the private sector and service industries in order to maintain their standard of living (Mrowczynski 2010: 60-62). People who studied economics and law can still relatively easily earn a medium-to-high-level income. The fact that economics graduates can more easily get well-paid jobs disturbs many social and cultural scientists. Decisive here is that in Soviet times people involved in trade were called 'speculators' and were seen as filling their own pockets with something that should belong to the collective (Humphrey 2002: 43f). Having a higher education does not necessarily mean a higher income nowadays, which is the reason why many young people choose to work rather than study (Pilkington 1996: 204). To a certain extent this gives those going to university (particularly if they study languages, arts or social science) the feeling of having the higher moral ground, because they do not make life choices based on materialist considerations. Especially the nouveaux riches, or nowadays simply 'the rich', who developed as a social group after the collapse of the Soviet Union are still seen by many as following the wrong set of values.

The students and young graduates in my interview group have very low or moderate incomes, depending in amount on their own or their parents' education and employment status. The stipends students can get in Russia are very low (even for a tuition-free spot), so most students are supported by their parents. Some students try to earn additional income with a part-time job such as giving language lessons or working in shops. The amount of money students are able to earn or receive from their parents varies greatly. While some are barely able to satisfy their basic needs, others have financial support that enables them shop frequently without worrying about prices. (For a detailed portrait of Russian students' living conditions see Eilmsteiner-Saxinger 2004). The decrease in social welfare provision after the collapse of the Soviet Union has increased the danger of impoverishment (Treadwell/Pridemore 2004: 466). The crisis that developed in 2009 greatly affected many of

my interviewees. Those self-employed as language tutors felt a decline in the number of their pupils, since people are less able to spend money on language courses than before the crisis. As one interviewee put it: 'In former times I used to have money, but no time at all. (...) Nowadays I have time, but no money. I don't have enough students'. (Julija, 15.01.2010).

Part-time and summer jobs are an important issue if they are *po-professii*, that is, related to somebody's type of degree or studies. Most such jobs are not. As there is a strong demand for language tutors, a lot of students and graduates work in this field teaching English, German or Spanish at language schools or privately. Most of them are quite satisfied with these jobs because the earnings are adequate, though many do face not having enough pupils for a proper income. Other graduates who work as translators or even managers for private companies are generally satisfied with their incomes as well. Talking to those who haven't started working yet makes it clear that work as a schoolteacher, in state universities or in local administration is by contrast a very unpopular choice, because state-owned 'companies' pay very low wages. One PhD student in physics at the University of Krasnodar stated that, though science was one of his main interests in life, that he would have to try to improve his income by taking an additional job in the private sector. Among the recent graduates some were unemployed simply because of the generally bad employment situation in Krasnodar.

Most students and young graduates feel they occupy a kind of a middle position in society, being neither impoverished on the one hand, nor one of the nouveaux riches on the other, who are often seen as not deserving the money they have and not educated enough to spend it in a cultured manner. Only a few of the students explicitly describe themselves as 'middle class'. But also those who do not use that term feel the need to distance themselves from the 'rich' as well as from the 'impoverished' because of the wide range of negative connotations attributed to both these terms. There has been a lively debate on the question of whether it is even possible to speak of a 'middle class' in the post-socialist Russian Federation. It is widely agreed that this presumed middle class is in any case unstable and that belonging to it does not necessarily mean a financially carefree life (Mrowczynski 2010: 36-41). Still, the educational level of the students and young graduates gives them the feeling that they are part of something like a middle class, even though some of them hardly earn more than those they perceive as impoverished.

### Strategies for 'saving'

With the limited means of most of my interviewees, most have several strategies for saving money – or at least, to have the feeling of saving money. The desire to save is not limited to those who can hardly afford to buy new clothing at all, but is shared by those who are dressed in retail-brand clothing and buy new clothes very often. All interviewees in my sample try to save money, but they do so in very different ways. Daniel Miller (1998) shows in his *A Theory of Shopping*, that saving on purchases plays a crucial role in the shopping experience of most people and does not necessarily mean spending less money. He then states several ways of 'saving', most of which can also be found amongst young educated people in Krasnodar. The two strategies mentioned most by my interview partners are shopping when there is a 'sale' (*rasprodasha*) in western retail-brand stores, and shopping in 'discounts' such as 'Semeinij Cenopad' or 'Obnovka'. To buy only when there is a sale, is a strategy preferred by those who like to shop in western retail-brand stores because these stores are the only ones that offer seasonal sales. As a lot of students like to go shopping (or at least walk around in shopping malls or in the city centre) at least once a week, they are very well informed about the current range of products in certain shops and about prices. When it comes to sales, they can only hope that their favorite items are not sold out yet, in the hope of being able to acquire an otherwise unaffordable item. While this strategy enables them to buy very fashionable clothing (often referred to as 'European style') in more expensive stores, the other strategy – shopping at discount-stores – makes it possible to buy more of average style clothing without having to wait for a specific sale. As one young woman put it:

*There is a shop close to the market – Semeinij Cenopad. They have a good selection of items and everything is low priced. I like it that everything is so affordable but the quality is good. (...) I always take 1000, 1500 or 2000 rubles with me and with that I buy as many things as I can get. With 2000 rubles I can afford to buy a lot (Julija, 15.01. 2010).*

While in other shops she would have the feeling of being able to afford only one item – or nothing at all – shopping in low-price shops gives her the feeling she can afford anything she wants. Furthermore, shopping there eliminates the need to compare oneself to wealthier shoppers, because most customers in low-price shops also have only limited money for clothing. Although she has to work hard at comparatively low wages, shopping in discount-stores gives her the feeling of being able to spend money freely, which makes her feel good.

Spending less is not the only saving strategy. Another way is buying very high quality clothing at a higher price in the hope that the items can be worn longer than cheaper clothing. At this point I should mention that nearly everyone I went shopping with or who gave me an interview were very concerned with the quality of items they bought. Before making a purchase, most of them would actually check the garment for flaws such as loose seams or stains on the fabric. This may have to do with the situation immediately post-USSR, when goods sold at low prices on street markets were often of worse quality (Auzan 1995: 78-80). Still another strategy is wearing new and fashionable items only for ‘going out’, so that it takes longer for them to get worn out. Then one woman related how as a student she tried to save money by sewing her own garments. Having now finished her studies and being supported by her husband, she continues to do so, but it is no longer a strategy for saving, as she now spends more money for sewing materials than she would for ready-made clothing.

The interviewees often expressed the view that clothing prices in Krasnodar and Russian prices were very high compared to prices in other countries (such as Germany or the US) where, according to them, prices are better matched to average incomes. While shopping, many of my interviewees made observations such as ‘I have seen this exact item in Sweden/Germany/the US for only half the money’. My own impression was much the same: While food is noticeably cheaper than in most West-European countries I have been to, clothing prices are about the same or even higher. Especially people who had been abroad complained about this, adding that they felt cheated by businesses who charged them more than they charged shoppers in other countries.

Although there are many second-hand shops around the town (very often advertising ‘European Fashion’), almost none of my interviewees said they shopped there. Only two people said that they liked going to second-hand shops. One of them did so in order to spend less money on clothing. The other – a student of arts and design – went there for items to create a highly personalized style. So buying second-hand can have various motives – to spend less or find unique items no one else has. Most young adults with higher education I talked to nevertheless prefer to buy new items of clothing, either at outdoor markets or in shops of different price ranges.

## Being like everybody else - or different

The interviewees are strongly divided on the issue of wishing to be like everybody else or wishing to be ‘different’. Elena Omeltschenko (2005) describes a division in Russian youth into two major groups: the ‘alternatives’ and the ‘normals’, partially corresponding to the classical left/right political divide. Omeltschenko divides both groups further into more moderate and more extremist subgroups, referring to the more extreme subgroups among the ‘alternatives’ as the *neformaliy* or ‘informals’, who she says include youth cultures such as ‘Punks’ or ‘Emos’. The extreme groups among the ‘normals’ are called *Gopniki*, whom she describes as aggressive youngsters often associated with petty crime. Some of the students and young graduates in my sample could potentially belong to the more moderate subgroups on both sides. Some of them, however, used to dress in various *neformaliy* styles when they

were younger. One young woman used to dress in 'punk' style and one young man as a 'rocker'. Now around age 22, they say that they have grown out of these styles and want to appear more grown up and less radical in their opinions and their clothing. The consensus among most of the interviewees was that members of youth culture groups are 'too radical' and not really interesting individuals. Most interviewees prefer to see themselves as intelligent, educated and broadly interested people who don't want to be associated with members of subcultures, whom they generally accuse of having one-sided world views. But some of them are interested in Russian folklore, the Middle Ages and pagan practices, and try to include ethnic Russian elements (such as wooden jewelry, materials like wool or linen or ornamented garments) in their everyday dressing styles. Some engage in historical re-enactments and sew their own clothing for these occasions. But just like other students who do not really belong to a 'subculture', they see themselves as intelligent, educated and open-minded as anyone.

For the students and graduates the question of where they position themselves in society is very important. In conversations one of the main issues seemed to be the implicit decision to be 'like everybody else' – or – different from 'everybody else', i.e. different from the 'typical Russian youth' or 'typical Russian'. Those who favor being 'like everybody else' would just say that they are 'normal' people, not trying to be noticed by others. Researchers have found that Russian youth in post-Soviet times characterize the 'typical Soviet person' as 'average' in many respects (Oushakine 2000: 108-111). When the interviewees state that they are 'normal' or 'average' people, I would however not interpret this as their seeing themselves as 'Soviet-type' people, but as expressing a desire for a certain conformism. Others who preferred to differentiate themselves from the 'average' did this through mentioning their opinions and views, as well as through positioning themselves as more European or cosmopolitan than other Russians. It is noticeable that a lot of those who see themselves as different have parents who are teachers, academics or medical doctors. They shop in Western retail-brand stores more often than others and think they dress in 'European' style. Whether they want to be 'like everybody else' or not, all of my interviewees still want to be recognized by others as 'normal' members of society through their visual appearance. All of them stressed that they do not wish to show off to others through buying or wearing expensive things. Showing off is associated with materialism and therefore is the kind of behavior they like to ascribe to wealthy 'others'.

The interviewed students and graduates articulated strong aversions to the dress habits of 'others', whose world-view, style and behavior they dislike. As my research ultimately shows, the articulation of and aversion to 'anti-groups' plays a very important part in the daily shopping and dressing routines of the students and graduates. This is strongly reminiscent of Mary Douglas' (1996: 63) argument that 'the cause of rejection is that the person does not want to be associated with another who would definitely like to be seen with these shoes on, or this tie or scarf'. When my interviewees explained why they disliked a particular style or garment, they almost always had in mind an image of people or groups who are generally thought to dress that way. These connotations do not necessarily have to be accurate, but they still strongly affect the dress strategies adopted by students and graduates.

### The question of where to shop

As Krasnodar does not offer many attractions for young people, the question of where to spend time is always particularly relevant. There are cinemas, theatres, ice-skating rinks, shopping malls and cafés around town, but mostly concentrated around the center and some of the main streets. All of the interviewees enjoy going to these places, the frequency depending mainly on the amount of money they have available. But they all have other ways of spending their free time which do not require spending a lot of or any money. Most of the interviewees show great interest in the acquisition of foreign languages, on which they spend a lot of time and energy. Nevertheless, some hobbies also involve expenses, such as buying

musical instruments to play in a band or buying fabric to sew clothing. Without spending money, time can be spent in parks, in the yards between apartment buildings, in the city center, in parents' or friends' apartments. As the rents for apartments are very high for average incomes in Russia, students tend to live with their parents if these live close enough to the institutions they attend. In Krasnodar it is very common to stroll around the city-center areas with friends for hours, even in winter when it is really cold. This includes walking up and down the main street 'Krasnaja', discussing current topics and joking around, warming up in shops or in the shopping mall 'Krasnaja Gallery'. The shopping malls – as in the West – are consumer spaces on the one hand, but on the other they are constantly used as socializing spaces by people warming up or just passing time. In Krasnodar there are three main shopping malls (in the north, south, and middle of town) and the central shopping street 'Krasnaja'. For clothing there also is a big outdoor market called the 'Veshevoj' market. Young people in Krasnodar stress the difference between the outdoor market and the shops in malls or along the shopping streets. The question of where to shop – to them – is a very important one and highly charged with choices of identity. Most prefer the shopping malls and shops along Krasnaja Street instead of the outdoor market because they see this way of going shopping as the more modern and European way of acquisition (something also noticeable to others, e.g. Andrusz (2008: 24)). Very few of my interviewees criticized this preference for shopping malls as the mindless imitation of western patterns of lifestyle and consumption. The outdoor market is seen as the cheaper option for clothing, but a less fashionable one. My own observation is that at the open-air market you can find a wide range of commodities at different price-levels. It is also perfectly possible to purchase there 'European-style' clothing for about the same price as in the shops – but it is simply not considered a modern way of shopping. When asked about the market, the students and graduates often complained of the crowds and the inconvenience of shopping there, for instance because of the lack of changing rooms. Those who prefer the shops and shopping malls see the market as an uncivilized place. Some mentioned a fear of petty crime such as pick pocketing. None of my interviewees could name an actual example for this, but I assume that the reason for their fear could be the fact that lower-ranking members of mafia-like groups that often control outdoor markets in Russia are also visible there (Humphrey 2002: 61). Another reason for the preference of most interview partners for the commercial streets and shopping centers is that groups of friends or family members, particularly female, often end up in cafes after looking around the stores. The outdoor market does not offer such luxuries: it is a place for seeking a particular item, but never for strolling around and hanging out with friends.

### How do they and don't they dress?

How do the students and graduates from Krasnodar actually like to dress? Almost all interviewees have some garments they refer to as 'casual style' (some call it *sportivnij* and others *molodjoshnij* style, which means for young people, sporty or youthful style), including but not limited to jeans, cargo-pants, less elegant skirts and dresses, pullovers, and cardigans for everyday wear. Such items of dress, in different price ranges and more or less fashionable, are for wear at university, when meeting friends, strolling around town or otherwise spending free time. For 'official' occasions, such as going to the theatre, to work or attending conferences, nearly all of the interviewees keep at least one outfit they classify as belonging to a 'classical' or 'official style'. There are different degrees and perceptions of 'official'. Some students or graduates may refer to black cargo-pants as 'official', while others would classify them as 'casual'. A certain number of students would only wear highly elegant suits or costumes for 'official' occasions. Not everybody likes this 'official' style. A few students said they felt 'overdressed' wearing suits or elegant dresses. About half of the women show a high preference for 'romantic' and 'feminine' clothing, which would include dresses and skirts, but also ruffles or other ornate additions to the garment. Others completely dislike dressing in this 'romantic' way, preferring the simpler, fashionable 'European' style, as they

put it. Some of the women own very glittery garments and high heels for going out to clubs and discos, but none of them would wear these things in everyday use or to school or work events. But they accuse others of doing so. Nearly everyone prefers a highly gendered style for women. This means that female students and graduates wear tighter fitting clothes than males, and that women have the option of wearing skirts, dresses, glittery and ruffled garments.

Most students and graduates showed a preference for the term 'style' (*stil*), which they opposed to the term 'fashion' (*moda*). According to Arjun Appadurai (1986: 32) there are two different mechanisms that shape the development of taste. The first is 'fashion' – a rapidly changing sense of 'appropriateness' – while the second mechanism consists of a more slowly changing system of habits and conventions, which may be called 'style'. To dress according to the latest fashion is not only very expensive in a city like Krasnodar, where most incomes are far too low for buying Western brand clothes. It is also something which most of my interviewees would not enjoy doing, because it simply 'wouldn't be them'. People who follow fashion in their dress are seen as mindless 'followers of the herd' and as lacking personality. Still, a lot of the students and graduates try to acquire at least some fashionable pieces to update their wardrobe to current trends. The term 'style' has two aspects. One of these is very important for constructing identity, as most of my interviewees defined 'style' as something very personal, as the following interview excerpt shows:

*Stylish is when a person knows which clothes fit them, what colors look good on them, when they dress according to their body shape and when they feel comfortable in their clothes*  
(Nastja, 09.06.2010).

Besides this personal aspect of style, the term also includes the appropriateness of one's outfit to the constraints and requirements of society. As many interviewees put it, dressing 'stylishly' (*stilno*), means knowing which colors or pieces of clothing go together well in order to dress harmoniously and be recognized by others as an intelligent member of society, the latter being a central goal to achieve in their daily clothing practice. Nearly all of them said they wanted to be noticed by others as someone who 'knows how to dress', because according to them this is a personal quality that shows their level of education and intelligence. A useful term to be mentioned here is 'clothing competence' (Tranberg-Hansen 2005: 111) or as Appadurai (1986: 41) calls it 'the knowledge that goes into appropriately consuming the commodity'. Knowing how to dress properly is something most interviewees see as a rare quality lacked by many. The social group commonly referred to as 'the rich' are thought to buy expensive clothes without knowing how to combine them in either an appropriate or harmonious way, which means they lack 'clothing competence'. According to the students and graduates, people who don't know how to dress in a 'stylish' way include not only 'the rich', but people from the countryside, and the absolutely impoverished. Those interviewees born in the countryside themselves but living the city during their educational career felt the need especially to differentiate themselves from 'country folk'. 'Not caring what one wears' is seen as synonymous with 'not caring for personal development' and 'lacking goals in life'. Interestingly, wearing sports clothes for everyday occasions is also considered highly unsophisticated by the people I interviewed. Dressing this way is associated with petty crime. In the 1980s sports clothes were desirable and fashionable, an example of how long-term shifts in society and in fashion can affect the classification of garments or groups of garments by the same person at different times, as discussed by Kopytoff (2001: 22) and Appadurai (1986: 34). For the students and graduates it is very important to dress appropriately in different situations, which means that they want to have more or less 'official' outfits for university lessons and work, and 'casual' outfits for meeting friends, or at least one 'appropriate' outfit for each special occasion that can occur in their lives. This is especially hard to achieve for those who don't earn much yet and aren't fully supported by their parents (mostly young people who teach language lessons, or whose parents live in the countryside, and have to pay for their own accommodations in the city). One young woman

from the countryside who graduated in English and German in Krasnodar, said that she only went shopping when her garments or shoes were so worn that she absolutely needed to buy new ones. She added that, even then, she couldn't always buy something new immediately. For instance, if her jeans got torn she would start wearing her 'official' black pants for 'casual' occasions as well, even though then she did not feel dressed 'appropriately'. Not having enough money to buy new clothes made her feel ashamed. She also said that she did not feel 'herself' in these clothes. As to shopping, she and others had a very difficult task – finding items that are affordable, of proper quality, that match their own taste and personality and match the items they already own to ensure an overall 'stylish' outfit. In her paper *Looking good – feeling right*, Sophie Woodward (2005: 22) describes three women and their daily dressing practices, involving explanations of why they combined this or that item with another. She found that the women, while getting dressed and combining garments, reflected on what others might think of them and whom they might be taken for in a particular outfit. Considering this, the importance Krasnodar students and graduates place on being dressed properly and appropriately for each particular occasion might be understood in the context of a similar desire not to be mistaken for poor or country people.

As mentioned, many students and graduates emphasized that they like to dress in a 'European' way. This nearly always went hand-in-hand with the notion of 'Europeanness' in world-views and mannerisms. Patico and Caldwell (2002: 290) write that 'the concrete qualities that consumers ascribe to these commodities are informed by – and in turn inform – the types of selves that people construct'. This means that in order to recognize themselves (and be recognized by others) as 'European' they need to choose garments and a lifestyle they consider 'European'. Furthermore, this way of dressing and 'being' is put in a kind of opposition to 'Russianness' or 'typically Russian' ways of dressing and 'being', as the following example from the interviews shows:

*I am a very European person, which differentiates me from other Russians. That's something other foreigners have told me before. I travel a lot and I am a cosmopolitan. My thoughts differ from those of most Russians, I love to communicate and I can connect with a lot of different people (Jana, 29.06.2010).*

What are examples of this 'European' style mentioned by the students and graduates? Different attributes are named by different students and graduates, but some of these recur. One supposedly 'European' characteristic of clothes is a kind of 'understatement' compared to 'glitteryness' they perceive as a typically 'Russian' aspect of clothing. Often 'European' style is described as highly 'elegant'. This may imply preferring silver jewelry over gold jewelry. To some European style means wearing not only fashionable, but also colourful, even some 'crazy' items. Very often the students would refer to certain brand names like 'Levis' jeans or 'Converse' sport shoes. While some perceive 'typical Russian' clothing as 'vulgar', 'European' clothing is never described with this particular attribute. At the time I conducted my field research, most of the interviewees interpreted the combination of casual jeans or skirts, Converse shoes, casual t-shirts or shirts with various prints and scarves (mainly loop scarves, but also others) as 'European'. This style was most likely derived from what retail-brand shops of West-European and American origin presented as current 'fashion' at that particular time. These and other brands symbolize a 'Western' lifestyle – or maybe a universal youth lifestyle, as in 1950s-Sweden when a refrigerator represented the 'American way of life' (Lövgren 1994: 60). To purchase these items the students need to spend more money than they would on 'average', less fashionable clothing. Buying items in so-called European style is something generally only those with higher incomes can afford. But not all the students and graduates with higher incomes actually stressed a preference for dressing in this European style. As mentioned before, especially those whose parents once belonged to the 'mass intelligentsia' felt the need to position themselves as 'European'. As this so-called European style is very often presented as the style of educated, creative and intelligent people, it might be a way these distinguish themselves from other people they would accuse of not

having interest in education and of pursuing only materialistic goals in life. In the interviews the students and graduates named certain groups as ‘materialistic’, ‘the rich’, ‘party people’, ‘country-folk’, ‘average people’ and ‘petty criminals’. Mary Douglas offers this model for interpreting accusations that others are too ‘materialistic’: ‘In a political context, the label ‘material’ becomes a criticism of holders of wealth and power. (...) Tension between material and spiritual values is always present’ (Douglas 1996: 25).

The former ‘mass intelligentsia’ as well as the ‘workers’ lost power and wealth after the collapse of the USSR. Formerly prestigious knowledge in fields such as literature or philosophy offers few benefits in the current Russian Federation. Education nowadays no longer guarantees the accumulation of income or status, which affects younger people’s life choices (Pilkington 1996: 204). Those who profited economically from the fall of the USSR (the ‘rich people’ or *Mažory*) are the targets of criticism, as are those who try to live the lifestyle of the ‘rich’ on the basis of a much more restrained income. The fact that both of these groups are associated with ‘glamorous’ clothing (Omeltschenko 2005: 3f; Gussarowa 2008: 5; Rudova 2008: 4) is perhaps an important reason most of my interviewees strongly emphasized that they never dress that way. This ‘glamorous’ style abhorred by most of my interviewees includes garments with glittery attachments or iridescent details. While some in fact do on occasion wear *some* ‘glittery’ garments, they still state that they don’t want to be associated with ‘glamorous’ style. I noticed that these students were often those really struggling in an economic sense. In their case wearing something ‘glittery’ might have the function of cheering them up with a change from their otherwise dreary everyday life. Menzel (2008: 16f) similarly explains the appeal of ‘glamour’ to those with little money or possibilities to move up in society. Accusations that others were ‘materialistic’ were expressed by nearly every interviewee, but this does not keep them from enjoying going shopping and buying new items. Material objects give them pleasure and most openly admit that consumption is very important to them. Nevertheless the students and graduates very often criticized *other* social groups or acquaintances for placing too much importance on consumption and ‘materialism’, which supposedly made them ‘superficial’. The following interview detail is very representative of how the students would talk about others:

*In Russia there is this group of people who only need material things. Their values are in whatever car they've just bought – superficial things. I think I'm very different from them* (Aleksander, 26.06.2010 – quotation freely translated by author).

In speaking like this, the students are very well in line with western traditions of thinking which describe people’s surfaces as not being a ‘real’ part of them. Daniel Miller discusses in this regard why studies of consumption and dress have been left out in the social sciences for such a long time:

*Since it is used as a covering or as a surface, clothing is easily characterized as intrinsically superficial. (...) We struggle with what might be called a depth ontology, a very specific Western idea of being, in which the real person, myself, is somehow deep inside me, while my surface is literally superficial, a slight transient aspect that is shallow, more contrived, somehow less real and certainly less important* (Miller 2005: 2f).

In the Soviet Union, whose leaders were obviously following the same traditions of thought, clothing and consumption were seen as superficial aspects of life which should not be too important to good Soviet citizens. Material culture was limited to meeting basic needs; everything else was seen as luxury (Althanns 2009: 173). Post USSR, people had to renegotiate the meaning of their own and other people’s activities, including acts of consumption and trade. In doing so, questions of morality were and still are very important (Patico 2009: 218f). My interviewees see their own buying, shopping and dressing habits as within ethical bounds because, they argue, they have many other interests in life. Quite often they compared other people – whose main interests in life they saw as limited to going

shopping and to discos – to themselves and their own richer interests such as cinema or theatre, music, science, traveling or learning languages. Those ‘others’ they consider to be only interested in clubs and shopping, mindless consumers following the wrong values in life, ‘shopaholics’, with some emphasizing that nowadays most people are ‘like that’, but that they are somehow an exception.

The emotion most frequently aroused against ‘the rich’ was a feeling of ‘unfairness’, because they were seen as having a comparatively easy life, spending much time on shopping and other activities my interviewees considered a waste. As to the lifestyle the students associate with being ‘rich’, some among the students and graduates didn’t underscore this unfairness aspect as much as did those defining themselves mainly through their education and internationalism. Instead, these expressed more a kind of envy, in the sense that they too would like to lead a life like ‘the rich’ – easygoing and characterized by visible consumption and recreational activities. One young woman studying accounting spends her spare time mostly in the shopping malls close to her home. She doesn’t enjoy this as much as she used to: with her income and interests, the possibilities in a city like Krasnodar are limited. To her, the ‘rich’ lifestyle seems very desirable, though difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, for most interviewees ‘the rich’ are an anti-group. Perceptions of the ‘nouveaux riches’ are thus highly emotionally charged in contemporary Russian society.

## Conclusion

Social and cultural anthropology can contribute to a better understanding of people’s everyday lives because of the detailed information it can provide through investigative methods that make it possible to get to know interviewees very well. Since the fall of the USSR there has been a differentiation in economic and social stratification in the new Russian Federation. In this paper I dealt with the topic of consumption and clothing practices among highly educated young people in the city of Krasnodar. The extent to which they engage in shopping activities differs highly, depending on their upbringing and social position, the kind of education they chose and what values in life they and their parents advocate. Most students and graduates see themselves as members of a ‘middle class’, even though some of them have very low incomes. The reason even the economically poor students and graduates consider themselves part of a ‘middle class’ is that their educational level differentiates them from others in society who also have very low incomes. It is clearly their own lower incomes (or that of their parents), that prevents them from belonging to ‘the rich’. However, as the social group of the rich in the public eye is widely imagined to be an uneducated, mindless, wasteful group of people, the students and graduates can consider themselves morally superior to them. Their clothing and consumption patterns play a very important role in constructing their position in society as educated people and members of the ‘middle class’. Their choice of ‘quality’ and ‘well-matched, understated clothes’ fits with their desire to be the educated middle class of the contemporary Russian Federation. Not to offend others by their clothing is very important to them and the fact that they do not want to position themselves above others who have less can be interpreted as a sign that they are unhappy with the huge social inequalities that derived from the fall of the old system. This does not mean that they themselves do not want to be consumers, spend time shopping or be able to buy new items: Some of the students and graduates actually do spend a lot of time in the shopping malls and main streets, in order putting together their own outfits. Their outfits are what allows them to present themselves in the right light: to make them recognizable to others as intelligent, ambitious, creative and educated young people.

## Notes

1. At this point I want to say many thanks to my academic adviser Peter Schweitzer.

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